

UZBEK BORROWINGS AND CULTURAL TERMS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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Abstract: *This article examines Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms in English translation, focusing on the linguistic and cultural challenges that arise when Uzbek-specific words are transferred into English. Uzbek vocabulary contains many culture-bound terms connected with national traditions, food, clothing, family relations, ceremonies, religion, folklore, and social life. Words such as mahalla, sumalak, chopon, do‘ppi, navruz, beshik, and osh do not always have direct equivalents in English because they represent concepts deeply rooted in Uzbek culture. Therefore, translators often use different strategies, including transliteration, descriptive translation, explanation, borrowing, footnotes, and cultural adaptation. The article analyzes how these methods help preserve the national identity of Uzbek terms while making them understandable for English-speaking readers. Special attention is given to the role of context, cultural background, and equivalence in translating Uzbek realia.*

Key words: *Uzbek borrowings, cultural terms, English translation, realia, translation strategies, cultural equivalence.*

INTRODUCTION

The translation of Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms into English is one of the important issues in modern translation studies, because language is closely connected with national identity, history, traditions, lifestyle, and worldview. Every nation has words that express its unique culture, and many of these words do not have full equivalents in other languages. In the Uzbek language, such words include mahalla, sumalak, navruz, do‘ppi, chopon, beshik, palov, hashar, kelin salom, and many others. These units are not only lexical items; they also carry cultural, historical, social, and emotional meanings.

The relevance of this topic is connected with the growing interest in Uzbek culture in international communication, tourism, literature, education, media, and intercultural studies. As Uzbekistan becomes more visible in the global cultural and academic space, the need to translate Uzbek cultural terms into English accurately and naturally is increasing. However, translation of such terms is not always simple. In many cases, English does not have direct equivalents for Uzbek cultural concepts. Therefore, translators must choose appropriate methods such as transliteration, explanation, descriptive translation, borrowing, footnotes, or cultural adaptation.

In translation theory, culture-specific words are often called realia or culture-bound terms. These are words that name objects, traditions, institutions, foods, clothes,

ceremonies, and social practices that are specific to one culture. According to Peter Newmark, cultural words require special attention because their meaning depends not only on the dictionary definition, but also on the cultural context in which they are used [1]. Therefore, the translator must understand both the linguistic form and the cultural value of the word.

The aim of this article is to analyze Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms in English translation and to identify effective ways of rendering them into English. The main focus is placed on the problems of equivalence, preservation of national color, and explanation of Uzbek cultural concepts for English-speaking readers.

ANALYSIS

Uzbek cultural terms can be divided into several thematic groups. The first group includes words related to national traditions and ceremonies, such as Navruz, kelin salom, beshik to‘yi, sunnat to‘yi, and hashar. These words are difficult to translate because they represent cultural practices that may not exist in English-speaking societies. For example, kelin salom cannot be translated simply as “bride greeting,” because this phrase does not fully explain the cultural meaning of the ceremony. A better translation may be: kelin salom — a traditional Uzbek ceremony in which the bride greets the groom’s relatives after the wedding. This method preserves the original Uzbek term and gives a short explanation.

The second group includes words connected with food culture, such as palov/osh, sumalak, somsa, manti, non, and shashlik. Food terms are among the most common cultural words in translation. Some of them can be borrowed directly into English, especially when they represent national dishes. For example, palov can be translated as palov, a traditional Uzbek rice dish cooked with meat, carrots, onions, and spices. If the translator writes only “rice dish,” the cultural meaning becomes too general. The Uzbek word palov should be preserved because it carries national identity and is strongly associated with Uzbek hospitality.

The third group includes words related to clothing and material culture, such as do‘ppi, chopon, atlas, and adras. These words also have no exact English equivalents. For example, do‘ppi is often translated as Uzbek skullcap, but this translation is only partly correct. The word “skullcap” gives the general idea of the object, but it does not reflect its national embroidery, symbolic meaning, and connection with Uzbek identity. Therefore, the best solution is often a combined translation: do‘ppi — a traditional Uzbek embroidered skullcap. This method gives both the original term and an understandable explanation.

The fourth group includes social and community-related terms, such as mahalla, oqsoqol, and hashar. Among these, mahalla is one of the most culturally important Uzbek words. It cannot be translated simply as “neighborhood,” because mahalla is not only a residential area. It is also a social institution based on mutual support, community responsibility, local traditions, and social cooperation. A suitable translation could be: mahalla — a traditional Uzbek local community institution. Mona Baker notes that non-equivalence at word level often occurs when the source language expresses a concept that

is not lexicalized in the target language [2]. The word mahalla is a clear example of this problem.

One of the main strategies in translating Uzbek cultural terms is **transliteration**. This means keeping the original Uzbek word in English letters. For example: mahalla, sumalak, do‘ppi, chopon, navruz. This strategy is useful when the word has strong national meaning and should not be replaced by a general English word. However, transliteration alone is not always enough. If the English reader does not know Uzbek culture, the word may remain unclear. Therefore, transliteration is often combined with explanation.

