

**PRESERVING CULTURAL MEANING: STRATEGIES FOR
TRANSLATING REALIA IN CROSS-CULTURAL
COMMUNICATION**

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Abstract

This article examines the translation of cultural realia in cross-cultural communication and the strategies used to preserve cultural meaning in the target language. Cultural realia refer to culture-specific lexical items that reflect traditions, institutions, food, and social practices, often without direct equivalents in other languages (Newmark, 1988). The study analyzes key translation strategies such as borrowing, calque, adaptation, generalization, explicitation, domestication, and foreignization (Venuti, 1995; Baker, 2011). The findings indicate that translation of cultural realia requires a flexible, context-dependent approach rather than a single universal method. Translators must balance cultural preservation and readability to ensure effective communication across cultures (Nord, 1997).

Keywords: Cultural realia; translation strategies; cross-cultural communication; domestication; foreignization; borrowing; adaptation; explicitation; translation studies; cultural meaning.

Introduction

Translation is widely recognized as a fundamental instrument in cross-cultural communication, as it enables interaction, understanding, and knowledge transfer between different linguistic and cultural systems. In an

increasingly globalized world, translation is not limited to word-for-word substitution; rather, it involves complex cognitive and cultural processes that require deep awareness of both source and target cultures (Newmark, 1988). One of the most challenging aspects of translation is the rendering of **cultural realia**, which are culture-specific lexical items that reflect unique aspects of a particular society. These elements often do not have direct equivalents in the target language because they are deeply rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts (Baker, 2011). As a result, translators face significant difficulties when attempting to transfer both meaning and cultural nuance simultaneously. Cultural realia include a wide range of concepts such as *mahalla*, *sumalak*, *Navruz* in Uzbek culture or *Thanksgiving*, *pub*, *baseball* in English-speaking cultures. These items are not merely lexical units; they represent cultural identity, traditions, and shared experiences of a community. For example, *Navruz* is not only a holiday but also a symbol of renewal and cultural heritage in Central Asian societies. Similarly, *Thanksgiving* reflects historical and social values in American culture. Therefore, translating such terms requires more than linguistic equivalence; it requires cultural interpretation and contextual understanding (Nida, 1964).

According to Venuti (1995), translation should be viewed as a form of cultural negotiation rather than simple linguistic transfer. This means that the translator plays the role of a cultural mediator who decides how much of the source culture should be preserved and how much should be adapted to the expectations of the target audience. In this process, two major strategies often emerge: **foreignization**, which preserves the cultural uniqueness of the source text, and **domestication**, which adapts the text to the cultural norms of the target language. Furthermore, Nord (1997) emphasizes that translation decisions are strongly influenced by the purpose (*skopos*) of the text and the needs of the target audience. For instance, in literary translation, preserving cultural flavor may be prioritized, while in informative texts, clarity and

comprehension may take precedence. This shows that the translation of cultural realia is a dynamic process that requires flexibility and contextual awareness. The complexity of translating cultural realia highlights the importance of cultural competence in translation practice. Translators must not only master linguistic systems but also understand cultural values, traditions, and communicative conventions in order to produce accurate and meaningful translations.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative analytical method grounded in theoretical research within the field of translation studies. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for a detailed and interpretative examination of translation phenomena, especially those related to culturally specific lexical units known as cultural realia. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on statistical measurement, qualitative analysis is more suitable for exploring meaning, context, and the decision-making processes of translators. The data used in this research were collected from secondary academic sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and classical works in translation theory. The most important theoretical foundations were taken from Newmark (1988), Baker (2011), and Nord (1997), who provide essential frameworks for understanding translation strategies, equivalence, and cultural transfer. In addition, Venuti (1995) is used as a key reference for discussing the concepts of domestication and foreignization in translation practice.

The analytical procedure of this study focuses on identifying, describing, and interpreting the main translation strategies used in rendering cultural realia. These strategies include borrowing (transliteration), calque (literal translation), adaptation, generalization, explicitation, and the broader strategies of domestication and foreignization. Each strategy is examined in terms of its role in transferring cultural meaning from the source language into the target language. Borrowing refers to the direct transfer of a source language term into

the target language with minimal or no modification. Calque involves a literal translation of the components of a term, preserving its structural form. Adaptation replaces a culture-specific element with a culturally equivalent concept that is more familiar to the target audience. Generalization is used when a specific term is replaced with a more general expression to ensure comprehension. Explication involves adding explanatory information to clarify culturally specific meanings that may not be understood by the target reader. Domestication and foreignization, as described by Venuti (1995), represent two opposing translation strategies: one aims to adapt the text to the target culture, while the other preserves the cultural uniqueness of the source text. Each of these strategies is evaluated based on its effectiveness in preserving cultural meaning, maintaining communicative clarity, and ensuring reader comprehension. The analysis also considers how different strategies function in various translation contexts, such as literary and non-literary texts, where the expectations of the target audience may differ significantly.

