
LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING UZBEK FAIRY TALES INTO ENGLISH

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Abstract

This article studies the main problems that appear when Uzbek fairy tales are translated into English. The article focuses on language, culture, and meaning in the tales. Special attention is given to evaluative words, polite speech, culture-specific objects, and moral symbols. The main texts used for analysis are "Zumrad and Qimmat" and "Cinderella." A comparative, descriptive, and close-reading method is used. Short extracts are examined in order to show what is easy to transfer into English and what may be lost in translation. The study shows that literal translation is not enough for folklore texts. In many cases, a balanced strategy is needed. Retention, short explanation, and careful adaptation often work better than direct word replacement. The main result is that good fairy-tale translation should keep both the story and the national feeling of the original text.

Keywords: Uzbek fairy tales, translation, folklore, English translation, culture-specific items, Zumrad and Qimmat, Cinderella

Introduction

Translation of folklore is not only a language task. A fairy tale carries memory, values, and a whole cultural background. Because of that, a translation may sound correct and still lose its deeper meaning. This problem is especially important in Uzbek fairy tales translated into English. The uploaded thesis on this theme also notes that the

central difficulties are connected with national realia, figurative expressions, phraseological units, and other cultural layers of the text

The topic is important for two reasons. First, Uzbek fairy tales preserve moral ideas and social norms in a very compact form. Respect, patience, envy, kindness, and justice are often shown through small details in speech and action. Second, English is widely used as the language through which many readers meet world literature. If a tale is translated badly, the story may stay clear, but the Uzbek cultural feeling may become weak. Recent translation studies also support this view and show that cultural context shapes translation choices (Munday et al.).

The purpose of this article is to examine the main linguistic and cultural challenges in translating Uzbek fairy tales into English. The article focuses on four points: character evaluation, speech behavior, culture-specific objects, and moral closure. These points are studied through extracts from "Zumrad and Qimmat" and "Cinderella."

Literature Review

Recent research shows that fairy-tale translation remains important because fairy tales move between oral tradition, written form, and intercultural reading. Judith Inggs explains that fairy tales and folk tales have different roots and that genre matters in translation. This idea is useful because Uzbek fairy tales also stand between oral tradition and written retelling.

A basic theoretical frame is given by Munday, Ramos Pinto, and Blakesley. Their book helps explain why culture-bound words and images cannot be translated by one fixed rule. Translation choices depend on context, function, and audience.

Claudia Neri's 2021 article on Baba Jaga is more directly related to fairy-tale translation. Neri shows that folklore translation is difficult because oral material enters written form and often child-centered reading. This result is helpful for the present article because Uzbek fairy tales face the same problem: oral simplicity should be kept, but cultural meaning should not be flattened (Neri).

Irina Mkhitarian's 2024 study on mediated translation in children's literature is also useful. The study stresses cross-cultural pragmatics and shows that semantic and stylistic changes become visible when translated texts are studied closely. This supports the extract-based method used in the present article (Mkhitarian).

Aishwarya B. and Raichel M. Syllus, in their 2024 study of Cinderella narratives, show that one story changes its cultural form across places and periods. Their discussion of transcreation is useful because it proves that similar plots may carry very different values and symbols in different cultures.

Research on culture-specific items also helps this topic. Al Tenaijy and Al-Batineh, in a 2024 study of Emirati literature, show that preservation and selective adaptation can work together in literary translation. Zeynalova reaches a similar result

and argues that retention with explanation often works well for literary realia. These ideas are valuable for Uzbek fairy tales because many important objects and expressions carry local meaning.

Another useful point from recent scholarship is that the translator of folklore must think about audience without erasing the source culture. In fairy tales, children, students, and general readers may all read the same text in different ways. For that reason, a translation should stay simple, but simplicity should not become cultural emptiness. This idea is important for the present article because Uzbek fairy tales are often introduced to English readers in simplified forms.

Research from Uzbekistan is also important. Javlieva's 2024 article compares English and Uzbek folklore and points to differences in narrative movement, repetition, idiomatic language, and oral texture. The uploaded thesis makes a similar point and notes that focused studies on Uzbek fairy tales translated into English are still limited (uploaded thesis introduction). This gap gives the present article a clear purpose.

Methodology

This article uses a qualitative text-based method. The main material comes from two fairy tales: the Uzbek tale "Zumrad and Qimmat" and the English tale "Cinderella." These texts were chosen because they share a similar basic pattern but belong to different cultural worlds.

Three methods are used. First, the comparative method is used to place similar scenes and symbols side by side. Second, descriptive analysis is used to explain how key words, replies, and objects work in the tale. Third, close reading is used for short extracts. Each extract is followed by simple analysis and short discussion.

The analysis focuses on four categories: character evaluation, speech behavior, reward symbols, and moral closure. These categories were selected because they carry the main theme of the article. Instead of asking only what a word means, the article also asks what function that word has in the fairy tale. This helps show why some small details become major translation problems.

Analysis and Discussion

The main theme of the article is shown through contrasts: kindness and cruelty, humility and arrogance, patience and envy, reward and punishment. For that reason, the extracts below are taken from places where these contrasts become very clear.

