Equivalence at Word Level in the Translation of Boris Pasternak’s Novel “Doctor Zhivago” from Russian to Turkish Language

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Abstract

Boris Pasternak (1890-1960)’s Nobel-winning novel “Doctor Zhivago” was first translated from Russian to Turkish in 2014. The published work has been praised on a number of occasions.

This article studies the translated work in the context of equivalence at word level. It was found out that quite a number of similar words in the source text were mistranslated. The content of this article, therefore, has been limited to include samples that cause problems of equivalence at word issues due to similarity.

The problems were identified to be emerging from Russian words that gained new meanings with the addition of prefixes, homophones, and similar words that are formed by similar letters.

The article may be beneficial to translators who will do literary translations, and researchers studying the field of translation between Russian and Turkish. It may also contribute to a better translation of this significant novel’s future editions if the semantic ‘mistakes’ are eliminated.

Keywords: B. Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago, Equivalence at Word Level, Literary Translation, Misconception of Similar Words, Translation from Russian to Turkish

Introduction

The Turkish reader got acquainted with the richness of the Russian Literature through successful literary translations, especially after 1990s when a certain level of interest rose about the Russian culture in the country. This is the period that witnessed a dramatic rise in translations of Russian literature (Ustunyer, 2012, pp. 23-29). It has been a source of joy for the reader that the publishing houses have shown great interest in the subject after 2010, which resulted in re-translation of the existing literature to increase translation quality as well as translating the ones that have never been translated before from the original, namely Russian.

This article investigates the lexicological equivalence in the Turkish translation of Boris Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago. Since Hulya Arslan translated this novel from Russian into Turkish in 2014, it has been praised at various occasions.

The aim of this article is to evaluate the translation quality studying equivalence at lexicological plane and offer a set of suggestions to translators in the field. There are only a few master’s theses, doctoral dissertations and publications on translation from Russian to Turkish. Thus, it is supposed that the findings of the current article will contribute to the literature in the theory of translation from Russian into Turkish language to a certain extent.

Equivalence in Translation

“Equivalence” and “adequacy” are two most common concepts in literary translation, with equivalence being indispensable especially in literary works (Göktürk, 2006, p. 55).

The concept of equivalence in translation evokes the idea of both the source text and the translated text are equivalent. As the huge structural, logical and cultural gap between the two languages become more evident, the concept of ‘similarity’ starts to prevail over ‘equivalency’ (Yazıcı, 2007, p. 39).

Biblical translations paved the way to systematic translation studies. It had been envisaged that written translation could render the same text in another language; however,
it caused cultural misunderstandings. Nida (as cited in Radeguns, 2013, p. 103) attempted to explain the translation process analytically in his work “Toward a Science of Translating” in order to lay a scientific foundation for Biblical translations. Translation must be didactic and inspected through linguistic methods. Nevertheless, translation of linguistic structures would never be enough. What is to be translated does not only consist of grammar, but also deliver a certain message within a context. Nida proposes a concept of “dynamic equivalency” that allows a modified structure to communicate the message in order to maintain the content and the impact.

Baker (as cited in Demirekin, 2014, p. 30) classifies equivalence in translation into 5 groups:

- Equivalence at word level: words themselves being equivalent
- Equivalence above word level: equivalence of words and phrases
- Grammatical equivalence: equivalence in grammatical classification
- Textual equivalence: equivalence at word order, cohesion, and text levels
- Pragmatic equivalence: studies how the translated text communicated the context in the content of the author, reader, and various cultural issues

This article concentrates on equivalence at word level and above word level.

Translation theories in general focus on the equivalence of meaning of words when the words start to interact with each other rather than the equivalence of the words’ literary meanings. Yet, it must be a source of significant attention that misinterpreting and misunderstanding of the smallest units in a text ("words" in this study) would lead to improper communication of sentences and paragraphs in literary works.

**The Fallacy of Similar Words in Translation as a Translation Problem**

One of the factors in translation problems is the identity of the translator. The challenges faced by a translator who is not a native speaker of the language of the source text would be different from the one who is a native speaker, that is, the non-native translator would have challenges in understanding the source text whereas the other would find it difficult to transfer the meaning into the target language. The bi-lingual translators would suffer from the semantic differences between the two languages as well.

