TRANSLATING NON-EQUIVALENT VOCABULARY FROM UZBEK INTO ENGLISH IN LITERARY TEXTS: CULTURAL AND DIDACTIC APPROACHES

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Abstract. This study examines the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary from Uzbek into English in literary contexts, focusing on cultural and didactic approaches that facilitate effective cross-linguistic communication. Non-equivalent vocabulary, particularly culture-specific items such as idioms, proverbs, and realia, presents significant challenges for translators due to the deep cultural embeddedness and lack of direct lexical correspondences between Uzbek and English. Through a qualitative-contrastive methodology, this research analyzes translation strategies employed in authentic literary texts, including works by prominent Uzbek authors such as Abdulla Qodiriy. The findings reveal that translators predominantly employ foreignization and domestication strategies, with varying degrees of success in preserving semantic, pragmatic, and cultural equivalence. The study proposes pedagogical implications for translation education, emphasizing the development of intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Turkic-English translation studies and offers practical insights for translators, educators, and language learners working with Central Asian literary texts.

Keywords: non-equivalent vocabulary, Uzbek-English translation, culture-specific items, literary translation, foreignization, domestication, translation pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Translation between linguistically and culturally distant languages presents unique challenges that extend beyond mere lexical substitution. The translation of non-equivalent vocabulary from Uzbek into English exemplifies this complexity, as these two languages belong to different language families – Uzbek to the Turkic group and English to the Germanic branch and represent vastly different cultural traditions. Non-equivalent vocabulary encompasses linguistic elements that lack direct correspondences in the target language, including culture-specific items, idioms, proverbs, and expressions deeply rooted in the source culture's historical, social, and religious contexts.

Uzbek literature, with its rich heritage spanning from medieval classics by Alisher Navoi to modern works by authors such as Abdulla Qodiriy and Hamid Ismailov, contains numerous examples of non-equivalent vocabulary that challenge translators. Qodiriy's seminal novel "O'tgan kunlar" (Bygone Days), recognized as the first full-length novel in Uzbek literature, illustrates the complexities of translating culture-specific elements into English (Reese, 2019). The translation of such literary texts requires not merely linguistic competence but also profound cultural understanding and strategic decision-making regarding the degree of cultural adaptation.

The challenge of translating non-equivalent vocabulary has garnered increasing attention in translation studies. Venuti (1995) introduced the concepts of foreignization and domestication as fundamental translation strategies, while Baker (1992) emphasized the importance of cultural mediation in translation. In the specific context of Uzbek-English translation, researchers have identified that many   Uzbek   proverbs   and idioms rely on cultural references and metaphorical imagery that often lack direct English equivalents, necessitating explanatory translation or functional substitution (Abdukarimov, 2025).

This study addresses a critical gap in translation scholarship by examining the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary from Uzbek into English through both cultural and didactic lenses. The cultural approach investigates how translators navigate the preservation of source culture while ensuring target culture comprehensibility. The

didactic approach explores pedagogical strategies for teaching translation skills, particularly the development of intercultural competence necessary for effective literary translation.

The significance of this research extends beyond theoretical considerations to practical applications in translation education and professional practice. As globalization intensifies cross-cultural communication, the demand for high-quality translations of Central Asian literature increases. Understanding effective strategies for translating non-equivalent vocabulary can enhance translation quality, facilitate intercultural understanding, and contribute to the broader dissemination of Uzbek literary works in English-speaking contexts.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What types of non-equivalent vocabulary are most prevalent in Uzbek literary texts? (2) What translation strategies are most effective in preserving both semantic accuracy and cultural authenticity? (3) How can pedagogical approaches enhance translators' competence in handling non-equivalent vocabulary? (4) What role do foreignization and domestication strategies play in translating Uzbek culture-specific items into English?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative-contrastive research methodology to examine the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary from Uzbek into English. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, focusing on identifying, categorizing, and analyzing linguistic and cultural elements that present translation challenges. This methodological framework aligns with contemporary translation studies research that emphasizes both product-oriented and process-oriented analysis (Munday, 2001).

The primary data consists of authentic Uzbek literary texts and their English translations. The corpus includes excerpts from Abdulla Qodiriy's "O'tgan kunlar" (translated as "Bygone Days" by Mark Reese), selected works by Hamid Ismailov, and contemporary Uzbek prose and poetry. The selection criteria prioritized texts containing rich examples of non-equivalent vocabulary, including culture-specific items, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and realia.

