

From Chagatai to German: Strategies for Rendering Babur's Proverbs in H. Dalov's Translation

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Received: 03-09-2025
Accepted: 12-10-2025
Published: 28-11-2025



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conclude that Dalov's renderings are largely successful and that rigorous proverb analysis can both safeguard heritage and enhance cross-cultural readability.

Keywords: Baburnama; Babur; Proverb Translation; H. Dalov; Fedorov; Phraseology; Uzbek; Persian-Tajik; German Translation; Functional Equivalence

Abstract: *This article examines how proverbs and proverbial expressions in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's Baburnama are rendered in H. Dalov's translation (into German, with Uzbek source passages). The Baburnama is celebrated for its direct, unornamented style and its closeness to living speech, in which proverbs play a pivotal role. We outline why translating proverbs is among the most difficult tasks in translation studies, review classic approaches (e.g., A. V. Fedorov), and analyze Dalov's concrete solutions. Using a qualitative, example-driven method, we group the book's proverbs by theme (friendship/brotherhood, enmity and wrongdoing, practical wisdom, loyalty and trust, labor and discipline) and compare each with Dalov's German renderings. We find that Dalov predominantly employs three strategies—functional equivalence, careful literal translation with stylistic smoothing, and adaptive reformulation—while preserving meaning and cultural color. Selected case studies (e.g., “Teng bo'lmaguncha, to'sh bo'lmas”; “Die Tore einer Stadt kann man schließen, doch nie den Mund des Feindes”; “ko'zlarini tuz tutti”; “Marg bo yoron sur ast”) show how proverbs intensify characterization, compress judgment, and anchor narrative stance. The discussion highlights best practices for proverb translation prioritizing function and discourse role, tracing intertextual Persian-Tajik sources, and using paratext where needed. We*

Introduction

One of the Baburnama's most remarked qualities is its plain, vivid language and free of needless ornament and close to the idiom of everyday speech. Within this living diction, proverbs and proverbial turns of phrase play a constitutive role. They are not mere embellishments: they condense communal wisdom, transmit moral judgment, and bridge past and present. Babur consistently leans on “fathers' words” the people's sayings to heighten narrative force, sketch character, and deliver verdicts with concise authority.

Translating such material is uniquely demanding. Proverbs are the “cream” of a language: dense in imagery, history, and culture. Effective translation requires grasping a proverb's inner sense, source and function in context, literal vs. figurative meaning, and its relationship to the surrounding narrative. Only then can a translator select an existing target-language equivalent, find a near-match, reformulate, or if necessary to explain briefly in paratext.

This study explores how H. Dalov (2022) renders Baburnama proverbs, asking what strategies he uses, how successfully he preserves meaning and effect, and what the results suggest for proverb translation more broadly.