The vocabulary of a language reflects the culture, beliefs, lifestyle, history and the geographic location of a society. Therefore, the translator may find that some semantic parts of the source language may be richer and developed whereas the other is not, or vice versa.

This article studies the translated work in the context of equivalence at word level. It was found out that quite a number of similar words in the source text were mistranslated. The content of this article, therefore, has been limited to include samples that cause problems of equivalence at word issues due to similarity.

Fallacy of similar words, as the name suggests, may originate from similar-looking indicators that act like a trap for the translator, and in fact, this case prevails in both languages. Demirezen (1991, s. 121) censures the translation of an American author Sontag’s Project for a Trip to China published through Gergedan Publishing House. He calls it a ‘disgrace of translation’ and mentions the following confusions as examples of bad translation: mixing up torture with torture; ‘landlord’ translated as the owner of the land; ‘Walls’ literally translated as walls rather than the Great Wall of China; and confusing ‘ballet’ with ‘ball’ (dance).

This study will attempt to converge on the case of Russian and Turkish.

Similar to any other language, there are homonyms (омонимы) in Russian. We will divide them into two in this study: full-homonyms, half-homonyms. Full-homonyms would cover the same words that are of the same type, pronunciation, and spelling, such as "пук" (onion, bow), "хран" (tap, crane), and "лист" (paper, leaf).

Half-homonyms can be divided into three:

- “омографы” (homograph): same spelling, different intonation (such as “муха - муха” (suffering, trouble - flour), “замок - замок” (palace in fairy tales - lock), “орган – орган” (organ (body) – organ (musical instrument))
- “омофоны” (homophone): same pronunciation, different spelling (such as “плод - плог” (fruit - boat))
- “омоформы” (homiforms): (same spelling with different word types or with case affixes) “печь” (pîşirmek, firin, soba – to bake, to oven, to stove), “печ” (tedavi ediyorum, üçuyorum – I’m treating, I’m flying)

As a matter of fact, the items mentioned above should be identified at the beginning stage, and users of intermediate and above levels must naturally be aware of them. Therefore, they must not be a source of problem for a professional translator. However, facing simple errors in translations may be considered as signs of inattentiveness, exhaustion, therefore being unable to identify the context in a particular sentence or paragraph.

Another possible source of problems seems to be the verbs with prefixes. Çaylak (2015) covers the same issue in one of his articles about issues that Turkish people have while learning Russian. He asserts that the verbs with prefixes are challenging due to their variety, their role in identifying the direction of an action by being placed at the beginning of both verbs of action and appearance, and the fact that they cause changes in the meaning, hence creating idioms (Çaylak, 2015, p. 1254).

As an example, below is a list of different meanings the verb “говорить” (speak) with the addition of prefixes:

- заговорить – start to speak / start a conversation
The Turkish equivalent of the verb “сознавали” (сознавать) is “идрak etmek, bilincine varmak” (to comprehend, to realize,) but it was mixed up with a similar verb “создавать”. Verb “Создавать” means “yaratmak, oluşturmak” (to create). Therefore, the sentence “Kendiiniz olmaktan anladığınız ne, varlığınız hangi parçalarını kendiniz oluşturduğunuz?" must be replaced with “Kendiniz oluşturdunuz?” must be replaced with “Kendiiniz ne olarak hatirıyorsunuz, kendi varlığınızı hangi bölümünüüzün bilincinde sizin?” In the same way, the verb “помните” (hatırlıyorsunuz – you remember) was miscommunicated with “понимаете” (anliyorsunuz – you understand).