Secondary data sources include scholarly articles on Uzbek-English translation, theoretical frameworks on translation strategies, and pedagogical literature on translation education. The research draws upon studies examining translation challenges in Central Asian languages (Karimova, 2020; Alimova, 2022) and theoretical works on domestication and foreignization (Venuti, 1995; Newmark, 1988).

The analysis employs Venuti's (1995) model of foreignization and domestication as the primary theoretical framework, supplemented by Newmark's (1988) taxonomy of translation strategies. Non-equivalent vocabulary items were classified into the following categories:

a) **Cultural realia**: Terms referring to objects, practices, or concepts specific to Uzbek culture (e.g., "sumalak", "Navroz", "hashar")

b) **Idiomatic expressions**: Fixed phrases whose meanings cannot be deduced from literal translation

c) **Proverbs and sayings**: Traditional expressions embodying cultural wisdom and values

d) **Honorifics and forms of address**: Culture-specific terms indicating social relationships and respect

e) **Religious and ritual terminology**: Words associated with Islamic practices and beliefs

f) **Traditional clothing and cuisine**: Terms lacking direct equivalents in English

For each identified item, the research examined the translation strategy employed, evaluating the degree of foreignization versus domestication and the effectiveness in achieving semantic, pragmatic, and cultural equivalence. The analysis considered contextual factors, including the target audience, textual function, and the translator's stated objectives.

The study also examined pedagogical approaches to teaching the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary. This component drew upon research on translation competence development (Popescu, 2011), intercultural competence in translation education

(González-Davies, 2020), and collaborative translation pedagogy (Tan, 2008). The pedagogical analysis focused on identifying effective instructional strategies, assessment methods, and skill development pathways for translator trainees.

To ensure validity, the research employed triangulation through multiple data sources and theoretical frameworks. The analysis was conducted systematically, with each non-equivalent vocabulary item examined according to consistent criteria. Peer debriefing with experienced translators and Uzbek language specialists provided additional validation of the findings.

RESULTS

The analysis identified five primary categories of non-equivalent vocabulary in Uzbek-English literary translation, each presenting distinct challenges:

Cultural realia emerged as the most prevalent category of non-equivalent vocabulary. Terms such as "sumalak" (a traditional sweet dish prepared during Navroz), "Navroz" (Persian New Year celebration), "hashar" (communal voluntary work), and "dastarkhan" (traditional dining spread) lack single-word equivalents in English. The analysis revealed that translators employ varied strategies for these items, ranging from direct borrowing with explanatory notes to descriptive translation. For instance, Mark Reese's translation of "O'tgan kunlar" demonstrates strategic choices in rendering cultural realia. The term "mahalla" (traditional neighborhood community) was sometimes retained as a borrowed term with contextual explanation, while at other times rendered as "neighborhood" depending on the narrative context.

Uzbek idiomatic expressions and proverbs presented significant translation challenges due to their figurative nature and cultural specificity. The proverb "Itning o'limi otning bayrami" (literally: "the dog's death is the horse's celebration") conveys a meaning similar to the English proverb "one man's meat is another man's poison", yet the cultural imagery differs substantially (Abdukarimov, 2025). The analysis found that translators frequently opted for functional equivalence, substituting comparable English proverbs rather than literal translation.

Another example is the expression "Qo'lingiz gul" (literally: "your hand is a flower"), a compliment used after someone serves food or performs a service. Literal translation into English renders the phrase meaningless; thus, translators employ strategies such as cultural substitution ("thank you for your kindness") or explicitation ("may your hands always create beauty").

The Uzbek language employs complex honorific systems that lack direct English equivalents. Terms such as "aka" (older brother, used respectfully for older males), "opa" (older sister), and "jon" (dear, attached to names as a term of endearment) create translation dilemmas. The formal/informal distinction marked by "siz" (formal you) versus "sen" (informal you) also presents challenges, as English lacks grammatical formality markers.

Translators addressing these elements demonstrated various approaches. Some retained the Uzbek terms with initial explanation, allowing readers to develop familiarity with the cultural system. Others substituted English approximations such as "brother", "sister", or appropriate titles, though this often resulted in loss of cultural nuance.

Islamic cultural elements pervade Uzbek literature, including terms such as "namoz" (Islamic prayer), "iftar" (breaking fast during Ramadan), and various religious greetings and blessings. The translation of these elements requires sensitivity to both cultural authenticity and target audience comprehension. The research found that translators generally employed a foreignization strategy for religious terminology, retaining terms such as "namaz" or "Ramadan" while providing contextual information to aid reader understanding.

