

On the Use of Profanity in Translation (On the Basis of Examples Taken from “Windmills of the Gods” By Sydney Sheldon)

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Abstract. *This article examines the translation of profanity, intimate scenes, and sexual lexis in Sidney Sheldon’s political detective novel Windmills of the Gods by comparing the English original with its Russian and Uzbek translations. The study outlines the theoretical foundations of linguistic translation studies, emphasizing the translator’s dual responsibility to maintain both semantic and stylistic equivalence while adhering to the sociocultural norms of the target language. Through comparative analysis, it identifies translation strategies such as euphemization, dysphemization, literal translation, and omission. The findings show that while the Russian translation tends to preserve the expressive and emotional force of the original, the Uzbek translation displays a greater degree of cultural adaptation, often neutralizing taboo or offensive elements. This difference highlights the influence of cultural, moral, and linguistic factors on the translator’s choice and demonstrates the complex interplay between fidelity and acceptability in cross-cultural translation.*

Key words: *translation studies, profanity, sexual lexis, euphemization, dysphemization, stylistic equivalence, cultural adaptation.*

Recently, considerable attention has been paid to translation issues in linguistic research. In many studies devoted to linguistic translation studies, scholars not only investigate particular problems of translation theory and practice, but also focus extensively on general theoretical questions that reflect the essence of this field. This situation indicates that linguistic translation studies are increasingly attracting the attention of researchers.

From the standpoint of linguistic translation studies, translation can be defined as follows: translation - as one of the most complex forms of human activity - is a creative process of reproducing a speech expression (text) created in one language, by means of another language, while preserving its unity of form and content. Thus, the speech expression (text) created through the linguistic means of the source language is replaced by an equivalent expression formed according to the rules and norms of the target language. In this way, semantic and stylistic adequacy between the source and target texts is achieved.

This definition pertains to the process carried out between languages and, to a large extent, concerns one of the oldest and most widespread forms of human practice. Therefore, when the term *translation* is mentioned, most people primarily imagine the activity of rendering a text from one language into another.

As for an outstanding Uzbek translation theorist Q. Musayev, "Translation is the art of recreating and reinterpreting the original."¹ This idea is supported by the Chinese scholar Libo Huang, who states that "the author's style is considered sacred in translation."² Therefore, conveying the essence of the original work accurately through translation places a great responsibility on the translator. In fact, the best style of a translator is said to be the one that preserves the style of the original.

In this article, we aim to analyze the translation of sections containing profanity, intimate scenes, and sexual lexis in the well-known American author Sidney Sheldon's political detective novel *Windmills of the Gods* by comparing the original text with its Russian and Uzbek translations.

It is well known that detective fiction often transcends national boundaries, reflecting the characteristics of various cultures. Such works tend to emphasize universal human values rather than purely national ones. Therefore, they frequently include international realia - cultural elements that require no translation, as they are generally comprehensible to readers across different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Given the nature of detective fiction, it can be stated that these works express universal and human aspects rather than national and cultural ones. Consequently, the process of stylistic reproduction in translation is comparatively less challenging than in other literary genres.

Most detective novels are characterized by tense and dynamic situations involving crimes, conflicts, and emotional tension, all of which are vividly reflected in the characters' speech. Elements such as exclamations of surprise, swearing, cursing, and expressions of pity or anger - which are culturally specific in every language - play an essential role in revealing the inner world and psychological state of the characters. At the same time, erotic or intimate scenes are also considered an integral component of the detective genre.

Sidney Sheldon's works likewise contain such scenes and are notable for the frequent use of profane and obscene language in the speech of the characters. Translators employ various translation strategies to render these elements, including:

- *Euphemization* - the replacement of unpleasant, rude, or socially unacceptable words and expressions with softer, more polite, or positive equivalents;
- *Literal translation* - the direct transfer of meaning with minimal stylistic adjustment;
- *Omission* - the deliberate exclusion of elements deemed inappropriate or unnecessary;
- *Dysphemization* - the use of emotionally intensified or harsh expressions to convey the speaker's attitude more vividly.

