



CULTURAL REALIA IN UZBEK–ENGLISH TRANSLATION: STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVATION AND ADAPTATION

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ANNOTATION

Cultural realia—culture-specific items embedded in language—pose persistent challenges in translation between Uzbek and English due to differences in history, social practices, and worldview. This study investigates effective strategies for rendering Uzbek cultural realia into English while balancing semantic accuracy and cultural accessibility. Using a qualitative analysis of literary and media texts, the research identifies key translation strategies, including preservation, adaptation, explanation, and substitution. The findings suggest that a combined, context-sensitive approach ensures both fidelity to the source culture and comprehensibility for the target audience. The study contributes to translation theory and offers practical guidance for translators working with Uzbek–English language pairs.

Keywords: cultural realia, Uzbek–English translation, equivalence, adaptation, preservation, translation strategies

INTRODUCTION

“Languages differ widely in the nature of their vocabularies. Distinctions which seem inevitable to us may be utterly ignored in languages which reflect an entirely different type of culture, while these in turn insist on distinctions which are all but unintelligible to us.”

Translation is not merely a linguistic process but also a cultural act. One of the most complex aspects of translation involves cultural realia—words and expressions that refer to objects, institutions, customs, or concepts specific to a particular culture. In Uzbek–English translation, such realia include traditional clothing (e.g., doppi), food (plov), social practices (mahalla), and culturally bound expressions. The main challenge lies in transferring these elements into English without losing their cultural essence or confusing the target audience. Translators must decide whether to preserve the original term, adapt it to the target culture, or provide explanatory context. This study aims to explore how these strategies are applied and to evaluate their effectiveness. Each language is unique, with own origins, historical backgrounds, roots and word building. For example, an irony in one language can lose all its meaning when is translated to another language, so if an irony is not rendered perfectly, the target reader might not actually get the sense of irony implied in the source text. As a result, the entire essence of the subject in question might get lost in translation. The next linguistic challenge lies in the correct translation of idioms and proverbs. For example, “osmon bilan yerdek farqi bor”, “как небо и земля” an idiom in the English language means, “As like as chalk and cheese”. This expression would be out of context if translated literally into another language.

Research objectives:

- To identify types of cultural realia in Uzbek texts
- To analyze strategies used in their English translation
- To determine the most effective approaches for preserving meaning and cultural value

METHODS

1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, focusing on textual analysis of translated materials.



2 Data Collection

The corpus includes:

- Uzbek literary works and their English translations
- Media texts and cultural articles
- Samples from bilingual dictionaries and translation manuals (chopon, tolkon, suri, choyxona, oqsoqol, mahalla, sumalak)

Nima uchundir onam tez-tez tolqon qilardi. Sababini keyin tushunganman. Non ko'pligi uchun emas, kamligi uchun tolqon qilisharkan. (O'.Hoshimov "Dunyoning ishlari", 21 bet)

I wondered why my mom often prepared tolkon. Later, I realized the reason. I found out that my parents could not supply the family with bread.

(Tolqon – [definition] type of food. It is made from corn, wheat, oats, bread crumbs and fruit. Method of preparation: roasted grain, dried bread or fruit crumbs, crush them with mixer. You can add some sugar, if you want.)

3 Analytical Framework

The analysis is based on established translation theory, particularly strategies such as:

- Preservation (transliteration/borrowing)
- Adaptation (cultural substitution)
- Descriptive translation (explanation)
- Generalization

Each example was examined to determine which strategy was used and why.

RESULTS

The analysis revealed four main strategies used in translating Uzbek cultural realia into English:

1 Preservation

This strategy retains the original Uzbek term, often in transliterated form.

Example: mahalla → mahalla

- Advantage: maintains cultural authenticity
- Disadvantage: may be unclear to foreign readers

2 Adaptation

The translator replaces the Uzbek term with a culturally equivalent English concept.

Example: choyxona → teahouse

-Insofli odamlar bevaga choyxona yonboshidagi pastak hujrani ajratib berishgan.

-Decent people in the village provided the widow with a small house near the choykhona. (teahouse) ("Choyxona" - the teahouse is a public cafeteria designed primarily for drinking tea. Widespread in Central Asian countries, Iran and Turkey. Alcohol drinks are not sold there.)

- Advantage: improves readability
- Disadvantage: partial loss of cultural nuance

3 Descriptive Translation

The meaning is explained using additional words.

Example: doppi → a traditional Uzbek skullcap

- Kechqurun o'sma ezib qo'yuvdim. Shu savil qurib qolmasin, deb qoshimga qo'ya qoluvdim.

- In the evening, I squeezed some tumor (usma). In order not to waste it, I applied it to my eyebrows

(O'sma – it is type of plant, which grows in Central Asia, Uzbek women use it by squeezing its leaves and polish them on their eyebrows and eyelash for cosmetics and treatment.)



- Advantage: ensures understanding
- Disadvantage: increases text length

4 Generalization

A more general term is used.

Example: plov → rice dish

- Advantage: simplicity
- Disadvantage: loss of specificity

The findings show that no single strategy is sufficient. Translators often combine methods depending on context, audience, and text type.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that cultural realia require flexible and context-dependent translation approaches. Preservation is particularly useful in literary texts, where maintaining cultural identity is essential. However, in informative or journalistic texts, adaptation and explanation are more effective for clarity.

The study also highlights the importance of audience awareness. For readers unfamiliar with Uzbek culture, explanatory strategies are crucial. In contrast, specialized audiences may prefer preserved terms with minimal explanation.

Furthermore, the findings align with functionalist translation theories, which emphasize the purpose of translation. The translator's decisions should be guided by the communicative function of the text rather than strict literal equivalence.

CONCLUSION

Cultural realia represent a significant and persistent challenge in Uzbek–English translation because they are deeply embedded in the historical, social, and cultural fabric of Uzbek society and often lack direct lexical or conceptual equivalents in English. These culture-specific elements—such as traditional customs, social institutions, food, clothing, and culturally bound expressions—carry meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions, reflecting unique values, beliefs, and ways of life. As a result, translators face the complex task of not only transferring linguistic content but also conveying the cultural nuances and connotations that may be unfamiliar to the target audience. This study demonstrates that effective translation of cultural realia cannot rely on a single universal method; rather, it requires a balanced and context-sensitive use of both preservation and adaptation strategies. Preservation allows translators to retain the original cultural flavor and authenticity of the source text by keeping culture-specific terms, while adaptation helps make the text more accessible and comprehensible to English-speaking readers by adjusting or explaining unfamiliar concepts. The findings suggest that a flexible combination of these strategies, guided by the purpose of the text and the needs of the audience, leads to more accurate, meaningful, and culturally appropriate translations.

Key conclusions:

- No universal strategy exists; context determines the choice
- Combining strategies yields the best results
- Cultural awareness is essential for accurate translation

The research contributes to translation studies by offering a structured approach to handling cultural realia and provides practical insights for translators, educators, and researchers.

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