### Table 2

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A. Bulut (2015, p. 68) states two different concepts: “translation mistake” and “translation error”. She says ‘mistake’ is at the scientific level, that is systematic and repetitive whereas ‘error’ can originate from a slip of the tongue. Although we cannot find ‘slip of the tongue’ in written translation, errors can originate from inattentiveness in some cases. Therefore, in order to understand if the case is a mistake or an error, we need to understand if there are more cases of the same nature in the translated work. Table 2 renders the same word we saw in Table 1. Here, it is evident that the verb “помните” (hatırlamak – to remember) was translated as понимаете (anlamlamak – to understand), which hints that the translator may have a permanent problem with the verb.
The verb "презрение" (hor görmek, küçük görmek – to scorn, to despise) in Table 3 was mistranslated as "подозрение" (şüphe - suspicion).

Table 4 offers another similar word fallacy. "стало жалко" means "bir şeye üzülmek, acılmak" (to be sorry about something, pity). The verb was used in the sentence: "Акшамдан калма, уыкulu Lara, дурumu там олар казваымышты. Инде булундуу дурумдан атеш bastı. Окесинден текет барымак истидыс деген азгыни ачыпди. Япабылдыгы янына дилни кымылдыктады (Pasternak, 2017, p. 119).

In Table 5, the verb "переблагородничать" originating from "благородность" (asalet, soyluluk – nobility) was taken for "благодарность" (minnettarlık - gratitude).

In the example provided in Table 6, the adverb "ранее" ("daha önce" - previously) was confused with the adjective "ранний" ("erken" - early), which caused a change in the meaning. The sentence mentions that an officer asks the doctor where an artillery unit that previously existed here moved to; however, the translation changes the meaning in
a way that makes the doctor trying to find out why the officer came here early. Moreover, the verb “переехать” (“taşınmak” – to move) was mistranslated as a similar looking verb “приехать” (“gelmek” – to come). It is challenging to decide if this mistake was made due to the similarity of the verbs or to adjust to the mistranslation in the previous sentence. Because, as we mentioned earlier, mistranslated words can cause changes of the meaning in the sentence or the whole paragraph.

Table 7

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Although the adjective “совершенный” in Table 7 means “mükemmel” (perfect), it was used as “tam çocuk” (just a child). The translator, however, mixed it up with “совершеннолетний” (reşit olmuş – come of age) that originates from the same root.

Table 8

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<th>Source Text</th>
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The word “председатель” (başkan - chairman) in Table 8 was mixed up with “представитель”(temsilci - representative)

Table 9

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Table 9 has a ‘mistake’ originating from the prefixes in Russian. According to the classification of ‘mistake’ and ‘error’ provided before, there is a mistake here, that is a repeated case. The verb “развернуть” that can be found in various places in the book, was mistranslated in both cases. Prefixes change the meanings of the verbs in Russian. The verb “развернуть” means “sanlı bir şeyi açmak” (remove the wrapping); however, the translator mistranslated it as “свернуть” (sarmak – to wrap). In the second example, the verb “развернул” was mistranslated as “geri katladi” (folded it back).
Table 10 contains a fallacy as well. Although verb "Отменят" comes from the root "менять", it gains a new meaning ("iptal etmek" – to cancel) with the prefix -ot. The translator transferred the meaning as "parayı değiştiricekler" (they were going to exchange the money); however, that section means "parayı iptal edecekler" (they were going to cancel the money), that is "para geçersiz olacak" (the money would not be valid anymore, i.e. withdrawn from circulation).

The verb “хлебнула” in Table 11 means “bir şeyi tatmak, sivi bir şeyi yudumlamak” (to taste, to sip). The root comes from “хлеб” (ekmek - bread). Most probably the translator took it for “yemeği ve içmeyi” (eating and drinking). On the contrary, the equivalent should have been “tatmak” (to taste) or “yudumlamak” (to sip).

“дровяной вор” (odun hırsızı – wood thief) in Table 12 was transferred as a very similar word: “двор” (avlu – yard). Since the wood is in the yard, we cannot hint at a major change in the meaning; yet, we cannot talk about equivalency, either.
The word “завод” can be seen in the source text in Table 13. “завод” in Russian is a homonym with two meanings. The first one is “fabrika” (factory), and the second one is “заводить”, which means “kurmak” (wind up a clock). The translator mistakenly used the first meaning. The source text mentions “yıllarca kurluymayan saatten” (a clock that hasn’t been winded up for years) but it was translated as “yıllardır fabrika yüzünü görmemiş saat” (a clock that hasn’t been to a factory for years).

