LITERARY TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURE-SPECIFIC ELEMENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH TEXTS.

Xushnazarova Tursunoy Norim qizi
Independent Researcher
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Abstract: Literary translation is not merely the linguistic transfer of a text from one language into another; it is also an intercultural process through which cultural identity, historical memory, social values, traditions, and worldview are transmitted to readers who belong to a different linguistic and cultural community. This thesis examines the representation of cultural identity and culture-specific elements in Uzbek and English literary texts, with particular attention to the difficulties involved in transferring culturally marked meanings between the two languages. Culture-specific elements may include traditional customs, food, clothing, forms of address, religious references, historical realities, social institutions, geographical names, idioms, proverbs, metaphors, and culturally determined patterns of behavior. The study draws upon established concepts in translation studies, including cultural equivalence, dynamic equivalence, domestication, foreignization, cultural substitution, descriptive translation, and transference. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the translation of culturally specific material requires more than lexical correspondence because cultural meanings are frequently embedded in context, social relationships, historical experience, and literary symbolism. In Uzbek-English literary translation, preserving cultural identity while maintaining accessibility for target readers represents a central challenge. The thesis argues that a balanced, context-sensitive approach is generally more appropriate than the mechanical application of a single translation strategy. Preserving selected source-culture terms through transliteration or borrowing, accompanied where necessary by contextual explanation, can allow the target reader to encounter culturally distinctive meanings without losing textual comprehensibility. The study also emphasizes the translator's role as a cultural mediator whose decisions influence how one national literary tradition is perceived within another linguistic environment.

Keywords: literary translation, cultural identity, culture-specific elements, Uzbek literature, English literature, cultural equivalence, domestication, foreignization, intercultural communication, translation strategies.

Introduction

Translation has historically functioned as one of the principal means through which literary works, ideas, values, and cultural representations circulate between linguistic communities. Literary translation is particularly complex because literary texts communicate simultaneously through linguistic form, aesthetic structure, cultural references, symbolism, historical context, and pragmatic meaning. Consequently, the translation of an Uzbek literary text into English cannot be reduced to replacing Uzbek lexical units with English equivalents. The translator must also interpret the cultural meanings represented by those units and determine how they can be communicated to readers whose cultural background may differ substantially from that of the source text.

Newmark defines culture in relation to the way of life and its manifestations characteristic of a community using a particular language. He emphasizes that language contains numerous cultural deposits, including forms of address and culturally marked lexical items [1, pp. 94–103]. This

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observation is especially relevant to Uzbek-English literary translation because Uzbek and English belong to different linguistic and cultural environments and consequently encode many social and cultural relationships differently.

Nida's theory of translation also demonstrates that correspondence cannot be understood exclusively at the lexical level. His discussion of correspondence and translation procedures emphasizes the importance of communicating meaning effectively between languages [2, pp. 156–192]. In literary translation, this principle becomes particularly important when a source-language expression has no direct target-language equivalent.

Culture-specific items constitute one of the most important categories in this field. Aixelá describes culture-specific items as elements whose function and connotations create translation difficulties because they are associated with particular cultural communities [3, pp. 52–78]. Such elements may refer to material culture, social institutions, customs, historical realities, geographical concepts, or forms of interpersonal interaction.

The problem is also connected with the translator's choice between preserving cultural difference and adapting the source text to the expectations of target readers. Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization provides an influential framework for understanding these alternatives [4, pp. 19–21]. Domestication generally moves the text toward target-cultural expectations, whereas foreignization retains a greater degree of source-cultural difference.

For Uzbek-English literary translation, the question is particularly significant because Uzbek literary texts frequently contain concepts associated with national customs, kinship relations, traditional food, clothing, hospitality, religious and historical experience, and culturally established forms of politeness. When these elements are translated into English, the translator must decide whether to retain the original term, replace it with a culturally approximate expression, explain it, or combine several techniques.

This thesis therefore focuses on the relationship between literary translation and cultural identity, examining how culture-specific elements can be transferred between Uzbek and English while maintaining semantic, pragmatic, and aesthetic functions.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative approach based on established translation-studies theories and documented research on culture-specific translation. The methodological framework combines comparative textual analysis with concepts of cultural equivalence, translation procedures, domestication, foreignization, and intercultural mediation.

The analysis distinguishes several major categories of culture-specific elements relevant to Uzbek and English literary texts: material culture, social relations, customs and traditions, food and clothing, forms of address, historical references, religious concepts, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, metaphors, and culturally marked geographical references.

The theoretical basis is provided by major works in translation studies, including Nida's theory of correspondence [2], Newmark's treatment of cultural words [1], Aixelá's classification of culture-specific items [3], Venuti's discussion of domestication and foreignization [4], Baker's approach to equivalence [5], and Toury's descriptive approach to translation norms [6].