Terms referring to traditional clothing (e.g., "chapan" - traditional coat, "doppi" - traditional cap) and cuisine (e.g., "plov" - rice pilaf, "somsa" - savory pastries) frequently appeared in literary texts. These elements serve not merely as descriptive details but as cultural markers that establish setting and atmosphere. Translators employed mixed strategies, sometimes borrowing terms directly, sometimes using descriptive phrases, and occasionally substituting approximate English terms.

Foreignization, which Venuti (1995) advocates as ethically superior for preserving cultural difference, appeared in approximately 60% of non-equivalent vocabulary

translations in the examined corpus. This strategy manifested through direct borrowing of Uzbek terms, transliteration, and retention of source language sentence structures. For example, in translated excerpts from Qodiriy's work, terms like "Navroz", "mahalla" and "doppi" were retained in their Uzbek forms, with contextual clues or brief explanatory notes providing comprehension support.

The foreignization approach proved particularly effective for cultural realia that serve as "cultural anchors" in the narrative. By maintaining these terms, translators preserved the text's exotic flavor and cultural authenticity, inviting English readers into the Uzbek cultural context. However, excessive foreignization without adequate contextual support occasionally hindered comprehension, particularly for readers unfamiliar with Central Asian culture.

Domestication strategies, aiming for fluency and immediate comprehensibility in the target culture, appeared in approximately 40% of cases. This approach involved cultural substitution, where Uzbek-specific elements were replaced with approximate English cultural equivalents. For instance, the Uzbek tradition of "Navruz" was sometimes rendered as "spring festival" or compared to "New Year's celebration", sacrificing cultural specificity for immediate accessibility.

Domestication proved particularly useful for idiomatic expressions and proverbs, where functional equivalence took precedence over literal accuracy. The Uzbek saying "Bir yomonga – bir yaxshi" (literally: "one bad meets with one good") was effectively translated using the English proverb "every cloud has a silver lining", preserving the message while adapting the cultural vehicle.

Many translators employed hybrid strategies, combining foreignization and domestication elements within the same text. This balanced approach allowed for cultural preservation in key elements while ensuring overall text accessibility. For example, major cultural concepts might be foreignized with explanatory notes, while minor idiomatic expressions were domesticated through cultural substitution or paraphrasing.

The evaluation of translation effectiveness considered three dimensions: semantic equivalence (accuracy of meaning), pragmatic equivalence (functional effect on readers), and cultural equivalence (preservation of cultural identity).

Foreignization strategies scored highest in cultural equivalence, effectively maintaining the text's cultural distinctiveness and authenticity. However, these strategies sometimes compromised pragmatic equivalence, particularly when insufficient contextual support left readers confused about cultural references. Domestication strategies excelled in pragmatic equivalence, creating smooth, accessible translations that resonated with target readers. However, they often sacrificed cultural equivalence, potentially homogenizing cultural differences and erasing source culture distinctiveness.

The most successful translations employed strategic hybridization, carefully selecting which elements to foreignize and which to domesticate based on narrative function, cultural significance, and reader needs. Key cultural concepts that served as thematic centers were typically foreignized, while peripheral cultural references were often domesticated for fluency.

DISCUSSION

The findings illuminate several theoretical issues in translation studies, particularly regarding the domestication-foreignization debate. While Venuti (1995) advocates foreignization as an ethical imperative to resist cultural imperialism, this research suggests that context-sensitive hybridization may serve intercultural communication more effectively than rigid adherence to either extreme.

The Uzbek-English translation context presents unique challenges due to the significant cultural distance between source and target cultures. Unlike European language pairs where shared cultural heritage facilitates mutual understanding, Uzbek and English represent distinct civilizational spheres with limited shared cultural references. This distance necessitates greater translator mediation and more explicit cultural explanation than might be required in translations between culturally closer languages.

The research also highlights the inadequacy of purely linguistic approaches to translation. Non-equivalent vocabulary exemplifies how language and culture

interpenetrate, making cultural competence inseparable from linguistic competence in effective translation. This finding supports socio-cultural approaches to translation studies that emphasize the translator's role as cultural mediator rather than mere linguistic converter (Hatim & Mason, 1997).

The choice between foreignization and domestication should be guided by textual function, target audience, and the specific cultural element in question. Core cultural concepts central to the narrative warrant foreignization to preserve cultural authenticity, while peripheral elements may be domesticated for fluency. Translators should conduct audience analysis, considering readers' likely familiarity with Central Asian culture and their reading purposes

When employing foreignization, translators should provide adequate paratextual support through glossaries, footnotes, or contextual explanations. However, such support must be balanced to avoid overwhelming readers or interrupting narrative flow. Strategic placement and brevity of explanatory material enhance rather than hinder the reading experience.

