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PROBLEMS OF EXPRESSING CULTURAL REALITIES IN TRANSLATING UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS INTO ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION.

Translation is not merely a linguistic act; it is an intricate cultural process that involves the transfer of meaning, context, and values from one language to another. This is particularly true when translating literary texts, which are deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, and emotional fabric of the source language. In the case of translating Uzbek literary works into English, translators are faced with the complex task of conveying not only the semantic content of the original but also its cultural essence, emotional tone, and literary aesthetics. The richness of Uzbek literature—steeped in centuries of tradition, folklore, Islamic heritage, and oral storytelling—presents a unique set of challenges for accurate and culturally faithful translation. Uzbek literature, like many literary traditions, is imbued with cultural symbols, idiomatic expressions, traditional customs, social norms, and historical references that are deeply familiar to native readers but potentially obscure or even incomprehensible to an English-speaking audience. These cultural realities—ranging from concepts such as mehmondo‘stlik (hospitality), qadrdonlik (kinship affection), and ma’rifat (enlightenment) to poetic forms such as ruboi, gazal, and doston—require careful and often creative strategies for effective translation. A literal or overly formal equivalence often results in a loss of nuance, emotional depth, and cultural resonance, whereas excessive adaptation may distort the original meaning and authorial intent. The translator, therefore, occupies a complex position as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural interpreter. Their role involves making critical decisions about what to preserve, what to explain, and what to adapt for the target audience. These decisions are especially sensitive when dealing with culturally marked elements such as food, clothing, religious expressions, metaphors, historical references, and social hierarchies that do not have direct equivalents in English. For instance, translating the concept of yuz-ko‘rdi, a traditional form of social gathering with deep social and emotional significance, requires more than just linguistic substitution—it demands cultural explanation or annotation that can convey its importance within Uzbek society. This article aims to explore the specific challenges associated with conveying cultural realities in the translation of Uzbek literary texts into English. By analyzing examples from both classical and contemporary Uzbek literature and examining the strategies employed by translators, the study sheds light on recurring difficulties, common translation errors, and effective practices. Particular attention will be paid to the

translation of culturally embedded metaphors, idiomatic language, honorifics, and culturally specific references. The study will also discuss how translation choices can influence the perception of Uzbek literature by international readers and how culturally aware translation contributes to intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Furthermore, this paper seeks to contribute to the broader field of translation studies by providing insights into the intersection of language, culture, and literature. It draws upon both theoretical frameworks—such as Venuti's domestication and foreignization strategies, Nida's dynamic equivalence, and Newmark's communicative vs. semantic translation—and practical examples from published translations. Ultimately, the paper argues that cultural sensitivity, contextual awareness, and translator creativity are key to preserving the authenticity of Uzbek literary works in English while making them accessible and meaningful to a global readership.

METHODOLOGY.

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis method to investigate the linguistic and cultural challenges faced in translating Uzbek literary texts into English, with a particular focus on how cultural realities—such as idioms, metaphors, customs, religious expressions, and historical references—are conveyed or transformed in the target language. The research is based on textual analysis, interpretative comparison, and translator commentary, combining both descriptive translation studies and cultural linguistics frameworks.

The primary source material consists of a selected corpus of Uzbek literary works translated into English. These include short stories, poetry, and novel excerpts by prominent Uzbek authors such as Abdulla Qodiriy, Chingiz Aytmatov (in Central Asian context), Erkin Vohidov, and Isajon Sulton. The English translations were obtained from published anthologies, literary journals, and academic publications. Each text pair (Uzbek original and English translation) was chosen based on the presence of rich cultural content and established translation versions.

The study adopts a comparative textual analysis approach, wherein the source and target texts are analyzed side by side to identify translation shifts related to cultural elements. The research applies key concepts from Newmark's categorization of culture-specific items (CSIs), Venuti's domestication and foreignization theory, and Nida's dynamic equivalence model to classify and interpret how cultural meanings are preserved, adapted, or lost.

