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TRANSLATION STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES FOR COMPARATIVE ADJECTIVE PHRASES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the translation strategies and challenges associated with comparative adjective phrases (hereafter CAPs) in the English–Uzbek language pair. Operating at three distinct analytical levels — morphosyntactic, lexical-semantic, and pragmatic-stylistic — the study demonstrates that the translation of CAPs is not a simple matter of structural substitution but a cognitively complex operation in which form, meaning, and communicative function must be simultaneously negotiated. English and Uzbek differ profoundly in their comparative systems: English employs a syllable-conditioned alternation between synthetic (-er) and periphrastic (more) forms, while Uzbek encodes comparison through an agglutinative suffix (-roq) and postpositional case-marking. These structural divergences, combined with culturally specific comparative imagery and register-sensitive idiomatic expressions, generate four recurring categories of translation difficulty: morphosyntactic non-correspondence, semantic loss in culturally embedded phrases, pragmatic distortion in indirect comparative speech acts, and structural opacity in elliptical and correlative comparatives. The paper evaluates four principal translation strategies — literal, functional-equivalent, descriptive, and transformational — and shows that no single strategy is universally applicable; rather, effective translation requires the principled selection of strategy according to text type, register, and communicative purpose.

Keywords: comparative adjective phrases, English–Uzbek translation, morphosyntactic equivalence, semantic equivalence, pragmatic equivalence, translation strategies, contrastive linguistics

1. Introduction

Comparative constructions occupy a central position in the grammar of every known human language, serving the fundamental cognitive function of relating the degree of a property held by one entity to the degree of that property held by another. Despite this universality of function, the formal mechanisms through which individual languages encode comparison are typologically diverse, varying in morphological strategy, syntactic configuration, and the semantic granularity of the distinctions they permit. For translators working between typologically dissimilar languages, these formal divergences create problems that extend well beyond word-for-word substitution into the deeper domains of meaning, pragmatic implication, and cultural framing.

The English–Uzbek language pair presents a particularly productive case for the study of comparative translation. The two languages belong to different typological families — English is an analytic Indo-European language, Uzbek an agglutinative Turkic one — and their comparative systems differ accordingly in both morphological and syntactic respects. These surface differences, however, are compounded by a further set of challenges arising at the lexical-semantic and pragmatic levels: culturally specific comparative imagery, idiomatically bleached comparatives, register-conditioned form selection, and the pragmatic implications of

indirect comparative speech acts each introduce translation difficulties that cannot be resolved by grammatical analysis alone.

Despite a substantial body of research on English comparative constructions (Quirk et al., 1985; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Kennedy, 2007) and growing scholarship on Uzbek comparative morphology (G'ulomov & Asqarova, 1987; Nishonov, 1994), comparatively little work addresses the translation of CAPs as a multi-level problem integrating grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions simultaneously. The present study aims to fill this gap by analysing the translation of English and Uzbek CAPs within Baker's (2011) framework of equivalence types.

1.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to provide a systematic, multi-level account of the challenges and strategies involved in translating comparative adjective phrases between English and Uzbek. The specific objectives are:

1. To describe the morphosyntactic encoding of comparison in English and Uzbek and identify the principal points of structural non-correspondence;
2. To analyse the lexical-semantic dimension of CAP translation, with attention to evaluative meaning, intensification, and culturally embedded imagery;
3. To examine pragmatic and register-related challenges arising in the translation of indirect comparatives and stylistically marked CAPs;
4. To evaluate four translation strategies — literal, functional-equivalent, descriptive, and transformational — with respect to their applicability across different text types and communicative contexts;
5. To identify recurring categories of translation difficulty and propose principled criteria for strategy selection.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative contrastive-analytical design, situating its linguistic analysis within the theoretical framework of translation studies as developed by Baker (2011), Nida and Taber (1969), and Vinay and Darbelnet (1995). Contrastive analysis provides the descriptive apparatus for comparing the structural properties of comparison in the two languages; translation theory furnishes the conceptual tools — equivalence type, translation strategy, adequacy — necessary for evaluating how inter-linguistic differences are negotiated in practice.