Table 14 is similar to Table 13 in that they both contain homonym mistakes. The word “носки” is a noun (“носка” - wear) derived from “носить” (“giymek” – to wear). A case affix was added to it and it became “носки”. A quick grammatical analysis would help correct the mistake. As a matter of fact, if the meaning was to be “çorap” (socks), the original text must have been “от носков” with the changed case. Consequently, the mistake in rendering the correct meaning caused a mistranslation of the sentence: It must have been “yeni ayakkabılar az giyilmekten henüz kararmamıştı” rather than “yeni ayakkılar henüz çoraptan kararmamıştı”.

There was a mix up in Table 15 between “Принято” (kabul edilen - accepted) and “приятно” (hoş - nice), which caused a semantic shift. It must have been “Gece rüyada görülenler, gündüz yaşanılan ve güçlü etki bıra-
kan olaylar olduğu düşünülür” rather than “Rüya görme konusuna gelince, insanın gündüzü koşuşturma içerisinde çok etkisinde kaldıği şeylerini düşününde gördüğüne inanması oldukça hoş bir düşüncede” that's found in translation.
Table 16

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The infinitive of the verb “посовестился” in Table 16 is “посовеститься” (utanmak – to be embarrassed) does not exist in modern Russian but was frequently used in Russian classics. The translator most probably took it for the similar verb “посоветоваться” (danışmak, tavsiye almak, fikir sormak – to seek consultation, to ask for an idea) and rendered it as “Бир сор önce” (let you ask first, why don’t you ask first?). The equivalence must have been “Утан biraz” (shame on you).

Table 17

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The verb “разорение” (iflas etme – to go bankrupt) was mixed up with “разочарование” (hayal kıırıklığı – disappointment) in Table 17.

Table 18

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<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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The word “поголовно” was used in the source text. It means “hepsini ıstisansız” veya “ayrı etmeksziniz hepsi” (all of them, without excluding any of them). “по голове” that is very similar to it means “başına” (on the head). The mix up caused the mistranslation. A suggested translation is “Partizan kuruşunları neredeyse hepsine isabet ediyordu” (The partisan bullets hit almost all of them) instead of what we find in the translated text: “Кuruşunlar yaralananların başına değil, neredeyse hepsine isabet ediyordu” (The bullets did not hit the heads of the wounded, but all of them).

Table 19

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The infinitive form of the verb “заговаривала” in the source text is “заговаривать” –“конuşarak birisinin kafasını kasırtmak, konuşmaya tutmak” (talking someone’s head off, chatting away) and its second meaning is “birsinine büyük yapmak” (to cast a spell over someone, to say a prayer for someone). In the section provided in Table 19, the second meaning was used. The translator mixed it up with the verbs “говорить / разговаривать”, hence “konuşmak” (to speak/to talk). The translator’s version of “hasta inek için Kubariha ile konuşuyordu” (was talking to Kubariha for the sick cow) instead of the correct translation of “Kubariha, hasta ineği okuyordu” (Kubariha was saying a prayer for the sick cow) was obviously a mistake causing confusion of the subjects in the sentence and distortion of the meaning.
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Table 20

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Table 21 includes the word “сочувствие” (birisini kısıtlamak / rahatsızlık vermek / sıkmak – restrict, disturb or bore someone) in Table 20 was mixed up with “стесняться” (utanmakt, çekinmek – to be embarrassed, to abstain from).

Table 21

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<th>Source Text</th>
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But when considered in the context:

“— Здравствуйте, хорошие мои. Всё, решительно всё чувствую и насквозь, до конца всё понимаю. Простите за смелость, вы страшно друг к другу подходите. В высшей степени гармоническая пара.

— Должен остановить вас. Прошу не вмешиваться в вещи, вас не касающиеся. У вас не спрашивают сочувствия. Вы забываетесь.”