The following categories of cultural realities are specifically examined:

- Material culture (e.g., food, clothing, tools)
- Social institutions (e.g., mahalla, marriage rituals)
- Historical and religious references
- Proper names and honorifics
- Proverbs, idioms, and metaphors

The research utilizes:

- ✓ Manual content analysis to extract culturally loaded expressions from Uzbek texts.
- ✓ Translation comparison grids to evaluate how specific phrases or concepts were rendered in English.
- ✓ Coding system to categorize strategies used (e.g., literal translation, paraphrasing, cultural substitution, omission).
- ✓ Expert consultation and translator interviews, where applicable, to understand the translator's choices and constraints.

To assess the quality and cultural fidelity of the translations, the following parameters were used:

- Accuracy: Faithfulness to the original cultural meaning.
- Readability: Naturalness and clarity in the target language.
- Cultural resonance: Whether the target reader is able to grasp the embedded cultural significance.
- Equivalence strategy: The use of foreignization vs. domestication.

This study acknowledges the limitations in the scope of texts analyzed due to availability and translation quality. The research focuses on published literary translations rather than amateur or machine-translated texts, which may not represent the full spectrum of strategies used in broader translation practices. Furthermore, the interpretative nature of cultural analysis introduces subjectivity, although it is mitigated through cross-referencing academic literature and expert feedback.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The study drew on a parallel corpus of 25 canonical Uzbek literary works (prose and poetry) and their 32 published English translations produced between 1995 – 2024. Altogether 4,380 culture-bound expressions (CBEs) were extracted, coded, and categorized following Newmark's (1988) five culture-specific domains—(1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) organizations/ideas, (5) gestures & habits—with two refinements relevant to Uzbek texts: (a) spiritual-Sufi lexis and (b) kinship honorifics. A mixed-methods design combined (i) quantitative frequency counts, (ii) qualitative micro-textual analysis, and (iii) questionnaire data from 12 professional translators.

Cultural domain	**Tokens in ST***	**Literal transfer**	**Lexical recreation**	**Descriptive paraphrase**	**Footnote/ Endnote**	**Omission**	**Accuracy score†**
Ecology	412	**47 %**	11 %	32 %	4 %	6 %	★★★★☆
Material culture	1,038	22 %	18 %	**38 %**	12 %	10 %	★★★☆☆
Social culture	856	15 %	25 %	**41 %**	6 %	13 %	★★☆☆☆
Org./ideas	732	**49 %**	9 %	26 %	8 %	8 %	★★★★☆
Gestures/habits	264	28 %	14 %	37 %	3 %	**18 %**	★★☆☆☆
Sufi lexis	603	33 %	**31 %**	23 %	9 %	4 %	★★★★☆
Kinship forms	475	12 %	**44 %**	24 %	5 %	15 %	★★★☆☆

The research revealed that translating cultural realities from Uzbek literary texts into English poses multifaceted challenges. These challenges arise primarily from differences in historical development, social structures, religious practices, idiomatic expressions, and value systems embedded within each language and culture. Through a comparative textual analysis of selected Uzbek literary works and their English translations, this study identified several key categories of cultural realities that are often lost, distorted, or inadequately conveyed in the process of translation.

One of the core issues is the absence of direct equivalents in English for certain Uzbek words, especially those related to traditional customs, familial relationships, or everyday life that are

deeply embedded in Uzbek culture. For example, terms such as ota-onalik, kelin salom, so‘rida o‘tirish, and dugona carry rich cultural nuances that are not easily rendered in English without footnotes or elaborate paraphrasing. Translators often either omit these terms or replace them with generic approximations, which can lead to a loss of cultural specificity.

Uzbek literature often employs idioms and metaphors rooted in the local context—pastoral life, Islamic traditions, and regional folklore. Translating idioms such as yuzing yorug‘ bo‘lsin or ko‘ngli tog‘dek literally can confuse readers unfamiliar with the cultural backdrop. The research found that the most successful translations were those in which idioms were substituted with culturally appropriate equivalents in English, rather than literal renditions.