2.2 Data Sources

The analytical corpus was assembled from four complementary sources. First, reference grammars of English and Uzbek provided the descriptive baseline: Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) for English; G'ulomov and Asqarova (1987) and Nishonov (1994) for Uzbek. Second, a selection of authentic English-language literary texts and their published Uzbek translations — including works from the holdings of the National University of Uzbekistan Library — was examined to document translation decisions in literary contexts. Third, Uzbek scientific and journalistic texts, together with their published English translations, were consulted to provide comparable data from non-literary registers. Fourth, established

dictionaries of English idioms and Uzbek phraseological units were drawn upon to identify and cross-check the status of fixed comparative expressions in each language.

2.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three stages corresponding to the three levels of equivalence under investigation. At the morphosyntactic level, the grammatical structures of CAPs in both languages were described and compared, with attention to the strategies by which structural non-correspondence is resolved in attested translations. At the lexical-semantic level, the evaluative, intensifying, and cultural-imagery dimensions of CAP meaning were examined, and instances of semantic loss or distortion in translation were identified and categorised. At the pragmatic-stylistic level, the illocutionary force, register marking, and communicative function of comparative constructions were analysed, and cases of pragmatic non-equivalence were documented. Throughout, attested translation examples from the corpus were used to illustrate and ground the analysis.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks jointly inform the analysis. Baker's (2011) taxonomy of equivalence — distinguishing word-level, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence — provides the multi-level architecture of the study. Kennedy's (2007) degree-theoretic semantics of gradable adjectives underpins the lexical-semantic analysis by specifying the formal properties of comparison, intensification, and evaluative polarity. Nida and Taber's (1969) concept of dynamic equivalence and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) classification of translation procedures — including transposition, modulation, and equivalence — inform the evaluation of translation strategies.

3. Results

3.1 Morphosyntactic Non-Correspondence

The most fundamental structural divergence between the two languages concerns their comparative formation strategies. English forms the comparative by one of two competing mechanisms whose selection is conditioned by syllable count: monosyllabic adjectives and a restricted class of disyllabic ones take the synthetic suffix *-er* (*faster, stronger, whiter*); adjectives of three or more syllables require the periphrastic construction *more* + *adjective* (*more beautiful, more intelligent*). A small closed class of adjectives exhibits suppletive comparison (*good/better, bad/worse*).

Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, employs a morphologically uniform strategy: the suffix *-roq* attaches directly to the adjective stem regardless of word length, and no periphrastic alternative is available. The standard of comparison is introduced not by a conjunction but by the ablative postposition *-dan*, yielding structures such as *U singlisidan bo'yroq* ('She is taller than her sister'). Analytic intensification is achieved through adverbs such as *yanada* and *ancha*, rather than through the English degree adverbs *much* and *far*.

These divergences are not merely formal: they generate predictable translation difficulties at the level of grammatical selection. When translating English periphrastic comparatives into Uzbek, the translator must collapse the English distinction between synthetic and periphrastic forms into a single morphological strategy, potentially losing nuances of register associated with the English alternation. Conversely, when rendering Uzbek -roq forms in English, the

translator must assign each instance to one of the two English strategies on the basis of syllabic criteria that have no analogue in the source language.

The equative comparative construction *as...as* presents a separate challenge. The English sentence *She sings as beautifully as a nightingale* places the subject and the standard in a strict degree-equality relation. The Uzbek equivalent *U bulbulday go'zal kuylaydi* employs the simile suffix *-day/-dek*, which encodes similarity or resemblance rather than degree-equality. The semantic gap between strict equality (English) and resemblance (Uzbek) means that the equative dimension of the English construction is regularly lost in translation, a systematic rather than incidental translation failure.

Table 1 summarises the principal morphosyntactic correspondences and divergences between the two languages.