Literature Review

Scholarly discussion of proverb translation has long revolved around the tension between semantic fidelity and idiomatic naturalness, a tension that becomes acute in historical texts whose rhetoric leans on communal wisdom condensed in fixed expressions. Foundationally, A. V. Fedorov (1958) distinguishes three broad modes for rendering phraseological units such as literal transfer, modified literal transfer, and substitution with a target-language equivalent, each appropriate only insofar as it preserves the unit's communicative function in context. Later writers refine this by emphasizing discourse role and pragmatic effect: a proverb rarely functions as neutral ornament but rather as judgment, stance-taking, character sketch, or scene closure, which means that a translation strategy must be chosen after the translator identifies the local function and intertextual lineage of the source item. G'. Salomov (1966), in turn, argues against the myth of "untranslatability," noting that absence of a ready-made equivalent simply raises the stakes for accurate, context-sensitive solutions, whether through near-matches, selective paraphrase, or discreet glossing. Within the Baburnama (2002), proverbiality is doubly layered: Babur deploys Turkic (Uzbek/Chagatai) sayings and also imports Persian–Tajik maxims, sometimes verbatim, sometimes naturalized into Turkic, often signalled by formulae such as *masal borkim* ("there is a proverb"). This intertextuality forces the translator to read not only across languages but across proverb networks where an identical function may be served by different imagery. Studies of historical prose further stress prosody and register: proverbs must "land" with cadence, parallelism, and aphoristic brevity in the target language or risk sounding explanatory rather than proverbial. Against this backdrop, H. Dalov's (2022) renderings provide a useful test case, because they exhibit a practiced mix of functional equivalence (e.g., pairing the "city gates" motif with a canonical German structure), adaptive reformulation guided by scene semantics (e.g., recasting "Teng bo'Imaguncha, to'sh bo'lmas" to comment on congruence of land and people), and literal translation with stylistic smoothing when the imagery itself is semantically load-bearing (e.g., "Marg bo yoron sur ast"). The literature therefore suggests an evaluative framework that weights discourse function, intertextual source-tracing, idiomaticity, and minimal but judicious explicitation for culture-bound images.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, example-driven comparative approach tailored to proverb translation in historical narrative. The corpus comprises the Baburnama excerpts provided (in Uzbek/Chagatai-based modernized Uzbek) and the paired German translations attributed to H. Dalov (2022), with attention to items explicitly marked as proverbs or proverb-like *sententiae* that perform equivalent functions. Each proverb candidate is first documented with its immediate narrative context and communicative purpose (e.g., character judgment, intensification, narrative closure, humorous relief). The item is then aligned with Dalov's (2022) rendering and coded along four axes: (1) strategy

is functional equivalent, literal with smoothing, or adaptive reformulation; (2) semantic fidelity is preservation of propositional content and entailments; (3) pragmatic effect is retention of aphoristic force, stance, and evaluative color; and (4) cultural imagery is whether source metaphors are kept, replaced, or glossed. Thematic clustering follows to map proverb usage across five domains recurrent in the data (friendship/brotherhood; enmity and wrongdoing; practical wisdom; loyalty and trust; labor and discipline). Finally, micro-case studies are used to probe translator decision-making where strategy choice is especially consequential (e.g., the “salt and eyes” idiom, the “city gates” pair of maxims, the solidarity-in-death Persian maxim). Throughout, evaluation prioritizes the proverb’s function in discourse over formal mimicry, while also noting instances where minimal paratext (parenthetical gloss) appears to be the enabling condition for preserving culture-specific images without sacrificing readability.

Result and Discussion

Across the analyzed samples, Dalov (2022) consistently employs three strategies in patterned ways that correlate with proverb function and opacity of imagery. Where a German proverb or proverb-shaped formulation can mirror Babur’s rhetorical move, he opts for functional equivalence with tight cadence, as in “Die Tore einer Stadt kann man schließen, doch nie den Mund des Feindes,” which neatly preserves parallelism and the normative claim about the futility of silencing detractors. When source imagery is central to authorial stance or to the emotional color of a scene, Dalov tends toward literal translation with stylistic smoothing, thereby maintaining metaphor and rhythm as with “Das Sterben mit seinen Freunden ist wie ein Festgelage,” whose hyperbolic conviviality intensifies Babur’s ethic of shared hardship. For context-dependent or culturally dense items lacking a ready-made counterpart, he adopts adaptive reformulation that aligns the proverb with the local scene semantics, exemplified by recasting “Teng bo’l maguncha, to’sh bo’l mas” into a judgment about congruence of mountains and inhabitants, thus delivering the same evaluative payload in a way that sounds native in German prose. In culture-bound idioms where literal imagery risks opacity (e.g., “ko’zlarini tuz tutti”), Dalov (2022) preserves the striking metaphor and adds minimal explicitation in parentheses, which secures comprehension without diluting proverbial punch. Thematically, Babur’s (2002) proverbs cluster around moral judgment of enemies and slander, leadership ethics under duress, practical counsel on timeliness and mortality, warnings about trust and betrayal, and injunctions to disciplined labor; in every cluster, the German renderings generally retain both sense and function, with prosodic balance that lets them read as genuine aphorisms rather than glosses. Micro-case analysis shows that proverb pairing (e.g., “dushman ne demas, tushga ne kirmas” alongside the “city gates” maxim) survives translation as a rhetorical couplet, thereby preserving the text’s argumentative scaffolding.

