

CULTURAL EQUIVALENCE IN ENGLISH-UZBEK LITERARY TRANSLATION

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Abstract: This article examines the concept of cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation and analyzes the major challenges that translators face when transferring culture-specific elements from English into Uzbek. Literary translation involves not only the transmission of lexical and grammatical meanings but also the preservation of cultural values, traditions, historical references, social relationships, and national identity. The analysis demonstrates that successful cultural translation requires a balance between preserving the cultural characteristics of the source text and making the translated text natural and comprehensible for Uzbek readers. The study also emphasizes the importance of translators' intercultural competence, contextual analysis, and pragmatic awareness in achieving adequate literary translation.

Keywords: cultural equivalence, literary translation, English, Uzbek, culture-specific items, intercultural communication, translation strategies, functional equivalence, adaptation, domestication, foreignization.

Introduction

Literary translation is one of the most important forms of intercultural communication. Through translation, readers gain access to literary works created in different linguistic and cultural environments. However, literary texts contain not only linguistic information but also cultural references, social values, historical associations, traditions, beliefs, and elements of national identity. Therefore, translating a literary work requires much more than replacing words and grammatical structures from one language with corresponding elements in another.

Cultural equivalence is particularly important in English-Uzbek literary translation. English and Uzbek belong to different linguistic and cultural traditions, and their speakers have developed different social conventions, customs, historical experiences, and ways of conceptualizing the world. Although globalization has increased cultural contact between English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking communities, many culture-specific concepts still have no direct equivalents in the target language.

Culture-specific items can include names of traditional foods, clothing, festivals, institutions, historical events, geographical features, religious practices, kinship terms, forms of address, idioms, metaphors, and proverbs. These elements often contribute

significantly to the atmosphere and artistic meaning of a literary work. If they are translated incorrectly or excessively adapted, important aspects of the source culture may be lost.

The purpose of this study is to examine cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation and to identify effective strategies for translating culture-specific items. The study also aims to demonstrate how linguistic, cultural, pragmatic, and contextual factors influence translation decisions.

Literature Review

The problem of equivalence has occupied an important position in translation studies. Eugene A. Nida distinguished between formal and dynamic equivalence and emphasized that translation should reproduce the meaning and communicative effect of the source text in a natural form in the target language. His theory provides an important foundation for understanding cultural equivalence because the translator must consider both linguistic meaning and the response of the target audience. Peter Newmark paid particular attention to cultural words and culture-bound expressions. He argued that translators should consider the cultural context of lexical items and select appropriate strategies according to the nature of the source text and the target audience. His work is especially relevant to the translation of cultural realities and terminology.

Mona Baker examined equivalence at different linguistic levels and demonstrated that translators frequently face difficulties when translating idioms, fixed expressions, and culturally marked phrases. According to her approach, context and communicative purpose are essential for selecting appropriate equivalents.

Lawrence Venuti introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization. Domestication makes the source text more familiar and accessible to target readers, whereas foreignization attempts to preserve the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the source text. Both approaches are relevant to English-Uzbek literary translation.

Methodology

The study employs comparative, descriptive, contextual, and linguocultural methods to investigate cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation. The research focuses on culture-specific items that commonly occur in English literary texts and their possible Uzbek translation equivalents.

The comparative method is used to identify similarities and differences between source-language expressions and their target-language renderings. The contextual method is applied to determine the meaning and function of culture-specific items within particular literary contexts. The linguocultural method is used to examine the relationship between linguistic expressions and the cultural values they represent.

For analytical purposes, culture-specific items are divided into several categories: food and beverages, clothing, religious expressions, forms of address,

kinship terms, idioms and proverbs, historical and geographical references, social institutions, and traditional customs.

The study also considers several major translation strategies: transliteration, borrowing, calque, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, adaptation, domestication, foreignization, and explanatory translation. These strategies are evaluated according to two major criteria: preservation of source-cultural meaning and accessibility for Uzbek readers.

Analysis and Results

The analysis demonstrates that cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation is determined by several interconnected factors. The first step is to identify whether a particular expression contains culture-specific meaning. Not every lexical item requires cultural adaptation. However, when an expression represents a particular tradition, social practice, historical reality, or worldview, the translator must analyze its cultural significance before selecting an equivalent.

Food-related vocabulary is one of the most visible categories of culture-specific items. English literary works may contain references to traditional dishes and beverages that have no direct equivalents in Uzbek. In such cases, replacing the original food with a culturally familiar Uzbek dish may make the translation easier to understand but can also distort the cultural setting. Therefore, borrowing or transliteration, sometimes accompanied by a short contextual explanation, can be a more appropriate solution.

Clothing terminology presents a similar problem. Traditional garments can communicate information about a character's social status, gender, nationality, historical period, or cultural identity. Translating a specific garment with a general word such as “clothes” may remove important information from the original text. Consequently, retaining the original term and providing a contextual description can help preserve its cultural significance.

Idioms and proverbs represent another major challenge. Their meanings are frequently figurative and culturally embedded. A literal translation may result in a grammatically correct expression that sounds unnatural or meaningless in Uzbek. Functional equivalence can be more effective when an Uzbek idiom or proverb has a similar meaning and communicative function. However, if the original expression is important for establishing the cultural atmosphere of the literary work, retaining the source expression with an explanation may be preferable.

