



TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC WORDS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract. This thesis examines the translation problems associated with culture-specific words in Uzbek and English literary texts. Such lexical units often denote objects, customs, social institutions, forms of address, food, clothing, ceremonies, and concepts that are strongly connected with the cultural experience of a particular community. Because a direct lexical equivalent may be absent in the target language, translators must choose between preserving the source-culture element and adapting it for the target reader. The study discusses major strategies including transliteration, borrowing, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, cultural substitution, and contextual explanation. It argues that successful literary translation requires the preservation not only of referential meaning but also of cultural associations and stylistic function.

Keywords: translation, culture-specific words, Uzbek, English, literary text, equivalence, realia, cultural context, transliteration.

Literary translation is not merely the replacement of words in one language with words in another. A literary text reflects the history, customs, social relations, material culture, and worldview of the community in which it was created. Consequently, translators frequently encounter lexical units whose meanings cannot be transferred adequately through ordinary dictionary equivalents. These units are commonly described as culture-specific words or realia.

Uzbek literary texts contain numerous culturally marked words such as “mahalla,” “dasturxon,” “choyxona,” “sumalak,” “hashar,” “do‘ppi,” and “kelin.” Each of these words has a basic referential meaning, but it may also carry additional social and cultural associations. For example, “mahalla” cannot always be translated simply as “neighborhood,” because in Uzbek culture the concept can refer not only to a geographical area but also to a traditional community institution and a network of social relationships. A translator may therefore retain the word “mahalla” and provide contextual clarification when its cultural significance is important.

The word “dasturxon” presents a similar problem. Depending on context, it may refer literally to the cloth on which food is served, but in literary discourse it can also evoke hospitality, family gathering, respect for guests, and shared meals. Translating it only as “tablecloth” may reduce its cultural meaning. Transliteration combined with contextual explanation can sometimes preserve the national character of the original more successfully.

English literary texts also contain culture-specific units that create difficulties for Uzbek translators. Words connected with British and American institutions, traditions,





MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

food, education, and social life may lack exact Uzbek equivalents. Terms such as “pub,” “Thanksgiving,” “prom,” or historically specific forms of social address require different strategies depending on the literary context. Replacing them mechanically with a familiar Uzbek cultural item may make the translation easier to understand but can distort the setting and cultural identity of the original work.

Several translation strategies can be used to solve these problems. Transliteration or borrowing preserves the original cultural term, especially when the object or institution is important to the source culture. Descriptive translation explains the meaning through a short phrase. Functional equivalence selects a target-language expression that performs a similar function, while cultural substitution replaces the source item with a more familiar target-culture concept. In some cases, a translator may combine borrowing and explanation, particularly when a culture-specific word appears for the first time.

The choice of strategy depends on context. For instance, translating Uzbek “do‘ppi” merely as “hat” communicates the general category of the object but removes its national specificity. The borrowed form “doppi” or a descriptive expression such as “traditional Uzbek skullcap” may be preferable when cultural identity is relevant. Similarly, “sumalak” cannot be fully represented by a generic expression such as “sweet dish,” because its association with Navruz and collective preparation forms part of its meaning.

Another important difficulty concerns forms of address and kinship terms. Uzbek speakers may use words such as “aka,” “opa,” “amaki,” or “xola” not only for biological relatives but also as respectful forms of address. English equivalents such as “brother,” “sister,” “uncle,” and “aunt” do not always perform exactly the same pragmatic function. Literal translation may therefore create an incorrect impression about family relationships. The translator must interpret the communicative situation and decide whether to preserve the Uzbek term, use a personal name, select an English form of address, or explain the relationship indirectly.

Cultural differences also influence connotation. A lexical item may have an apparently straightforward equivalent while producing different emotional or social associations in the target language. Literary translation consequently requires attention to the character’s social background, historical period, narrative voice, and relationship with other characters. The most accurate solution at the dictionary level is not necessarily the most accurate solution within the literary text.

A comparative approach to Uzbek and English translation shows that there is no universal strategy for every culture-specific word. Excessive domestication may erase the foreign cultural environment, whereas excessive use of unexplained borrowings may make the translation difficult for readers. The translator must find a balance between comprehensibility and cultural preservation. This balance is especially important in literary works because cultural details contribute to atmosphere, characterization, and the identity of the text.





MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS

In conclusion, culture-specific words constitute one of the central challenges in Uzbek-English and English-Uzbek literary translation. Their translation requires more than lexical knowledge because their meanings are connected with cultural practices, social relations, and collective experience. Transliteration, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, cultural substitution, and contextual explanation can all be effective when selected according to the function of a particular word. A successful translator should preserve the essential cultural information of the source text while making the literary work understandable to the target reader. The study of such units is therefore significant for comparative linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

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