“Sizin empati kurmanıza gerek yok” (No need for you to show empathy) seems to be a better version.

Table 22

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“страм” (utanç, rezalet – shame, disgrace) (an archaic word found frequently in classic Russian literature, also found in dictionaries the form of “срём”) was mixed up with “странно” (“tuhaf” - strange) in Table 22, which should render the translation as “Böyle konuşmaya utanmıyorsunuz?” (Aren’t you ashamed to talk like that?) instead of “Ne tuhaf konuşuyorsunuz” (How strange you talk) in the translated version.
The word “нечестно” used in Table 23 literally means “doğru değil, dürüst değil” (incorrect, dishonest), and in daily usage, it means “haksızlık” (injustice), which was confused with “бесчестье” (ahlaksızlık, namussuzluk – indecency, ignominy).

Table 24 renders two sections of a chapter towards the end of the novel. We will focus on two verbs: “пережить” (совершенный - bitmişlik – perfective aspect) and “переживать” (несовершенный - bitmemişlik – imperfective aspect). We will elaborate on the usage of the two words without any details in grammar. “пережить” means...
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We will examine how the misinterpretation in the translation affected the content: the author tells about the main character's (Zhivago) last tram trip before his death in the source text. The frequent break-down of the tram causes Zhivago to think about the concept of relativity deeply. While doing this, Zhivago's attention is drawn onto an elderly lady walking outside, believing that they passed the lady a couple of times, and then she passed the tram during the break-downs. He then remembers the math problems he solved at school. Applying them to real life, he starts to think when certain objects start to move from the same point in different speeds, how many times they can cross each other’s paths without being aware of that, and in conclusion, who will live longer than the other. In the second section, Zhivago suffers a heart attack and dies during the long tram trip. The elderly lady stops by the tram that came to a halt because of the incident, and sees Zhivago for the first time, therefore outliving him.

Hence, the translator ignored how the author crafted the end of the story.

The last sentence of the second section also reveals a missing part. “Onuncu kez tramvayın önüne geçmiş, olan bitenin farkında olmasa da Jivago’ya yetişmiş ve tek acıyan o olmuştu.” (Although she passed the tram ten times being not aware of what was going on, she caught up with Zhivago, being the only one who pitied him). As it is quite visible here, translators should pay attention to contextual and structural features, but also understand the whole story well, and how it was built to be able to interpret the story correctly.

Table 25

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We witness that similar but contradicting concepts have been mixed up in Table 25.

The phrase “He раз” (birkaç kez / birden fazla – a couple of times, more than once) was confused with “ни раз” (hic / bir defa bile – never, even once). Reading the sentence alone also reveals the inconsistency. “Kitabını içeriğini daha önce hiç okumamışlardi ama neredeyse hemen hepsini ezbere biliyorlardı” (They’ve never read the book before but knew the content by heart). One can ask the question how they knew the content of a book that they’ve never read before. Therefore, a suggested translation can be: “Daha önce çok kez okunan ve neredeyse yarısını ezberek bildikleri Yuri’nin yazıldıkları olan bitenin farkında olmasa da Jivago’ya yetişmiş ve tek acıyan o olmuştu.” (They were going through the notebook of Yuri’s writings that they have read many times before and knew almost half of it by heart).

Table 26

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Table 26 compares “страшная” (korkunç - terrible) to “странная” (tuhaf -strange). A better translation could be “Korkunç bir koşturmaca başladı” (… horrifying rush …) instead of the translator’s version of “Tuhaf bir telaş sardi insanları” (… funny/strange excitement …).
Table 27

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Table 27 demonstrates the confusion of “умеряющий” (yumuşatmak, azaltmak, kısıtlamak – soften, decrease, restrict) with “умирающий” (ölmekte olan, ölmek üzere olan – someone who’s dying, someone about to die). A suggested translation: “Aslında Pavel, Vosnoboynikov’un târnım kabuslarını yumuşatan sansürden bile, meselelere daha karamsar bakıyordu.” (As a matter of fact, Pavel was more pessimistic than Vosnoboynikov’s farming nightmares).