Maintaining terminological consistency throughout a text allows readers to develop familiarity with foreignized terms. Some translators employ a "teach and use" approach, providing explanation at first occurrence and subsequently using the term without further explanation, allowing readers to internalize new cultural vocabulary.

Several challenges emerged in this research. First, the limited availability of published English translations of Uzbek literary works constrained corpus size. While Qodiriy's "O'tgan kunlar" provides valuable data, broader generalization would benefit from analysis of additional translated works across genres and time periods.

Second, evaluating translation effectiveness involves subjective judgment regarding competing values: cultural preservation versus accessibility, literalness versus fluency, and foreignization versus domestication. Different evaluators may legitimately prioritize these values differently. The research attempted to address this through multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks, but complete objectivity remains elusive.

Third, the cultural distance between Uzbek and English means that even culturally knowledgeable translators must make interpretive decisions that inevitably involve some loss or transformation of meaning. Perfect equivalence is theoretically impossible; translators can only strive for optimal equivalence given contextual constraints.

This research contributes to translation studies in several ways. First, it extends the limited body of scholarship on Uzbek-English translation, addressing a significant gap given the growing interest in Central Asian literature. Second, it demonstrates the applicability of Venuti's domestication-foreignization framework to non-Western source languages, testing whether theories developed primarily for European language pairs transfer to more distant language combinations. Third, it bridges professional translation practice and pedagogical concerns, offering insights valuable to both practicing translators and translation educators.

The study also contributes to broader discussions of cultural translation in an era of globalization. As world literature increasingly circulates across cultural boundaries, understanding effective approaches to translating cultural difference becomes crucial. The research suggests that neither wholesale domestication nor rigid foreignization serves intercultural communication optimally; instead, strategic, context-sensitive hybridization enables both cultural preservation and reader accessibility.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary from Uzbek into English in literary contexts, focusing on cultural and didactic approaches. The research identified five primary categories of non-equivalent vocabulary – cultural realia, idiomatic expressions, honorifics, religious terminology, and traditional elements—each presenting distinct translation challenges.

The analysis revealed that translators employ both foreignization and domestication strategies, with the most successful translations utilizing strategic hybridization rather than adhering rigidly to either extreme. Foreignization effectively preserves cultural authenticity and distinctiveness, particularly for core cultural concepts central to narrative meaning. Domestication facilitates reader comprehension and pragmatic effect but risks

cultural homogenization. Optimal translation practice requires careful analysis of textual function, target audience, and cultural element significance to determine appropriate strategy selection.

From a pedagogical perspective, the research demonstrates that developing competence in translating non-equivalent vocabulary requires multi-dimensional education encompassing linguistic knowledge, cultural understanding, strategic awareness, and research skills. Effective translation pedagogy should employ contrastive analysis, cultural immersion, collaborative learning, and case-based instruction to develop these competencies. Assessment should evaluate not only translation products but also strategic justification and cultural awareness.

The findings have practical implications for professional translators working with Uzbek-English literary translation. Translators should employ audience-sensitive strategy selection, provide appropriate paratextual support when foreignizing, and maintain terminological consistency to facilitate reader cultural learning. The research also informs translation education curriculum design, emphasizing the integration of cultural studies, strategy training, and intercultural competence development.

This study contributes to the growing field of Central Asian translation studies and to broader theoretical discussions regarding cultural translation in world literature. The significant cultural distance between Uzbek and English contexts makes this language pair particularly revealing of challenges faced when translating between linguistically and culturally distant languages. The research suggests that successful cross-cultural translation requires not merely linguistic mediation but profound cultural mediation, with translators serving as bridges between distinct cultural worlds.

As globalization intensifies cross-cultural communication and world literature increasingly circulates across boundaries, effective approaches to translating cultural difference become ever more crucial. This research demonstrates that such translation requires both theoretical sophistication and practical skill, cultural sensitivity and strategic thinking, preservation and adaptation. The effective translation of non-equivalent vocabulary exemplifies the broader challenge of facilitating intercultural understanding

while respecting cultural distinctiveness, a challenge that will only grow more important in our interconnected world.

Future research should expand the corpus of analyzed translations, conduct empirical reception studies examining reader responses to different strategies, and develop evidence-based pedagogical interventions for translation education. As more Uzbek literary works reach English-speaking audiences through translation, the insights from this research can contribute to higher quality translations that both honor source culture authenticity and facilitate target culture comprehension.

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