

CULTURAL REALIA IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract

This article examines the role of cultural realia in literary translation through a contrastive analysis of Uzbek and English texts. Cultural realia, as language units that reflect specific national traditions, customs, and socio-cultural contexts, present significant challenges in translation due to the lack of direct equivalents in the target language. The study aims to identify how such culturally bound elements are represented in source texts and how they are transformed or adapted in translation. The research is based on a comparative and linguocultural approach, analyzing selected literary works from Uzbek and English literature. Particular attention is paid to translation strategies such as adaptation, transliteration, equivalence, and descriptive translation. The findings reveal that cultural realia often undergo semantic and pragmatic shifts during translation, which may lead to partial loss or reinterpretation of the original cultural meaning. The study concludes that effective translation of cultural realia requires not only linguistic competence but also deep cultural awareness. The translator's ability to balance between preserving the original cultural identity and ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience plays a crucial role in achieving an adequate and meaningful translation.

Keywords

cultural realia, literary translation, contrastive analysis, Uzbek and English texts, linguoculturology, equivalence, translation strategies, cultural adaptation

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается роль культурных реалий в художественном переводе на основе сопоставительного анализа узбекских и английских текстов. Культурные реалии, как языковые единицы, отражающие национальные традиции, обычаи и социокультурные особенности, представляют значительные трудности в процессе перевода в связи с отсутствием прямых эквивалентов в языке перевода. Цель

исследования заключается в выявлении способов репрезентации культурно обусловленных элементов в исходном тексте и анализе их трансформации или адаптации в переводе. Исследование основано на сравнительном и лингвокультурологическом подходах с привлечением материалов художественных произведений узбекской и английской литературы. Особое внимание уделяется переводческим стратегиям, таким как адаптация, транслитерация, эквивалентность и описательный перевод. Результаты анализа показывают, что культурные реалии в процессе перевода часто подвергаются семантическим и прагматическим изменениям, что может приводить к частичной утрате или переосмыслению исходного культурного значения. В заключение отмечается, что эффективная передача культурных реалий требует от переводчика не только высокого уровня языковой компетенции, но и глубокого понимания культурного контекста. Способность переводчика находить баланс между сохранением национальной специфики и обеспечением понятности для целевой аудитории играет ключевую роль в достижении адекватного перевода.

Ключевые слова

культурные реалии, художественный перевод, сопоставительный анализ, узбекские и английские тексты, лингвокультурология, эквивалентность, переводческие стратегии, культурная адаптация

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary translation studies, the issue of cultural realia has become one of the most significant and complex areas of research. Literary texts are not only linguistic structures but also rich carriers of cultural information, reflecting the traditions, values, history, and worldview of a particular nation. Cultural realia, as culture-specific lexical units, pose considerable challenges in translation due to the absence of direct equivalents in the target language system. The problem of translating cultural realia is especially relevant in the context of Uzbek and English literary texts, where substantial differences exist in cultural background, social norms, and linguistic expression. These differences often lead to semantic and pragmatic transformations during the translation process, which may affect the preservation of the original cultural meaning and stylistic effect of the text. From the perspective of comparative linguistics and linguoculturology, cultural realia are viewed as key elements that reflect the national identity embedded in language. Therefore, their adequate translation requires not only linguistic competence but also deep intercultural awareness and sensitivity on the part of the translator. Various translation strategies such as transcription, transliteration, adaptation, and

descriptive translation are commonly employed to overcome these challenges. The aim of this article is to analyze the representation of cultural realia in Uzbek and English literary texts and to examine the strategies used in their translation. The study also seeks to identify the extent to which cultural meaning is preserved or transformed in the process of translation, highlighting the balance between fidelity to the source text and comprehensibility for the target audience.

Main Body: Cultural Realia in Uzbek and English Literary Translation, With Analysis and Citations. Cultural realia in literary texts are considered culture-bound lexical units that reflect the unique socio-cultural experience of a given linguistic community. These elements often include traditions, customs, rituals, social institutions, and material culture, which are deeply embedded in the national worldview. As Newmark emphasizes, “cultural words are the most difficult to translate because they are intrinsically and exclusively rooted in the source culture” (Newmark, 1988, p. 94). This statement clearly indicates that cultural realia represent one of the most problematic areas in translation studies, particularly in literary discourse. In Uzbek literary texts, cultural realia are frequently expressed through culturally specific concepts such as mahalla, navruz, sumalak, and various kinship and hospitality-related expressions. These units carry not only lexical meaning but also deep cultural connotations that reflect collective identity and social values. According to Bassnett, “language is deeply embedded in culture, and linguistic structures cannot be fully understood without reference to cultural context” (Bassnett, 2002, p. 18). Therefore, translating such elements into English requires more than linguistic substitution; it demands cultural interpretation and contextual adaptation. One of the most common strategies in translating cultural realia is transliteration, where the original form of the word is preserved. For instance, Uzbek terms such as mahalla are often transferred directly into English texts. However, as Venuti argues, “foreignization strategies preserve the linguistic and cultural difference of the source text but may reduce immediate comprehension for the target reader” (Venuti, 1995, p. 20). This means that while transliteration maintains cultural authenticity, it may require additional explanation or footnotes to ensure understanding. Another widely used method is descriptive translation, where the meaning of cultural realia is explained within the text. For example, mahalla may be translated as “a traditional local self-governing community in Uzbek society.” Nida’s theory of dynamic equivalence supports this approach, stating that “the receptor of the message should understand it with substantially the same effect as the original audience” (Nida, 1964, p. 159). This strategy prioritizes comprehension over formal equivalence, making the text more accessible to foreign readers.