Table 28

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Table 28 renders another mistake caused by misinterpretation of a prefix.

The verb “расстегнутая” (ïliklenmemiş / açık – unbuttoned, open) was mixed up with “застегнутая” (ilikli / kapalı – buttoned, closed) and the translation offered the opposite meaning. Therefore, the translation should read “ Önüiliklenmemişti ” (his coat was unbuttoned) instead of “ Önünü sıkı sıkı kapadığı ” (... buttoned fast ...)

Conclusion

Literary translation is a source of many challenges for a translator. One of the first steps to take is to pay utmost attention to equivalence at word level. Taking the wrong step first would end up in mistranslations.

As a result of the study, it was identified that the translator faced difficulties in similar words, different meanings of words originating from the same root, words with different meanings with the addition of prefixes, connotations, and words with different meanings coming from similar roots.

The most common mistakes were identified to belong to the group of independent words formed with similar letters but of different roots:

• сознавать (idrak etmek – to comprehend) – создавать (oluşturmak – to create, form)
• помнить (hatırlamak – to remember) - понимать (anlamak – to understand) (twice)

• жалко (acima / üzülme – sorry, pity) – жарко (sıcak - hot)
• благодарность (asalet - nobility) – благодарность (minnettarlık - gratitude)
• председатель (başkan - chairman) – представитель (teyasedi - representative)
• дрова (odun - wood) – двор (avlu – yard, garden)
• принято (kabul edilmiş / alışılması – accepted, familiar) – приятно (hoş - nice)
• посоветоваться (danışmak – to consult)
• разорение (iflas etmek – to go bankrupt) – разочарование (hayal kırıklığına uğramak – to get disappointed)
• страшная (korkunç – terrible, horrifying) – странная (tuhaf – strange, funny)
• страничный (korkunç – terrible, horrifying) – странная (tuhaf – strange, funny)
• умерявшая (yumuşatmak - softening) – умирающая (ölmek olan - dying)

The second most common mistake was about the words with prefixes:

• презрение (hor görmek – to scorn) – подозрение (şüphelenmek – to get suspicious)
• расстегнуть (açmak – to open) - застегнуть (iliklemek – to button)
• развернуть (açmak – to open) – завернуть (sarmak – to wrap)
• отменять (iptal etmek – to cancel) -поменять (değiştirmek – to change)
• заговаривать (okumak / büyü yapmak – to say a prayer, to cast a spell) – разговаривать (konuşmak – to speak)
• нежестоко (haksızlık, doğru değil – injustice, incorrect) -бесчестье (namussuzluk / ahlaksızlık – ignominy / indecency)
• пережить (birisinden daha uzun yaşamak – to outlive) – переживать (birisi için endişe etmek/ üzülmek – to worry about someone) (twice)

Thirdly, the mistakes concentrate on full homophones, half homophones, and words originating from the same root:
• завод (kurmak – to wind up) – завод (fabrika - factory)
• не раз (bir defa değil, birkaç kez, birçok kez – not only once, a couple of times, many times) - ни разу (hiç - never)
• носка (giyme – wearing) – носки (çorap - sock)
• стеснять (kısıtlamak /rahatsız etmek – to restrict / to disturb) – стесняться (utanmak – to get embarrassed)
• ранее (daha önce - previously) – ранний (erken - early)
• совершенный (tam / mükemmel – full / perfect) – совершенолетний (reşit olmuş – to be of age)
• хлебнуть (tatmak / yudumlamak – to taste / to sip) - хлеб (ekmek - bread)
• по голове (başına /başından – to the head, on the head) – поголовно (hepsini /istisnasız – all / with no exception)
• сочувствие (üzülme / empati kurma – to be sorry / to empathize) - чувства (duygular - feelings)

It is of utmost importance to understand the words in the context correctly. Otherwise, we can never talk about correct, sufficient, and quality translations. Furthermore, we can come across cases where the translator provided the opposite meaning and/or spoiled the pattern of the story, which can even be funny. The translator’s responsibility surely increases if the subject under discussion is a literary work.

References


