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# LINGUOCULTURAL LOSSES IN OXYMORON TRANSLATION AND STRATEGIES FOR THEIR COMPENSATION

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**Abstract.** The paper analyses the rendering of oxymorons in literary translation from English into Uzbek. Four types of translation loss are distinguished — semantic, structural, pragmatic and linguocultural — and a step-by-step decision procedure for selecting a translation strategy is proposed. The analysis draws on Th. Dreiser’s Sister Carrie and its Uzbek translation.

**Key words:** translation, oxymoron, linguoculturology, translation loss, compensation, calque, descriptive translation, equivalent substitution.

**Introduction.** The translation of an oxymoron differs fundamentally from the translation of an ordinary lexical unit. With an ordinary unit, the translator conveys meaning; with an oxymoron, what must be conveyed is not the meaning itself but the effect that the clash between two meanings produces in the reader. If the contradiction is lost in translation, the stylistic figure disappears even when the semantics of the phrase have been rendered correctly. For this reason, the criterion of “correct/incorrect” is insufficient for evaluating oxymoron translation. What is required is to establish at which level the loss has occurred and to determine where it can be compensated. Before translation analysis can begin, the object of analysis must be strictly delimited. In practice, three phenomena are frequently conflated.

**Oxymoron** — the compression of two semantically opposed words into a single syntactic unit: sweet sorrow, jim faryod (‘silent scream’).

**Antithesis** — the opposition of contrary notions within one sentence or in adjacent sentences; they occupy separate syntactic positions.

**Paradox** — the logical incongruity of an entire statement; it arises at the level of the proposition, not of the word combination.

This distinction is of practical significance. The sentence “She was alone in the city, and yet she was not alone”, for instance, is frequently cited as an oxymoron. In fact, it is a paradoxical construction built on the conjunction yet: the contradiction lies not within a phrase but between two predications. Its translation problem is likewise different: what must be preserved here is not compactness but the tone of logical opposition. Including paradoxical constructions in the analysis of oxymoron translation distorts the conclusions drawn about strategy selection.

On the basis of the material analysed, it is proposed that losses in oxymoron translation be divided into four types.

**Semantic loss** — the semantic scope of one of the components narrows or widens. The translation reads well, but the force of the contradiction in the original phrase diminishes.


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**Structural loss** — a compact two-word phrase turns into an expanded description in translation. Since the entire effect of an oxymoron rests on its brevity, this loss is the most perceptible.

**Pragmatic loss** — the illocutionary aim changes: a phrase that is ironic in the original reads as serious in the translation, or vice versa.

**Linguocultural loss** — the phrase is left without cultural grounding for the Uzbek reader, because its contradiction is tied to a conception rooted in the source culture.

Table 1

| Type of loss | What is lost | Means of compensation |
|---|---|---|
| Semantic | Scope of the component's meaning | Equivalent substitution |
| Structural | Compactness of the phrase | Calque or a concise equivalent |
| Pragmatic | Illocutionary aim, tone | Compensation in context |
| Linguocultural | Cultural grounding and connotation | Functional adaptation |

These four types frequently co-occur, but distinguishing between them shows the translator precisely which layer needs to be compensated.

In Th. Dreiser's Sister Carrie, the phrase bitter joy is rendered into Uzbek as achchiq quvonch. This is a calque, i.e. a direct translation. Semantically the translation is accurate, and structurally the compactness is preserved. In Uzbek, however, the adjective achchiq is associated primarily with the semantics of taste and of fate, whereas English bitter also carries a layer of resentment and grievance. The result is a linguocultural loss: the phrase is intelligible, but the hint at the character's inner resentment is weakened. The second case is deafening silence → kar qiluvchi sukunat. Here the calque works successfully, because the mechanism of the contradiction is identical in the two languages: acoustic force is attributed to the absence of sound. The Uzbek reader recovers this shift without any explanation. The success of a calque thus depends not on the closeness of the languages but on the universality of the way the contradiction is resolved. The third case is passive aggression → sokin tajovuz. This combination is not in fact a literary oxymoron but a term of psychology: in English its contradiction has faded, and it has become fixed as a term. Attempting to translate it as a stylistic figure would therefore be the wrong path — in such cases terminological correspondence should be sought, not literary effect. This example shows that the distinction between usual and occasional oxymorons has practical significance in translation as well. The fourth case is bittersweet victory → achchiq-shirin g'alaba. The translation is structurally successful, but a pragmatic shift occurs: in the Uzbek text the phrase amplifies the positive feeling of victory, while the note of loss present in the original recedes into the background. In such cases compensation — restoring the lost tone in an adjacent sentence — is the most appropriate solution. The fifth case runs in the opposite direction. When the Uzbek phrase jim faryod is rendered into English as silent scream, the calque works in full. The converb-pattern combination kulib yig'lamoq ('to cry while laughing'), however, has no direct equivalent in English: the variant to laugh and cry at once preserves the contradiction but loses the compactness of the single word-form and turns the figure into a description. This is a purely structural loss, and its cause is morphological rather than lexical: English possesses no counterpart to the Uzbek converb pattern.