1. Character evaluation

Extract from "Zumrad and Qimmat": "Zumrad was a very beautiful, kind and clever girl. Qimmat was a very lazy and arrogant girl at home" ("Zumrad and Qimmat").

Simple analysis. This extract gives the moral line of the tale in a very direct way. The adjectives are simple, but they guide the whole story. The reader is told at once who deserves sympathy and who does not.

Discussion. In translation, this direct moral wording should not be made too literary. Uzbek fairy tales often use simple and open evaluation. That simplicity is part of the folklore style. A close and natural English version is better than a decorative one.

A similar contrast appears in "Cinderella": "the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen" and "a young daughter, but of unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper" ("Cinderella").

Simple analysis. The same moral contrast is present, but the English wording is more expanded and old-fashioned.

Discussion. This comparison shows that similar meanings may be carried by different styles. Uzbek tales often sound shorter and more oral. English classic fairy tales often sound more literary. Translation should keep this difference in mind.

2. Speech behavior and upbringing

Extract from "Zumrad and Qimmat": the old woman says, "Don't be sad, I will help you," and Zumrad replies, "Oh, thank you, you are so kind." Later, Qimmat "couldn't find sweet words to reply back, because her mother hadn't taught her" ("Zumrad and Qimmat").

Simple analysis. The contrast is built through reply. Zumrad answers with gratitude. Qimmat fails in speech. Politeness becomes proof of moral education.

Discussion. In Uzbek culture, respectful reply often carries more weight than a simple "thank you." A translator should keep this social meaning. A very short English answer may weaken the cultural value of the scene. This supports Mkhitarian's view that literary translation should be studied through pragmatics as well as vocabulary (Mkhitarian).

A related line appears in "Cinderella": "It would make the people laugh to see a cinder wench at a ball" ("Cinderella").

Simple analysis. The heroine is lowered through naming. The insult marks shame and class.

Discussion. Here translation must keep not only the insult, but also its social force. This example shows that speech in fairy tales often carries hidden cultural meaning.

3. Reward symbols and culture-specific objects

Extract from "Zumrad and Qimmat": "There are two boxes: one is red, and another is white. Go and take the red one." Later, "the box was full of precious things" ("Zumrad and Qimmat").

Simple analysis. The box is more than an object. It is the sign of justice and blessing. It also belongs to a domestic world, not a royal one.

Discussion. If the box is translated too generally, the scene loses part of its national feeling. The object should be kept visible. Retention with a short explanation, when needed, is a better strategy than full replacement. This result agrees with recent

work on culture-specific items in literary translation (Al Tenaijy and Al-Batineh; Zeynalova).

The key object in "Cinderella" is different: "the little glass slipper" ("Cinderella").

Simple analysis. The slipper stands for beauty, identity, and public recognition.

Discussion. The comparison is important. The box in the Uzbek tale suggests household blessing and moral reward. The slipper in the English tale suggests elegance and royal choice. Similar plot roles do not mean the same cultural meaning.

4. Moral closure

Extract from "Zumrad and Qimmat": "There were two dragons in it... As for Zumrad and her father, they lived together happily for many years" ("Zumrad and Qimmat").

Simple analysis. Punishment is direct and final. The tale closes with sharp justice.

Discussion. This kind of ending should be translated clearly, without softening the force of the moral result.

In "Cinderella," the ending is softer: the sisters are forgiven, and the heroine marries the prince and lives happily ever after ("Cinderella").

Simple analysis. Justice is present, but mercy is stronger.

Discussion. The comparison shows that the same basic plot may end with a different emotional tone. The Uzbek tale keeps stronger punishment. The English tale gives more space to forgiveness. This difference matters in translation because endings shape the final moral feeling of the text.

Overall discussion. The extracts show that fairy-tale translation depends on small but meaningful details. Adjectives guide moral judgment. Replies show upbringing. Objects carry cultural memory. Endings define the final emotional tone. Because of that, dictionary meaning alone is not enough. A balanced strategy works better: close translation for direct moral lines, preservation for culture-specific objects, and careful adaptation where speech carries hidden social force.

One more issue should be noted. The same translation strategy may work differently in different parts of one tale. A preserved culture-specific object may work well in a reward scene, but the same degree of preservation may slow the reading of a fast dialogue scene. Because of that, the translator should make decisions according to function inside the text, not only according to general theory.

CONCLUSION

The article examined the main linguistic and cultural challenges in translating Uzbek fairy tales into English. The analysis showed that the most serious problems appear in places that look simple: evaluative adjectives, polite replies, key objects, and ending scenes. In these places, language and culture work together.

The study also showed that "Zumrad and Qimmat" and "Cinderella" share a similar moral frame, but they express it through different cultural forms. The Uzbek tale carries stronger domestic color and sharper directness. The English tale carries more literary expansion and court-centered symbolism.

The main result of the article is that successful translation of Uzbek fairy tales into English should preserve simple narrative movement while keeping cultural feeling. Retention of important objects, careful handling of respect and insult, and moderate adaptation where necessary give better results than flat literal translation. The novelty of the article lies in its close extract-based comparison of one Uzbek and one English fairy tale through recent translation scholarship.

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