Table 1. Morphosyntactic Properties of Comparative Adjective Phrases: English vs. Uzbek

Feature	English	Uzbek
Comparative formation	Synthetic (-er) or Periphrastic (more)	Agglutinative suffix (-roq), uniform
Selection criterion	Syllable count of adjective	None — morphologically uniform
Standard of comparison	Subordinating conjunction: than	Ablative postposition: -dan
Equative construction	as...as (degree-equality)	-day/-dek (resemblance/similarity)
Intensification	much, far + comparative form	yanada, ancha as pre-modifiers
Correlative comparative	the more...the more (clause-initial)	qanchalik...shunchalik (correlative)
Ellipsis of standard	Frequent and grammatically licensed	Less frequent; fuller form preferred
Suppletive forms	good/better, bad/worse, far/further	None — fully regular throughout

3.2 Lexical-Semantic Challenges

Beyond morphosyntax, CAP translation raises a distinct set of lexical-semantic challenges related to evaluative meaning, intensification, and culturally embedded imagery. Kennedy (2007) notes that gradable adjectives denote scalar properties, and that comparative morphology operates by asserting that the subject's degree on a scale exceeds the standard's degree. This formal account, however, does not fully capture the evaluative and affective dimensions that comparative constructions accumulate in actual use.

Consider the English sentence *He is far more intelligent than I expected*. The intensifier *far* amplifies the comparative, and the complement *than I expected* introduces an expectational standard that adds a connotation of surprise or admiration. The Uzbek rendering *U men kutganimdan ancha aqlliroq ekan* uses *ancha* as the intensifier and the evidential particle *ekan* to signal inferred or recently acquired knowledge. The intensifier partially preserves the amplification, but the pragmatic nuance of surprise encoded by English *far* — an intensifier with stronger emotive force than *ancha* — is only partially recoverable.

Culturally specific idioms present the most acute semantic challenges. English fixed similes such as *as busy as a bee*, *as cool as a cucumber*, and *as brave as a lion* are phraseological units whose comparative referents carry culture-specific symbolic weight; they are stored holistically in the mental lexicon and cannot be decomposed compositionally. A calque translation into Uzbek — *asalari kabi band* for *as busy as a bee* — is grammatically well-formed but pragmatically inert: it exploits a comparative referent (the bee as emblem of industry) that does not carry equivalent symbolic weight in Uzbek cultural contexts. The translator is therefore forced to abandon the source-language image in favour of a functional equivalent that achieves the same communicative effect through different means.

A parallel problem arises when Uzbek idioms are rendered into English. The expression *Shovqin-suron osmondagidek baland* ('The noise is as high as the sky') is a natural Uzbek hyperbolic comparative, but its literal English equivalent *The noise is as high as the sky* is pragmatically anomalous: English speakers would more naturally encode extreme noise through adjective-based intensifiers such as *deafening* or *ear-splitting*. The source-language comparative structure is thus incompatible with the target-language collocational norms for the same semantic domain.

3.3 Pragmatic and Stylistic Challenges

The pragmatic dimension of CAP translation encompasses at least three distinct problem types: indirect comparative speech acts, register-conditioned form selection, and the pragmatic distortion of gender- and culturally-contrastive comparatives.

Indirect comparative speech acts arise when a comparative construction performs an illocutionary act other than description — most commonly, criticism or disagreement expressed through understatement. The English sentence *Your presentation could have been more structured* is conventionally understood in anglophone professional discourse as indirect criticism, operating through the implicature that the presentation was insufficiently structured. The Uzbek rendering *Taqdimotingiz yanada tizimli bo'lishi mumkin edi* preserves the surface meaning but may be received as more direct criticism in Uzbek communicative norms, where the conventions for indirect negative evaluation are differently calibrated. The form is equivalent; the pragmatic effect is not.

Register-conditioned form selection creates a further translational challenge. In English, the near-synonyms *bigger* and *larger* are in near-complementary register distribution: *bigger* is characteristic of spoken and informal registers, *larger* of written and formal ones. This register distinction carries social-indexical meaning that should ideally be preserved in translation. In Uzbek, the corresponding distinction between *kattaroq* and *ancha katta* is real but less grammatically systematic, making register-faithful translation a matter of lexical judgment rather than grammatical rule.

Gender-contrastive comparatives introduce yet a further dimension of pragmatic complexity. The sentence *She was braver than any man in the room* uses *any man* as a generically quantified standard of comparison with a gender-contrastive implication. The Uzbek rendering *U xonada hamma erkakdan jasurroq edi* preserves the propositional content but imposes a universal-quantifier reading ('all men') that is stronger than the English generic and somewhat altered in pragmatic tone.