From the perspective of translation theory, the rendering of such linguistic and stylistic phenomena requires not only linguistic equivalence but also pragmatic and cultural adequacy, as the translator must balance fidelity to the original text with the target language's sociocultural norms and communicative conventions.

Now, let's discuss some of the examples:

English:

In the Black Rooster, a Washington, D.C. hangout for newsmen, Ben Cohn, a veteran political reporter for the Washington Post, was seated at a table with four colleagues, watching the inauguration on the large television set over the bar.

'The son-of-a-bitch costs me fifty bucks,' one of the reporters complained. (1.15)

¹ Мусаев К. Таржима назарияси асослари. –Тошкент.: Фан нашриёти, 2005. –Б. 90.

² Huang L. Style in translation. A Corpus-based perspective. –China, 2015. – P. 212.

Русский:

Бен Кон, бывалый репортер «Вашингтон пост», сидел в «Черном петухе», вашингтонской забегаловке для прессы, в компании четырех коллег и наблюдал за церемонией инаугурации по большому телевизору, укрепленному над баром.

- **Сукин сын** стоил мне пятьдесят баксов, - пожаловался один из репортеров. (2.13)

О’zbek:

‘Washington post’ ning tajribali muxbiri Ben Kon vashingtonlik jurnalistlar xush ko’radigan joy – ‘Qora xo’roz’ da to’rt hamkasbi bilan televizor orqali inaugaratsiya marasimiga bag’ishlangan ko’rsatuvni tomosha qilib o’tirardi.

- Shu **itvachchani** deb ellik dollardan mahrum bo’ldim, - dedi jurnalistlardan biri. (3. 146)

In the original text, the expression “son of a bitch” is defined in English explanatory dictionaries as follows:

A son of bitch – a man who is unpleasant or who has made you angry.

Based on this definition, the phrase *son-of-a-bitch* can be translated simply as “*an unpleasant man*”. However, it is important to note that the word “*bitch*” literally means “*a female dog*” Therefore, the idiomatic expression “*son-of-a-bitch*” (*an unpleasant man*) has been rendered more literally in Russian as “*Сукин сын*” and in Uzbek as “*itvachcha*”.

From the standpoint of translation theory, this example illustrates a case of dysphemization, where the translator preserves emotional and expressive force of the source language through a semantically and culturally equivalent but equally coarse expression in the target language. While a euphemized translation such as “*yoqimsiz odam*” (*an unpleasant man*) would reduce the emotional intensity, the literal equivalents “*сукин сын*” and “*itvachcha*” more accurately convey the speaker’s anger, irritation, and emotional charge present in the original English phrase.

English:

*His words rang out with a deep, heartfelt sincerity. ‘He means it,’ Ben Cohn thought. ‘I hope no one assassinate the **bastard**. ’* (1.16)

Русский:

*В его словах звучала глубочайшая, неподдельная искренность. «Он действительно так считает, - подумал Бен. - Надеюсь, никому не придет в голову прикончить этого **парня**».* (2.15)

О’zbek:

*Prezidentning bu so’zlarida chinakam ishonch mujassam edi. ‘U chindan ham shunga ishonadi, - degan xulosaga keldi Ben Kon. - Ishqilib, bu **yigitni** kimdir otib tashlamasa bo’lgani.* (3.147)

In the original, the word “*bastard*” was translated into Russian as “*парень*” and into Uzbek as “*yigit*”. Considering that the Uzbek version was translated from the Russian text, it is clear that both translations correspond to each other. However, when we examine the semantic content of the word “*bastard*” as defined in English explanatory dictionary, a significant discrepancy becomes apparent.

According to the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners of American English* (2002, p.112), the word *bastard* is defined as follows:

Bastard (C) (offensive) an insulting word for an unpleasant or annoying man;

(old fashioned) someone whose parents are not married to each other;

If we translate this definition into Uzbek, the first meaning refers to “*yoqimsiz, asabga tegadigan kishi*” (*an unpleasant, irritating person*), while the second conveys “*iflos, haromi*” (*a person of illegitimate birth*). Based on the definitions, it is evident that the Russian and Uzbek translations do not correspond to the original meaning or the contextual function of the word in the source text.