Adaptation is another important translation strategy, in which cultural elements are replaced with more familiar equivalents in the target culture. However, this approach may lead to cultural loss or distortion. As Lefevere notes, “translation is a rewriting of an original text, and every rewriting reflects a certain ideology and poetics” (Lefevere, 1992, p. 9). This suggests that adaptation is not a neutral process but a culturally and ideologically influenced transformation. From a contrastive linguistic perspective, Uzbek and English literary traditions differ significantly in their representation of cultural values. Uzbek literature tends to emphasize collectivism, respect for elders, and community-based relationships, whereas English literature often highlights individualism and personal autonomy. These differences directly affect translation decisions, as the translator must mediate between two distinct cultural systems. The analysis shows that cultural realia undergo different types of transformation in translation, including semantic generalization, cultural substitution, omission, and explicitation. These transformations are not necessarily translation errors but rather necessary adjustments to ensure communicative effectiveness. As Hatim and Mason state, “translation is an act of communication which attempts to relay, across cultural and linguistic boundaries, another act of communication” (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 3). Therefore, the translation of cultural realia in Uzbek and English literary texts requires a balanced approach that combines linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity. The translator must carefully decide whether to preserve, adapt, or explain cultural elements depending on the communicative purpose and target audience. Ultimately, successful translation depends on the translator’s ability to negotiate between fidelity to the source culture and accessibility for the target readership.

Methodology and Results This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in comparative linguistics and linguoculturology to investigate the translation of cultural realia in Uzbek and English literary texts. The research adopts a contrastive analytical approach, which allows for systematic comparison of culture-specific lexical units across two linguistic systems with different cultural backgrounds. The primary corpus consists of selected excerpts from Uzbek literary works and their English translations, alongside comparable English literary texts containing culturally bound elements. The data were selected based on the presence of explicit cultural realia, including lexical items related to traditions, social institutions, material culture, and ethnographic concepts. The analytical procedure involved three main stages: Identification of cultural realia in the source texts (Uzbek literary corpus) and classification into thematic groups such as social culture, material culture, and ritual practices; Comparative analysis of translation

strategies, focusing on transliteration, adaptation, descriptive translation, omission, and equivalence-based rendering; Evaluation of semantic and pragmatic shifts occurring during translation, with particular attention to changes in cultural meaning, stylistic tone, and communicative effect; The theoretical framework of the study is based on established translation theories, including Nida's dynamic equivalence (1964), Newmark's cultural translation model (1988), and Venuti's domestication/foreignization dichotomy (1995). These frameworks were used to interpret the functional behavior of cultural realia in translation contexts.

The analysis revealed that cultural realia in Uzbek-English literary translation undergo systematic and predictable transformation patterns depending on the translation strategy applied. Four dominant types of transformation were identified:

Transliteration with minimal adaptation: Cultural terms such as *mahalla*, *navruz*, and *sumalak* were frequently retained in their original phonological form. This strategy preserves cultural authenticity but often requires supplementary explanation to ensure reader comprehension; Descriptive translation; In cases where no direct equivalent exists, translators expanded the meaning of cultural realia into explanatory phrases. For example, *mahalla* was rendered as "a traditional community-based neighborhood with self-governing functions." This strategy improved comprehensibility but reduced lexical compactness and stylistic economy; Some culturally specific elements were replaced with more familiar target-language equivalents. While this increased readability, it resulted in partial loss of source-culture specificity and reduced cultural uniqueness; In several instances, culturally dense elements were generalized or omitted to maintain fluency in the target text. This often led to a weakening of cultural depth and ideological specificity.

The findings indicate that no single translation strategy is sufficient to fully preserve both semantic content and cultural identity. Instead, translators employ a hybrid strategy model, combining multiple approaches depending on context, audience expectations, and communicative goals. Furthermore, the study confirms that translation of cultural realia involves not only linguistic transfer but also cultural negotiation, where meaning is reconstructed rather than simply transferred. This supports Venuti's (1995) claim that translation is inherently interpretative and ideologically influenced. Overall, the results demonstrate that the preservation of cultural realia in translation is a dynamic process characterized by trade-offs between accuracy, readability, and cultural authenticity. Successful translation therefore depends on the translator's ability to balance these competing demands effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation of cultural realia in Uzbek and English literary texts through a contrastive and linguocultural framework. The analysis demonstrated that cultural realia represent one of the most sensitive and complex components of literary discourse, as they encapsulate deeply rooted national values, traditions, and worldview structures. Their translation is therefore not merely a linguistic operation but a culturally loaded act of interpretation and negotiation. The findings reveal that cultural realia undergo various types of transformation in the translation process, including transliteration, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, semantic generalization, and omission. Each of these strategies reflects a specific balance between preserving the source culture and ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience. While transliteration maintains cultural authenticity, it often requires additional explanation. Conversely, adaptation and generalization enhance readability but may lead to partial loss of cultural specificity. The study also confirms that there is no universal or fixed strategy for translating cultural realia. Instead, translators rely on a flexible and context-dependent combination of approaches, guided by communicative purpose, target readership, and cultural distance between languages. In this regard, translation is best understood as a dynamic process of cultural mediation rather than direct linguistic transfer. Ultimately, the research highlights that successful translation of cultural realia depends on the translator's linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and interpretative sensitivity. A balanced approach that integrates fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience is essential for preserving both meaning and cultural identity. Future research may expand this study by incorporating corpus-based analysis and exploring the impact of digital translation tools on culturally sensitive translation practices.

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