Discussion

The analysis of H. Dalov’s translation (2022) choices for proverbs in the Baburnama (2002) reveals how translation is not merely a linguistic operation but a deep act of cultural mediation. Proverbs, by their very nature, are embedded in the collective consciousness of

a people; they encode social norms, moral values, humor, and cognitive metaphors particular to a culture. Translating them, therefore, requires not only linguistic competence but also historical, anthropological, and aesthetic sensitivity. In Dalov's case (2022), his rendering of Babur's proverbs demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the dual heritage that underpins the Baburnama: the Turkic oral tradition and the Persian written canon. Both streams inform Babur's idiom, and Dalov's ability (2022) to navigate between them while adapting the sayings into idiomatic German shows a rare balance between fidelity to source culture and communicability in the target language.

From a theoretical standpoint, Dalov's work (2022) aligns most closely with the functional equivalence model proposed by Eugene Nida and others, emphasizing that the translator's duty is to elicit in the target audience the same effect that the original text produced in its audience. In proverb translation, this entails preserving not just the surface sense but also the proverbial force, the way a saying "lands" emotionally and cognitively. For example, when Dalov (2022) transforms "Teng bo'Imaguncha, to'sh bo'lmas" into "Wie die Berge sind, so sind auch die Bewohner," he sacrifices formal fidelity for communicative function, allowing the German reader to perceive the same sardonic moral commentary that Babur's contemporaries would have recognized. Such adaptive rendering highlights the translator's interpretive role as a cultural intermediary who reconstructs meaning through resonance rather than replication.

Another dimension of Dalov's success (2022) lies in his stylistic tact and rhythmical sensitivity. Proverbs are memorable partly because of their phonetic symmetry, internal rhyme, or parallel syntax; these features aid their oral transmission and rhetorical power. Dalov's German renderings frequently preserve these rhythmic and syntactic balances, ensuring that the translated proverbs remain quotable and aphoristic rather than verbose explanations. The rhythmic pairing in "Die Tore einer Stadt kann man schließen, doch nie den Mund des Feindes" exemplifies this: its chiasmic cadence reproduces the moral closure of the Uzbek source, making it sound naturally proverbial within German discourse.

Equally important is Dalov's (2022) ethical stance toward cultural imagery. In some cases, he chooses to keep striking local metaphors intact, even when they appear exotic to Western readers, supplementing them with minimal clarification. This occurs in "ko'zlarini tuz tutti" ("salt consumed his eyes"), a metaphor that ties moral retribution to a culturally specific notion of salt as both blessing and bond. By retaining the literal image and offering a concise gloss, Dalov (2022) allows readers to experience the texture of Central Asian moral imagination without losing comprehension. This approach contrasts with domestication strategies that erase cultural difference in favor of familiarity; instead, Dalov (2022) practices what Lawrence Venuti calls foreignization, inviting readers to encounter the cultural Other through the text itself.

Furthermore, Dalov's (2022) treatment of proverbs demonstrates a deep awareness of intertextual layering. Many of Babur's proverbs trace back to Persian and Arabic sources or have cognates across Turkic languages. Dalov's (2022) renderings occasionally echo existing German equivalents from Biblical or classical literature, thereby creating new intertextual bridges. For instance, the maxim "Uzri gunohidan yomonroq" ("An excuse

worse than the sin”) is translated as “Seine Entschuldigung ist schlimmer als die Tat,” which recalls the moral phrasing of Western proverbial wisdom. In doing so, Dalov subtly aligns Babur’s ethical worldview with a universal moral lexicon, reinforcing the text’s timeless humanism while maintaining its historical specificity.