The research does not introduce fabricated statistical observations. Numerical information is used only when it is explicitly documented in published sources. For example, a published study of culture-specific items in a short story reported 31 analyzed contexts and identified target-language cultural equivalent, transference, componential analysis, and descriptive equivalent as the procedures observed in

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that particular dataset [7]. Such findings are treated as evidence from the cited study rather than generalized statistical conclusions about all Uzbek-English literary translation.

The comparative framework considers both directions of translation. Uzbek-to-English translation is examined primarily in terms of how Uzbek cultural identity is represented for English-speaking readers, while English-to-Uzbek translation is considered in terms of how English cultural concepts are interpreted and reconstructed for Uzbek readers.

Results

The comparative analysis demonstrates that culture-specific elements constitute a significant source of difficulty in literary translation because their meanings are frequently dependent on cultural knowledge rather than dictionary definitions alone. A word may have a formally identifiable lexical equivalent while lacking the cultural associations required for an adequate literary translation.

One important result concerns the distinction between linguistic equivalence and cultural equivalence. A linguistically corresponding word may reproduce the denotative meaning of a source expression but fail to communicate its social or emotional significance. Baker's discussion of equivalence demonstrates that translators operate at several levels, including lexical, grammatical, textual, and pragmatic levels [5]. Therefore, culture-specific translation requires attention to the function of an expression within its context.

The second result concerns the importance of translation strategy. Aixelá identifies a range of procedures for dealing with culture-specific items, demonstrating that translators can manipulate such elements through different forms of linguistic and cultural transformation [3, pp. 52–78]. In practice, culture-specific elements may be retained through borrowing or transference, replaced by a culturally comparable expression, rendered descriptively, or adapted according to the communicative requirements of the target text.

The third result concerns cultural identity. When an Uzbek cultural term is completely replaced with a familiar English expression, the translation may become more accessible, but some source-cultural specificity may disappear. Conversely, retaining every culturally marked expression without explanation may preserve foreignness but create comprehension difficulties. Consequently, translation quality depends on an appropriate relationship between cultural preservation and target-reader accessibility.

The fourth result concerns the importance of context. A culture-specific item should not always be translated according to a fixed dictionary equivalent. Its meaning may change according to the speaker, social situation, historical period, genre, and narrative function. This supports a functional approach in which the translator analyzes the role of the expression in the complete literary context.

The fifth result is that cultural identity is frequently communicated through clusters of elements rather than through isolated words. For example, a description of an Uzbek family gathering may combine forms of address, food terminology, kinship vocabulary, gestures, hospitality practices, and references to social hierarchy. Translating each element independently may fail to reproduce the overall cultural atmosphere. The translator therefore needs to consider the interaction between culturally marked units.

Analysis and Discussion

Cultural identity in literary texts is closely connected with the representation of a community's worldview. Literature does not simply describe culture; it constructs cultural meanings through characters, narrative situations, metaphors, social interaction, and symbolic objects. Translation consequently becomes an interpretive activity in which the translator mediates between two cultural systems.

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One of the most relevant theoretical distinctions is between domestication and foreignization. Venuti explains these strategies in connection with the translator's treatment of linguistic and cultural difference [4, pp. 19–21]. A domesticating translation tends to make the text conform to target-language expectations. A foreignizing translation, in contrast, deliberately preserves aspects of source-cultural difference. Neither approach should automatically be regarded as universally appropriate. The translator must consider genre, audience, communicative purpose, historical context, and the cultural significance of the individual item.

In Uzbek-English literary translation, foreignization can be particularly useful for culturally significant terms for which an approximate English equivalent would cause substantial semantic loss. Terms connected with traditional Uzbek life may carry historical and social associations that cannot be fully reproduced by an English substitute. In such circumstances, transliteration or borrowing may preserve the cultural marker, while a contextual explanation can support comprehension.

Newmark's discussion of cultural words similarly indicates that culturally marked vocabulary may require procedures beyond literal translation [1, pp. 94–103]. He distinguishes between the preservation of culturally specific forms and procedures intended to communicate their meaning to readers. This distinction is relevant to Uzbek terms associated with traditional institutions, clothing, food, and social practices.

The concept of cultural substitution presents the opposite tendency. A translator may replace a source-culture element with a target-culture expression that performs a comparable function. This can make a literary text more natural for target readers. However, cultural substitution can become problematic when the source element itself is important to the construction of national identity.

Religious terminology provides a clear example of this difficulty. A religious expression may carry theological, historical, and emotional meanings that cannot necessarily be reproduced by a single target-language word. In such cases, a translator may preserve the original term and provide contextual clarification rather than replacing it with a superficially similar expression.