Forms of address are also culturally significant. English expressions such as “Mr,” “Mrs,” “Sir,” and “Madam” do not always correspond directly to Uzbek forms of address. Uzbek expressions such as “janob,” “xonim,” “aka,” and “opa” can communicate additional meanings related to age, respect, social distance, and familiarity. Therefore, the translator must consider the relationship between characters rather than translating forms of address mechanically.

Kinship terminology provides another example of cultural and linguistic differences. The English word “uncle,” for instance, can refer to either the mother's brother or the father's brother, whereas Uzbek distinguishes between “tog‘a” and “amaki.” The appropriate translation therefore depends on contextual information. This demonstrates the importance of contextual analysis in achieving cultural equivalence.

Religious expressions also require careful treatment. Religious vocabulary may have established equivalents in Uzbek, particularly because Uzbek culture has a long Islamic historical tradition. Nevertheless, similar religious terms may have different pragmatic functions in different contexts. A religious expression may function as a prayer, blessing, greeting, emotional reaction, or conventional social formula. Therefore, translators must consider not only the dictionary meaning but also the communicative function of the expression.

Historical and geographical names are generally handled through transliteration or established target-language forms. Incorrect rendering of a proper name can make identification difficult and may affect the reader's understanding of the historical or geographical context. Consistency in transliteration is therefore essential.

Another important issue is the translation of cultural metaphors. Literary authors frequently use metaphors that are based on objects, traditions, or experiences familiar to members of their culture. A metaphor that is transparent to an English-speaking reader may not have the same associations for an Uzbek reader. The translator may therefore need to choose between preserving the original metaphor and replacing it with an Uzbek expression that produces a comparable effect.

The analysis also demonstrates the importance of pragmatic equivalence. Literary expressions often communicate meanings that go beyond their literal content. A character's statement may express politeness, irony, respect, social distance, criticism, or solidarity. If the translator focuses only on lexical meaning, the pragmatic force of the original may be weakened or lost.

The strategies of domestication and foreignization are particularly relevant to this issue. Domestication makes the translated text more familiar to Uzbek readers by replacing or adapting culturally unfamiliar elements. This can improve readability and naturalness. However, excessive domestication may erase the cultural identity of the source text.

Foreignization, on the other hand, preserves unfamiliar cultural elements and allows readers to encounter aspects of the source culture. This strategy can strengthen cultural authenticity but may make the text more difficult for readers who lack background knowledge. The most effective approach is often a balanced combination of both strategies.

Descriptive translation is particularly useful when a culture-specific item has no established Uzbek equivalent. Instead of replacing the original term, the translator can

explain its meaning or function within the text. This strategy preserves cultural information while helping the reader understand the reference.

Explanatory notes can also be used in literary translation. Footnotes and translator's notes are especially useful for historical, religious, geographical, and culturally specific references. However, excessive explanation may interfere with the aesthetic quality of a literary work. Therefore, notes should be used selectively.

The results indicate that there is no single universal strategy for achieving cultural equivalence. The most appropriate strategy depends on the type of cultural item, its function in the literary text, the intended audience, the genre, and the purpose of translation.

The analysis further demonstrates that translator competence is a decisive factor. A translator should possess not only strong knowledge of English and Uzbek but also intercultural competence. Understanding British, American, or other English-speaking cultural contexts, as well as Uzbek traditions and social conventions, allows translators to make more accurate decisions.

Thus, cultural equivalence should be regarded as a multidimensional phenomenon involving semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, and sociocultural components. A successful literary translation should preserve the artistic function of the original while making the text meaningful and natural for Uzbek readers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that cultural equivalence is one of the most important and challenging aspects of English-Uzbek literary translation. Culture-specific items carry meanings that extend beyond their dictionary definitions and frequently represent historical, social, religious, and national values.

The analysis confirms that functional equivalence, borrowing, transliteration, descriptive translation, adaptation, and explanatory translation are effective strategies for dealing with culture-specific elements. However, no single strategy can be applied universally. The choice should depend on the context, genre, communicative purpose, cultural significance of the expression, and expectations of the target audience.

The following recommendations can be proposed:

1. Translators should develop strong intercultural competence alongside linguistic competence.
2. Special attention should be given to idioms, proverbs, forms of address, kinship terms, religious expressions, food, clothing, and historical references.
3. Translators should avoid unnecessary domestication when it causes the loss of important cultural information.
4. Foreign cultural elements should be preserved when they contribute significantly to the atmosphere, characterization, or artistic meaning of a literary work.

5. Descriptive translation and brief explanatory notes should be used when culture-specific items have no satisfactory Uzbek equivalents.
6. Translation training programs should include more practical exercises involving culture-specific items and intercultural pragmatics.
7. Bilingual and linguocultural dictionaries of English-Uzbek culture-specific expressions should be developed to support translators, researchers, and students.

In conclusion, cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation is not merely a linguistic problem but a complex intercultural process. An effective translator acts as a cultural mediator who must preserve the identity of the source text while creating a natural and comprehensible target text. A balanced pragmatic and linguocultural approach can significantly improve the quality of English-Uzbek literary translation and contribute to deeper intercultural understanding.

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