3.4 Translation Strategies: Analysis and Evaluation

The four principal strategies identified in the corpus are analysed below with respect to their structural properties, conditions of applicability, and associated risks.

Literal (formal-correspondence) translation is applicable where source and target structures occupy equivalent grammatical positions. The English *more dangerous than a snake* maps directly onto the Uzbek *ilondan ham xavfliroq*, where *than* corresponds to *-dan* and the comparative suffix to *-roq*. Literal translation succeeds where structural parallelism exists, but fails for culturally embedded expressions: *cheaper than chips* cannot be rendered as *kartoshkadan arzonroq* without losing the cultural image of chips as the prototypical cheap commodity in British cultural discourse.

Functional-equivalent translation abandons formal correspondence in favour of a target-language expression that produces an equivalent communicative effect. The English simile *as quiet as a mouse* becomes *sichqonday jim* in Uzbek — a translation that substitutes a culturally salient Uzbek comparison for the English one, preserving pragmatic force while sacrificing formal structure. This strategy is most appropriate for fixed comparative idioms and culturally specific similes, where literal translation produces unnatural or opaque results.

Descriptive (paraphrase) translation is employed when no direct structural or functional equivalent is available. The English expression *greener than thou* — meaning one who ostentatiously claims superior ecological virtue — has no Uzbek idiomatic equivalent and must be rendered descriptively as *boshqalardan o'zini ko'proq ekologik ongligini namoyish qiladigan*. The communicative image is preserved, but the stylistic economy of the source-language idiom is irrecoverably lost.

Transformational translation restructures the entire sentence, changing grammatical category and syntactic frame to achieve naturalness in the target language. The English *The project is more advanced than we had hoped* becomes *Loyiha kutganimizdan ham ilgarilab ketdi* in Uzbek, where *more advanced than* is rendered by the verbal phrase *ilgarilab ketdi* ('has surged ahead'). The comparative structure disappears entirely, replaced by a lexical verb that encodes the comparative meaning implicitly. Transformational translation maximises target-language naturalness at the cost of source-language transparency.

These four strategies are not mutually exclusive, and skilled translators frequently combine them within a single text or even a single sentence. The corpus evidence indicates, however, that strategy selection is not arbitrary: it is systematically conditioned by text type (literary vs. scientific), register (formal vs. informal), degree of cultural embedding of the source-language expression, and the relative weight assigned to semantic precision versus communicative naturalness.

3.5 Problematic Construction Types

Beyond the general categories discussed above, the corpus identifies four specific construction types that generate disproportionate difficulty in English–Uzbek CAP translation.

Correlative comparatives (*the more...the more*) present structural challenges because the English construction is syntactically peripheral and has no direct analogue in Uzbek grammar. The sentence *The more complex the problem, the more creative the solution* is rendered in Uzbek as *Muammo qanchalik murakkab bo'lsa, yechim shunchalik ijodiy bo'ladi*, using the correlative adverb pair *qanchalik...shunchalik*. The functional equivalence is achieved, but the Uzbek construction is more syntactically explicit and slightly less stylistically compressed than the English.

Elliptical comparatives such as *She is taller* (without an explicit standard) are licensed by contextual recoverability in English but are pragmatically less acceptable in Uzbek discourse, where fuller expression of the standard is typically preferred. When such structures must be rendered in Uzbek, translators commonly restore the standard from context or add intensifiers (*ancha, juda*) to indicate the comparative without explicitly naming the standard.

Idiomatically bleached comparatives such as *more than happy* have undergone semantic drift and no longer denote degree comparison at all: they function as intensified adjectives equivalent to *very happy* or *delighted*. Literal translation (*xursanddan ham ko'proq*) produces a semantically anomalous Uzbek phrase; the appropriate rendering is the intensified equivalent *juda ham xursand* or *jon-dildan*.