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It follows that the source of translation difficulty is not always cultural difference. In the case above there is no cultural difference at all — the experience of laughing through tears is equally intelligible in both cultures. The difficulty stems solely from the morphological type of the language. Conflating these two causes is a widespread error in translation analysis, and it leads to the wrong choice of strategy: responding to a morphological problem with a cultural note yields no result. On the basis of the analysis, the following step-by-step decision procedure is proposed for the translator.

**Step one.** Is the unit usual or occasional? If it is usual, a terminological or dictionary correspondence is sought; no stylistic re-creation is required.

**Step two.** Does Uzbek possess a ready-made phrase with the same contradiction? If so, equivalent substitution is applied; this yields the most natural result.

**Step three.** The calque test: rendered word for word, does the phrase produce a living contradiction, or does it collapse into a meaningless combination? If a living contradiction is preserved, the calque is preferable, since it sacrifices no compactness.

**Step four.** If the calque fails, descriptive translation is applied, but it inevitably entails structural loss. Descriptive translation is therefore treated as a last resort, not as a first choice.

**Step five.** After any loss, the possibility of compensation is assessed: the lost effect may be restored not at that exact point but in a nearby stretch of the text. It should be stressed that the "additional explanation" so often recommended in the scholarly literature is of limited value in literary translation: a note does not restore the effect of an oxymoron but turns it into an object of analysis. In a literary text, a note is an admission of loss, not its compensation. In current evaluative practice, oxymoron translation is most often judged by semantic fit. This is insufficient, since a semantically impeccable translation may have lost the stylistic figure entirely. It is proposed that the following four criteria be applied jointly.

**Preservation of the contradiction.** Is the opposition between the two components perceptible to the reader in the translated phrase? If it is not, the translation has produced not an oxymoron but an ordinary word combination.

**Preservation of compactness.** Is the size of the translated unit close to that of the original? Two words expanding into a sentence is a perceptible loss.

**Preservation of tone.** Does irony remain irony, and anguish remain anguish? This criterion is the most frequently overlooked and the most frequently violated.

**Naturalness.** Does the phrase feel artificial in the Uzbek text? A calque sometimes preserves the contradiction but disrupts the rhythm of the text.

These criteria compete with one another: preserving compactness often requires sacrificing precision, while the pursuit of naturalness requires softening the contradiction. The translator's task is therefore not to satisfy all the criteria at once but to make a conscious choice as to which criterion takes priority for the given text. In poetic texts, compactness and tone usually prevail; in prose, naturalness and pragmatic fit. One further point must be borne in mind when these criteria are applied. An oxymoron does not stand alone in a text — it forms part of a character's image or of the author's tone. A translation judged "successful" at the level of a single phrase may therefore produce the wrong result at the level of the text: if a translator who has consistently maintained the irony softens it at a single point, the entire line of the character's portrayal is broken. The unit of evaluation is thus not the individual phrase but its functional chain within the text.

**Conclusion.** Oxymoron translation does not rest on a single universal strategy. The choice of strategy follows from whether the unit is usual or occasional, whether a ready-made equivalent exists in


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Uzbek, and whether a calque is capable of producing a living contradiction. In assessing translation quality, the type of loss must be named precisely: semantic, structural, pragmatic or linguocultural. Such differentiation gives the translator a concrete decision rather than a general recommendation. In further research, it would be advisable to test the proposed decision procedure on a broader text corpus and to verify its effectiveness through reader response. It should be emphasised that the observations presented in this paper are based on limited material and require quantitative confirmation. The proposed typology of losses and the decision procedure are not a ready-made rule but a working model to be tested on broader material. Their practical value lies in giving the translator a sequence of verifiable questions instead of a general recommendation such as “take the cultural context into account”.

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