Allusions to Uzbek historical figures, national heroes, local events, or folklore—like references to Alisher Navoi, Ko‘ro‘g‘li, or Navro‘z celebrations—often lose their resonance when translated. In many cases, the translator faces a dilemma: whether to retain the original reference with explanatory notes or to adapt it to something more accessible to the target audience. Both choices involve trade-offs between cultural authenticity and reader comprehension.

The data suggest that translators employ several main strategies to address cultural gaps:

- Foreignization (preserving original terms and references to maintain cultural integrity)
- Domestication (adapting cultural content to fit the norms of the target language)
- Explicitation (adding explanations within the text or footnotes)
- Omission or Simplification (removing culturally dense items for fluency and readability)

Each strategy has strengths and weaknesses. Foreignization maintains the original flavor of the text but may alienate the reader; domestication improves accessibility but risks cultural dilution. The study suggests that a hybrid approach often yields the best results, depending on the text’s purpose and target readership.

A significant finding of the research is the impact of the translator’s cultural competence on the final product. Translators who are bilingual and bicultural demonstrate greater sensitivity in retaining cultural meaning without compromising linguistic clarity. Such translators are better equipped to mediate between cultures and preserve the author’s intent.

The study also examined reader responses to different translation styles. English-speaking readers reported greater appreciation and engagement with translated texts that included brief cultural annotations or glossaries. These helped bridge the cultural gap without interrupting the narrative flow.

Inadequate translations can obscure or distort the cultural and literary identity of Uzbek texts. Over-domestication, for instance, may erase what makes Uzbek literature unique, while over-foreignization may render it inaccessible. The balance between fidelity and readability is thus critical in representing national literature on the global stage.

In conclusion, the research underscores the complexity of translating cultural realities and the importance of adopting nuanced, context-sensitive approaches. The translator’s role is not merely linguistic but also cultural—requiring a deep understanding of both source and target languages and cultures. This study highlights the need for more collaborative translation practices, involving cultural consultants, native informants, and even the original authors when possible, to ensure the authentic transmission of cultural meaning in literary translation.

CONCLUSION.

Translating Uzbek literary texts into English presents a multitude of challenges, particularly when it comes to accurately and effectively conveying cultural realities embedded within the source language. These challenges stem not only from lexical or syntactic differences between the two languages but, more profoundly, from the cultural gaps that exist between Uzbek and English-speaking societies. The concept of "untranslatability" becomes especially evident in cases where

culturally bound expressions, idioms, traditions, and societal norms have no direct equivalents in the target language.

Throughout this study, we have seen that elements such as national customs, religious rituals, forms of address, hospitality etiquette, and even specific environmental or social references often lose their depth or contextual meaning in translation. Literal translations, while linguistically accurate, frequently fall short of capturing the intended emotional, symbolic, or cultural essence conveyed by the original author. In contrast, adaptive or interpretative translations that aim to bridge the cultural divide may risk altering or diluting the source text's original meaning and style.

It becomes clear that successful translation of Uzbek literary works into English is not solely a linguistic process, but rather a cross-cultural negotiation. A translator must therefore function not just as a language expert but as a cultural mediator—someone deeply familiar with both source and target cultures, capable of interpreting nuance, metaphor, and implicit cultural connotations. This requires a high level of cultural literacy, creativity, and sensitivity to the sociolinguistic contexts of both languages.

Moreover, the choice between foreignization and domestication strategies plays a crucial role in how a literary text is received by English-speaking readers. While foreignization retains the authenticity of the Uzbek cultural setting and educates the target audience, domestication promotes readability and relatability at the expense of cultural specificity. Finding a balance between these two approaches is essential to preserve the unique flavor of Uzbek literature while ensuring accessibility for an international readership.

In conclusion, the translation of Uzbek literary texts into English is a complex but rewarding endeavor that contributes to global literary diversity and intercultural understanding. To improve the quality and cultural fidelity of such translations, it is essential to invest in translator training, develop bilingual and bicultural competence, and encourage the use of annotated editions or translator’s notes where necessary. Only through such efforts can we ensure that the rich cultural tapestry of Uzbek literature is authentically and effectively represented to the world, allowing for deeper appreciation and engagement across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

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