Allusion-bearing comparatives embed comparative structure within cultural or literary allusions. The rhetorical question *Is she not more beautiful than Helen of Troy?* presupposes familiarity with classical mythology that Uzbek readers may not share. Translators must choose between a foreignising strategy that preserves the allusion with a marginal note and a domesticating strategy that substitutes a culturally familiar standard — either option involving a departure from the source text.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Inadequacy of Single-Level Equivalence

The results confirm that CAP translation cannot be adequately theorised at any single level of linguistic analysis. A purely grammatical approach — seeking structural correspondences between English and Uzbek comparative forms — fails for culturally embedded idioms, pragmatically bleached constructions, and indirect speech acts, all of which require analysis at the semantic or pragmatic level. Conversely, a purely pragmatic approach — seeking functional equivalents that produce the same communicative effect — risks sacrificing the semantic precision required in scientific and technical texts. Baker's (2011) multi-level framework, which

distinguishes grammatical, lexical, textual, and pragmatic equivalence as distinct and not always simultaneously achievable targets, best captures the real complexity of the problem.

4.2 Typological Implications

The morphosyntactic divergences documented in Section 3.1 are consistent with the typological literature on comparison (Stassen, 1985; Croft, 2003): agglutinative languages characteristically encode the standard of comparison through case-marking on the standard noun phrase rather than through comparative conjunctions, and Uzbek follows this pattern precisely. The practical consequence for translation is that the English distinction between synthetic and periphrastic comparison — a distinction that carries register implications in English discourse — is neutralised in Uzbek, imposing a systematic impoverishment of register differentiation in English-to-Uzbek translation.

4.3 Strategy Selection Criteria

The corpus evidence supports the following tentative criteria for strategy selection. Literal translation is appropriate where structural parallelism exists and the source-language expression is not culturally embedded. Functional-equivalent translation is appropriate for fixed idioms, cultural similes, and pragmatically marked constructions where target-language naturalness is the primary criterion. Descriptive translation is a last resort, applied when neither structural correspondence nor functional equivalence is achievable; its use entails an acknowledged loss of stylistic economy. Transformational translation is appropriate in literary and persuasive registers where the pragmatic effect of the construction is more important than its grammatical transparency, and where the target-language conventions strongly resist literal or functional-equivalent rendering.

4.4 Implications for Translation Pedagogy

The findings have direct implications for the training of professional translators working between English and Uzbek. The study demonstrates that the morphosyntactic dimension of comparative translation is relatively manageable: the structural correspondences, while imperfect, are systematic enough to be taught as explicit rules. The lexical-semantic and pragmatic dimensions, by contrast, require the development of cultural competence and discourse sensitivity that cannot be reduced to rule-following. Translator training programmes should address all three levels and equip students with explicit criteria for strategy selection rather than relying on intuitive judgement alone.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic, multi-level analysis of the translation challenges and strategies associated with comparative adjective phrases in the English–Uzbek language pair. The principal findings may be summarised under three headings.

At the morphosyntactic level, English and Uzbek encode comparison through structurally non-parallel mechanisms — syllable-conditioned alternation versus uniform agglutination, conjunctional versus case-based standard-marking — that create systematic translation gaps, most acutely in the equative (as...as) and correlative (the more...the more) constructions and in elliptical comparative clauses.

At the lexical-semantic level, the primary source of translational difficulty is the cultural embeddedness of fixed comparative idioms, whose comparative referents carry symbolic weight in the source culture that has no equivalent in the target culture. Semantically bleached comparatives present a further challenge, requiring translators to access pragmatic rather than compositional meaning.

At the pragmatic-stylistic level, indirect comparative speech acts, register-conditioned form selection, and gender-contrastive comparatives each generate non-equivalences that a purely formal analysis cannot capture or resolve.

Against these challenges, four translation strategies — literal, functional-equivalent, descriptive, and transformational — are evaluated and shown to be differentially applicable according to text type, register, and communicative purpose. The overarching conclusion is that no single strategy is universally adequate: effective CAP translation requires principled, context-sensitive strategy selection informed by simultaneous attention to grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of equivalence. Future research should extend this analysis through corpus-based quantitative investigation of strategy frequency distributions across text types, and through experimental studies of translator decision-making in the face of the construction types identified as most problematic here.

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