The Russian explanatory dictionary (*Ожегов & Шведова*) defines “парень” as:

- *a young man, youth (colloquial): парни и девушки (boys and girls)*
- *in general, a man, person (colloquial): свой парень (a simple, approachable person)*

Similarly, the Uzbek explanatory dictionary defines *yigit* as:

- *a sexually and physically mature man;*
- *a young man, a youth;*
- *(figuratively) a brave and courageous man;*
- *a girl's beloved or fiancé;*
- *a member or a certain group or military unit;*
- *a form of address to a younger man;*

Neither the Russian nor the Uzbek definitions contain any negative or insulting connotations. Therefore, rendering “bastard” as “парень” or “yigit” neutralizes the emotionally intensity, stylistic coloring, and pragmatic force of the original English expression.

From the perspective of translation theory, this constitutes a clear case of semantic loss and stylistic domestication. The offensive and expressive tone of the original is replaced by a neutral or even positive term in the target texts, thereby diminishing the characterization, emotional realism, and authorial intent present in the source language.

A more contextually adequate translation strategy would involve the use of a term that retains at least part of the negative emotional charge of “bastard”, for example, “мерзавец” in Russian or “badbaxt”, “haromi”, or “iflos” in Uzbek, depending on the situational tone and pragmatic aim of the dialogue.

English:

*Harry Lantz loved the South American women. I know a dozen of **bitches** there with hot pants who would rather fuck than eat. (1.50)*

Русский:

*Гарри любил латиноамериканских женщин. «Я знаю с дюжину **девчонок**, которые уж точно предпочут перепихнуться вместо ужина». (2.56)*

O'zbek:

*Garri Lansga lotinamerikalik ayollar yoqardi. Argentinada u yemakdan ko'ra aysh-ishratni ma'qul ko'radigan kamida o'nta **ayol** bilan tanish edi. (3.170)*

In the original text, the word “bitch” was translated into Russian and Uzbek in a softened and even positive manner. To illustrated this, let us compare the dictionary definitions of the English word *bitch*, the Russian word *девушка*, and the Uzbek words *qiz* and *ayol*.

According to the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners of American English* (2002, p.138):

Bitch (C)

- *(offensive) an insulting word for a woman;*
- *(offensive) an insulting word for someone, especially a woman, who is rude or cruel;*
- *a female dog.*

Additionally, the *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (Johnathan Green, 2005) defines *bitch* as a *prostitute*.

In contrast, the Russian explanatory dictionary (*Ожегов & Шведова*) defines *девушка* as:

- *A female person at the age between adolescence and youth;*
- *A sexually mature woman who is not yet married;*

- *A young maid or servant girl (obsolete);*
- *A form of address to a young woman (colloquial).*

The Uzbek explanatory dictionary defines *qiz* as:

- *A female who has not yet reached puberty;*
- *A female child;*
- *A sexually mature woman who is not yet married;*
- *A polite or affectionate form of address to a young woman.*

And *ayol* as:

- *A person of the female sex, opposite of man;*
- *A mature female (in contrast to “girl”);*
- *A wife or spouse.*

From the definitions, it is evident that the meaning of “bitch” in the source text which carries offensive, derogatory, or sexual connotation was completely neutralized in the Russian and Uzbek translations. In English, *bitch* can mean *a rude, cruel, or immoral woman* and in some contexts even *a prostitute*.

From the standpoint of translation theory, this instance reflects euphemization the deliberate softening of a taboo or offensive expression. While this may have been done to a loss of pragmatic and stylistic equivalence.

In the translation of profanities and sexual lexis used in the English original, it can be concluded that the Russian translation remains closer and more direct to the original, while the Uzbek translation demonstrates a higher degree of cultural adaptation, reflecting the translator’s sensitivity to cultural and moral constraints within the target readership.

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