Another important strategy is **descriptive translation**. In this method, the translator explains the meaning of the term instead of replacing it with one word. For example, hashar can be translated as a traditional form of voluntary community work. This translation gives the meaning clearly, but it may lose the shortness and cultural color of the original word. That is why descriptive translation is useful in academic texts, tourist materials, and cultural explanations, but in literary translation it should be used carefully.

A third strategy is **functional equivalence**. This means using a target-language expression that performs a similar function, even if it is not culturally identical. For example, oqsoqol may sometimes be translated as community elder. This gives the general meaning, but it does not fully show the Uzbek cultural role of an oqsoqol. Therefore, in culturally sensitive texts, it is better to use oqsoqol — a respected elder in a local Uzbek community. This keeps the original cultural value and makes the meaning understandable.

A fourth strategy is **footnote or commentary**. This method is especially useful in academic, historical, literary, and ethnographic texts. For example, in a literary translation, the word sumalak may be kept in the text, and a footnote may explain that it is a traditional sweet dish prepared during Navruz from sprouted wheat. Javier Franco Aixelá emphasizes that culture-specific items create translation difficulties because they belong to the source culture and may not have ready equivalents in the target culture [3]. Therefore, explanatory notes help preserve cultural authenticity.

In translating Uzbek cultural terms, the translator must also consider the type of text. In literary translation, preserving national color is very important. For example, replacing do‘ppi with “cap” or chopon with “coat” makes the text easier to understand, but it weakens the Uzbek cultural atmosphere. In tourist texts, clarity is more important, so explanation is necessary. In academic texts, both the original term and definition should be given. In news or media translation, the translator should choose a short and understandable version, often with a brief explanation in the first use.

For example:

Mahalla — not simply “neighborhood,” but a traditional Uzbek local community institution.

Sumalak — not simply “sweet food,” but a traditional Navruz dish made from sprouted wheat.

Do‘ppi — not simply “cap,” but a traditional Uzbek embroidered skullcap.

Chopon — not simply “robe,” but a traditional Uzbek quilted robe.

Hashar — not simply “work,” but voluntary community work based on mutual help.

These examples show that literal translation is often insufficient. Literal translation may give the basic meaning, but it does not always transfer cultural associations. Uzbek cultural terms often include emotional, historical, and symbolic meanings. For instance, Navruz is not only a spring holiday; it is connected with renewal, national identity, family gatherings, traditional food, music, and public celebrations. Therefore, it should be translated as Navruz, the traditional spring festival celebrated in Uzbekistan and other countries of Central Asia.

Another important issue is the balance between foreignization and domestication. Foreignization preserves the original cultural element, while domestication adapts it to the target reader’s culture. Lawrence Venuti argues that translation is not only linguistic transfer, but also a cultural choice between making the foreign culture visible or adapting it to the target audience [4]. In the case of Uzbek cultural terms, foreignization is often more appropriate because it helps introduce Uzbek culture to English-speaking readers.

However, excessive foreignization may make the text difficult to understand. If the translator uses many Uzbek words without explanation, the reader may lose interest or misunderstand the meaning. Therefore, the best approach is usually balanced translation: the Uzbek term is preserved, but a short explanation is added when necessary. For example: The family prepared sumalak, a traditional sweet dish made from sprouted wheat, for Navruz. This sentence is clear, natural, and culturally informative.

Translation of Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms also plays an important role in intercultural communication. When Uzbek terms are translated properly, English-speaking readers can understand not only the meaning of the word, but also the cultural worldview behind it. Such translation contributes to the promotion of Uzbek national heritage, literature, customs, cuisine, clothing, and social traditions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms are important elements of national identity, and their translation into English requires careful linguistic and cultural analysis. Many Uzbek cultural words do not have full equivalents in English because they express concepts specific to Uzbek life, traditions, ceremonies, food, clothing, and social relations. Therefore, direct translation is often not enough.

The analysis shows that the most effective translation strategies are transliteration with explanation, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, and footnotes. Transliteration helps preserve national color, while explanation helps the reader understand the meaning. Descriptive translation is useful when clarity is more important than brevity. Functional equivalence can be used when a similar concept exists in English, but it should be applied carefully because it may reduce the cultural meaning of the original term.

The translation of words such as mahalla, sumalak, do‘ppi, chopon, navruz, palov, and hashar demonstrates that cultural terms should not be treated as ordinary vocabulary. They

are carriers of history, tradition, and national worldview. A successful translator must understand not only the language, but also the culture behind the word. Therefore, the translation of Uzbek cultural terms into English should aim to preserve cultural identity while making the text accessible to English-speaking readers.

Thus, Uzbek borrowings and cultural terms in English translation are not only a linguistic problem, but also an important part of intercultural communication. Their accurate and thoughtful translation helps promote Uzbek culture in the international arena and strengthens cultural understanding between nations.

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