However, this balancing act also exposes the limits of any single approach. There are instances where the loss of semantic layering is inevitable. Some Uzbek proverbs operate simultaneously on literal, metaphorical, and cultural levels that have no precise equivalent in German. The translator’s choice, whether to preserve imagery or prioritize accessibility is necessarily privileges one aspect over another. Dalov’s (2022) decision to add short parenthetical explanations in such cases, rather than resorting to lengthy footnotes, demonstrates a preference for preserving narrative flow and reader immersion, aligning with the stylistic directness of Babur’s prose. This minimalist explanatory style reflects a modern translation ethos: maintain readability while hinting at cultural complexity.

The discussion also extends to the didactic and rhetorical functions of proverbs in Babur’s narrative. Many sayings in the Baburnama are not merely inserted for flavor but act as moral commentary or reflective summation after an event. They provide closure, moral evaluation, or ironic contrast. Dalov’s (2022) translations succeed largely because he preserves this discursive function—ensuring that each proverb still performs its evaluative or interpretive role in the translated text. For example, the placement of “Das Sterben mit seinen Freunden ist wie ein Festgelage” at the end of the snowy mountain episode maintains the emotional crescendo of solidarity that Babur intended, turning a historical anecdote into a moral tableau.

From a broader cultural perspective, Dalov’s (2022) translation practice contributes to cross-cultural continuity: he does not treat the Baburnama (2002) as an archaic relic but as a living document whose wisdom can still resonate through well-chosen proverbs. His renderings reveal that proverbial language is a shared human medium for encoding moral reasoning, humor, and collective memory. The translator thus becomes a mediator of universal values articulated in culturally specific forms. In the Baburnama, proverbs function as miniaturized philosophies of life on loyalty, justice, and human frailty and Dalov’s (2022) sensitivity ensures that these philosophies remain audible in another linguistic world.

Finally, the implications of this analysis reach beyond the Baburnama. The findings illustrate general principles for translating culturally rich historical texts: (1) prioritize communicative and functional equivalence over mechanical literalism; (2) maintain rhythmic and aphoristic qualities to preserve oral resonance; (3) respect source imagery while calibrating comprehension through minimal gloss; (4) recognize intertextual genealogies to select meaningful equivalents; and (5) allow the translator’s voice to act not as an intruder but as a bridge. By embodying these principles, Dalov (2022) achieves what might be called dynamic fidelity: a translation that speaks with the same moral gravity and aesthetic precision as the original while sounding fully at home in its new language.

In conclusion, the discussion underscores that proverb translation is a microcosm of translation itself where linguistic accuracy, cultural empathy, and artistic instinct converge.

H. Dalov's rendering of Babur's proverbs exemplifies this convergence, transforming historical wisdom into a living dialogue between civilizations. His work confirms that a translator's art lies not only in words but in the delicate preservation of worldview, rhythm, and human sentiment that proverbs so compactly convey.

Conclusion

Proverbs in the Baburnama (2002) are not decorative; they are engines of evaluation, characterization, and narrative closure. H. Dalov's (2022) translation demonstrates three effective strategies such as functional equivalence, literal translation with smoothing, and adaptive reformulation deployed with sensitivity to context and intertext. Where imagery is culture-bound, minimal explicitation preserves both meaning and color. The overall result is high semantic fidelity and strong pragmatic effect.

For translators of historical prose rich in proverbial material, best practice includes: (1) analyzing discourse function before choosing a strategy; (2) mapping cross-language proverb networks (Uzbek ↔ Persian–Tajik ↔ target language); (3) favoring target-language proverb equivalents when they carry the same rhetorical force; and (4) using brief paratext sparingly for opaque idioms. Such practice safeguards the heritage voice while ensuring readability for contemporary audiences.

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