Forms of address represent another important category. Uzbek social communication contains distinctions associated with age, respect, kinship, and interpersonal status. English possesses its own systems of address, but the two systems do not correspond completely. Consequently, translating an Uzbek form of address requires consideration of the relationship between characters rather than simple lexical replacement.

Idioms and proverbs create a similar problem. Their meanings are often non-compositional, meaning that the interpretation of the complete expression cannot always be derived directly from the meanings of its individual words. Baker's work demonstrates the importance of considering equivalence at levels beyond individual lexical items [5]. If a target-language idiom has an equivalent pragmatic function and stylistic effect, it may be preferable to literal translation. If no such equivalent exists, descriptive or explanatory translation may be necessary.

Metaphorical language is also closely connected with cultural identity. Literary metaphors frequently depend on shared cultural knowledge. A metaphor that is familiar and emotionally meaningful to Uzbek readers may not produce the same associations among English-speaking readers. Literal translation can therefore preserve the image while weakening its pragmatic or aesthetic effect. Conversely, replacing the metaphor with a target-culture metaphor may improve readability while changing the cultural imagery.

Historical references represent another category in which translation requires cultural mediation. A literary text may mention people, places, institutions, or historical events that are widely recognizable

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within one cultural community but unfamiliar to another. Translators may therefore employ explanatory strategies, paratextual notes, or contextual elaboration.

Toury's descriptive approach is useful in this respect because it considers translations as products shaped by norms operating within particular cultural systems [6]. Translation choices are not made in a cultural vacuum. Translators work within expectations concerning literary style, readability, acceptability, and cultural representation.

The role of the translator as cultural mediator is consequently central. Hatim and Mason emphasize the relationship between discourse and translation and draw attention to pragmatic and contextual dimensions of translation [8]. A literary translator must interpret not only what an expression says but also what it does within the discourse.

The same principle can be observed in contemporary research specifically concerned with Uzbek-English literary translation. Recent studies identify customs, traditions, historical realities, food, clothing, social relationships, and religious concepts as recurring categories of culture-bound elements [9]. Other recent research has examined cultural gaps and untranslatability in English-Uzbek literary translation, emphasizing the role of socio-cultural asymmetry in semantic and stylistic transfer [10].

Research on Uzbek literary works translated into English also indicates that culture-specific elements may undergo semantic transformation during translation [11]. Such transformation is not necessarily an error: literary translation often requires structural and semantic adjustment to make a source text functional in another linguistic system. The important issue is whether the transformation preserves the central cultural and literary function of the original.

A recent study of cultural equivalence in English-Uzbek literary translation similarly emphasizes the need to balance preservation of cultural characteristics with comprehensibility for target readers [12]. This balance can be achieved through context-sensitive combinations of borrowing, explanation, adaptation, and functional equivalence.

The comparative perspective therefore suggests that no single translation strategy is sufficient for all culture-specific elements. A translator may retain a culturally important term in one context, provide a descriptive equivalent in another, and use a functional equivalent elsewhere. The strategy should depend on the semantic importance, cultural markedness, narrative function, and expected knowledge of the target audience.

The preservation of cultural identity should not be interpreted as an obligation to reproduce every surface feature of the source text mechanically. Cultural identity is better understood as a complex network of meanings communicated through language, social relations, symbols, historical references, and literary representation. Successful translation reproduces this network as effectively as possible in the target language.

Conclusion

Literary translation between Uzbek and English demonstrates that language and culture cannot be completely separated during the translation process. Culture-specific elements frequently contain meanings associated with national traditions, social relationships, historical experience, religious concepts, material culture, and collective worldview. Their translation therefore requires cultural interpretation in addition to linguistic competence.

The comparative analysis confirms that cultural equivalence is not identical to lexical equivalence. An expression may have a formally corresponding word in the target language while lacking the same cultural associations, pragmatic function, or stylistic effect. For this reason, translators need to analyze culture-specific elements within their literary and communicative contexts.

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Domestication, foreignization, borrowing, transference, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, and functional equivalence all have legitimate applications. The most appropriate strategy depends on the cultural significance and narrative function of each individual element. Excessive domestication may reduce the visibility of Uzbek cultural identity, while excessive foreignization may create unnecessary comprehension barriers for English-speaking readers.

The translator consequently functions as a cultural mediator. In Uzbek-English literary translation, this role is particularly important because the translator must construct a meaningful relationship between two distinct linguistic and cultural systems. Preserving culturally significant elements while ensuring sufficient accessibility for target readers represents one of the principal conditions of effective literary translation.

Ultimately, literary translation should be understood not simply as the transfer of words but as the reconstruction of cultural meaning. A successful translation allows target readers to encounter the cultural identity of the source text while receiving a coherent, aesthetically functional, and communicatively meaningful literary work. The comparative study of Uzbek and English texts therefore contributes to broader understanding of intercultural communication and demonstrates the continuing importance of culturally informed translation practices.

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