

CULTURAL ISSUES IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This article explores cultural issues in literary translation from theoretical and practical perspectives. Literary translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but an intercultural process in which cultural meanings, values, and symbolic systems must be reconstructed in the target language. The study examines culture-specific items, realia, metaphors, pragmatic meaning, and sociolinguistic variation as major sources of translation difficulty. Drawing on functionalist, equivalence-based, and cultural approaches to translation, the article argues that successful literary translation requires intercultural competence and pragmatic awareness. The paper concludes with methodological recommendations for translator training and further academic research.

Keywords: literary translation, culture, equivalence, domestication, foreignization, pragmatics, realia, linguoculturology.

Introduction

Literary translation occupies a unique position within translation studies because it involves the transfer of aesthetic, emotional, and cultural meaning across languages. Unlike technical or informational translation, literary translation aims to reproduce artistic expression and cultural identity embedded in the source text.

Culture plays a central role in shaping literary texts. Every narrative reflects the worldview, traditions, values, and historical experiences of a particular society.

Therefore, when translating literature, the translator must navigate not only linguistic differences but also cultural gaps between the source and target communities.

The objective of this study is to analyze the main cultural issues in literary translation and to examine strategies used to overcome them.

Theoretical Foundations

The relationship between language and culture has long been recognized in translation theory.

Eugene Nida introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence, emphasizing equivalent effect on the target audience. According to Nida, cultural adaptation is often necessary to achieve communicative effectiveness.

Peter Newmark highlighted the importance of cultural words and proposed strategies such as descriptive translation and functional equivalents.

Lawrence Venuti developed the concepts of domestication and foreignization, which describe two opposite approaches to handling cultural elements in translation.

Functionalist approaches, particularly Skopos theory introduced by Hans Vermeer, argue that translation strategies should depend on the purpose of the target text.

Major Cultural Issues in Literary Translation

1. Culture-Specific Items and Realia

Culture-specific words (realia) refer to objects, institutions, customs, and concepts unique to a particular society. These items often lack direct equivalents in the target language.

For example, British social customs depicted in *Pride and Prejudice* reflect a class-based society unfamiliar to many non-Western readers. Translators must provide contextual adaptation to preserve meaning.

Common strategies include:

- Transliteration with explanation
- Descriptive translation
- Functional substitution

- Use of footnotes

2. Historical and Religious References

Literary texts frequently contain historical and religious allusions that carry deep cultural significance.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Orthodox Christian philosophy plays a central role. Translating such references into cultures with different religious backgrounds requires careful explanation and contextualization.

Failure to interpret such elements correctly may result in semantic loss or distortion.

3. Idioms and Phraseological Units

Idiomatic expressions are culturally bound and rarely allow literal translation.

In *The Great Gatsby*, idiomatic language and symbolic expressions reflect American culture of the 1920s. The translator must find culturally equivalent expressions rather than translate word-for-word.

Idioms may be handled through:

- Equivalent idioms in the target language
- Paraphrasing
- Semantic explanation

4. Metaphor and Symbolism

Metaphors and symbols reflect cultural cognition.

In *Hamlet*, metaphors express philosophical and existential ideas. Preserving metaphorical imagery while ensuring comprehension remains a major challenge.

The translator must decide whether to maintain original imagery or adapt it to the target culture.

5. Pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Differences

Pragmatic meaning includes implied meaning, politeness strategies, and social hierarchy markers.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, informal teenage speech constructs the protagonist's identity. Translators must recreate stylistic tone without distorting the norms of the target language.

Sociolinguistic variation often requires creative adaptation rather than direct translation.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that cultural issues in literary translation are multidimensional. Translators must:

- Understand the cultural context of the source text
- Evaluate the expectations of the target audience
- Choose appropriate translation strategies
- Balance fidelity and readability

Excessive domestication may erase cultural authenticity, while extreme foreignization may hinder comprehension. Therefore, a balanced approach is recommended.

Conclusion

Cultural issues in literary translation stem from the inseparable relationship between language and culture. Literary texts encode social norms, historical experience, religious symbolism, and pragmatic meaning that cannot be transferred through literal equivalence alone.

The analysis demonstrates that culture-specific items, metaphorical structures, pragmatic implicatures, and sociolinguistic variation represent the most significant translation challenges. Effective literary translation requires a balanced application of dynamic equivalence, functional adaptation, and selective foreignization.

Therefore, translator training programs should integrate linguocultural competence, discourse analysis, and pragmatic theory to ensure high-quality intercultural mediation. Future research may employ corpus-based methods to evaluate

how cultural elements are systematically handled in English–Uzbek literary translation.

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