Results

The analysis reveals that each translation strategy plays a distinct and function-specific role in the process of rendering cultural realia into the target language. Rather than functioning as interchangeable techniques, these strategies contribute differently to meaning transfer depending on communicative goals, text type, and audience expectations. Borrowing is primarily used to preserve the cultural authenticity of the source text. It allows the original cultural term to remain intact in the target language, thereby maintaining its identity and foreign character. This strategy is particularly effective when dealing with internationally recognized or culturally significant terms, as it minimizes semantic loss and preserves cultural reference (Molina & Albir, 2002). However, its effectiveness often depends on the reader's familiarity with the borrowed term.

Calque, on the other hand, maintains the structural and semantic components of the source expression by translating it literally. While this strategy helps preserve the original conceptual structure, it may sometimes result in unnatural or less idiomatic expressions in the target language. As a result, its use requires careful consideration of linguistic acceptability in the target culture. Adaptation functions by replacing culture-specific elements with culturally equivalent concepts that are more familiar to the target audience. This strategy significantly improves readability and comprehension, especially in cases where the source culture concept has no direct equivalent in the target language. According to Baker (2011), adaptation enhances communicative effectiveness, although it may lead to partial loss of the original cultural nuance.

Generalization simplifies culture-specific expressions by replacing them with broader, more general terms. While this strategy facilitates understanding and reduces cognitive load for the reader, it also reduces cultural specificity and may weaken the cultural richness of the original text. Explication involves the addition of explanatory elements to clarify meanings that may not be immediately understood by the target audience. This strategy is particularly useful when translating unfamiliar cultural concepts, as it bridges the gap between source and target cultures and ensures accurate comprehension (Nord, 1997). However, it may also increase text length and reduce stylistic compactness. Finally, domestication and foreignization represent two contrasting translation orientations. Domestication aims to make the text more accessible by adapting it to the cultural norms of the target audience, thereby increasing readability and familiarity. In contrast, foreignization preserves the cultural identity and uniqueness of the source text, intentionally retaining its foreign elements to emphasize cultural difference (Venuti, 1995). The choice between these strategies often depends on the translator's purpose and the expected function of the translated text.

Discussion

The findings confirm that translating cultural realia is not a mechanical process of word-for-word substitution but rather a complex decision-making activity that requires critical thinking and cultural awareness. Translators are required to go beyond linguistic equivalence and take into account multiple contextual factors such as the purpose of translation, the characteristics of the target audience, and the nature of the text itself (Hatim & Mason, 1997). These factors significantly influence the choice of translation strategies and determine the overall success of cultural transfer.

In practice, different text types tend to require different translation approaches. For instance, literary translation often prioritizes **foreignization** in order to preserve the cultural atmosphere, stylistic features, and identity of the source text. This approach allows readers to experience the cultural uniqueness of the original work. In contrast, informative and functional texts usually favor **domestication**, as clarity, accessibility, and immediate comprehension are more important than cultural preservation. According to Newmark (1988), there is no universal translation strategy that can be applied to all contexts. Instead, effective translation depends on the translator's ability to combine multiple strategies in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. This means that borrowing, adaptation, explicitation, and other techniques may be used together within a single text depending on communicative needs. Venuti (1995) further argues that translation is always a cultural act influenced by ideological choices. He emphasizes that excessive domestication can result in the loss of cultural identity, as the source culture becomes overly simplified or invisible in the target text. On the other hand, excessive foreignization may reduce readability and make the text difficult for the target audience to understand. Therefore, maintaining a balance between these two approaches is essential for achieving both cultural preservation and communicative effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that translating cultural realia requires a flexible, context-sensitive, and purpose-oriented approach rather than a fixed set of procedures. The analysis shows that strategies such as borrowing, adaptation, explicitation, and the broader orientation of domestication and foreignization each contribute differently to the translation process, depending on communicative context and textual function (Baker, 2011; Venuti, 1995). These strategies are not mutually exclusive; instead, they often interact within a single translation task to achieve an optimal balance between meaning transfer and cultural representation. The findings also highlight that cultural realia cannot be fully understood or translated through purely linguistic means, as they are deeply embedded in social, historical, and cultural contexts. Therefore, translators must carefully evaluate not only the semantic content of the source text but also its cultural implications and pragmatic functions.

Ultimately, translators function as cultural mediators who bridge the gap between source and target cultures. Their role involves ensuring both comprehension for the target audience and preservation of cultural authenticity from the source text. Effective translation is achieved when linguistic accuracy is successfully combined with cultural sensitivity, allowing the target reader to access the meaning of the text without losing its cultural depth. In conclusion, the study confirms that successful translation of cultural realia depends on a dynamic balance between clarity and cultural representation, requiring translators to make informed and context-dependent decisions in every translation situation.

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