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TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF CULTURAL UNITS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract

Translation is not only a linguistic process but also a transfer of cultural meanings, values and social experience. Cultural units are difficult to translate because they are connected with traditions, customs, religion, everyday lifestyle and national worldview. This article analyzes the main problems of translating cultural units between Uzbek and English. The study focuses on culture-specific vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, etiquette formulas, kinship terms, food names and ritual expressions. The article discusses the reasons for non-equivalence and suggests practical translation strategies such as transliteration, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, contextual adaptation and footnotes. The analysis shows that literal translation often causes semantic loss or cultural misunderstanding. Therefore, the translator should consider lexical meaning, cultural background and pragmatic function together.

Keywords

cultural units, translation problems, Uzbek and English, realia, non-equivalence, translation strategies, intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

Translation plays an important role in intercultural communication. It enables nations to exchange literary, scientific, historical and social experience. However, translation becomes complicated when a text contains cultural units that have no direct equivalents in the target language. These units are closely related to the mentality, traditions and worldview of a particular people.

Uzbek and English represent different linguistic and cultural systems. Uzbek reflects Turkic, Islamic and Central Asian cultural traditions, while English reflects Anglo-Saxon, Western and global cultural experience. As a result, Uzbek units such as mahalla, sumalak, hashar, beshik to‘yi, kelin salom, do‘ppi, non and duo cannot be

translated accurately through simple word-for-word replacement. Likewise, English units such as Thanksgiving, pub, privacy, prom and small talk may be difficult to render into Uzbek.

The problem is relevant for literary translation, education, tourism, journalism, diplomacy and digital communication. Incorrect translation of culturally marked words may lead to misunderstanding or loss of national color. Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify the main translation problems of cultural units in Uzbek and English and to propose appropriate strategies.

2. Literature Review

The relationship between language, culture and translation has been studied by many scholars. Nida emphasized dynamic equivalence and argued that the translator should reproduce the closest natural equivalent of the source message. This idea is important for cultural units because the translator must transfer not only meaning but also communicative effect.

Newmark classified cultural words into categories such as ecology, material culture, social culture, customs, activities, concepts, gestures and habits. Baker discussed non-equivalence at word level and above word level, showing that cultural concepts often lack direct equivalents in another language. Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization are also useful: domestication adapts the text to the target reader, while foreignization preserves the source culture.

In Uzbek-English translation, cultural units are common in texts connected with family, hospitality, rituals, food, clothing, religion and community life. Such units usually require explanation, adaptation or preservation in the original form.

3. Research Methodology

This article uses descriptive and comparative methods. Selected Uzbek and English cultural units are analyzed according to their semantic meaning, cultural background and pragmatic function. The examples are taken from everyday speech, educational materials, literary contexts and intercultural communication.

The study considers several groups of cultural units: traditional food names, clothing, kinship terms, rituals, religious and etiquette expressions, idioms, proverbs

and social institutions. The purpose is not to create a full dictionary but to show typical translation difficulties and practical ways of solving them.

4. Main Translation Problems of Cultural Units

4.1. Lexical Non-Equivalence

The most frequent problem is the absence of a direct equivalent. For example, mahalla is often translated as “neighborhood,” but this version is incomplete. Mahalla is not only a residential area; it is also a traditional community institution based on social support, cooperation and local identity.

Example: Mahalla aholisi hashar tashkil qildi. A better translation is: The residents of the mahalla organized a hashar, a traditional form of collective community work. In this case, transliteration with explanation preserves the cultural meaning more effectively than literal translation.

4.2. Loss of Cultural Connotation

Some words have dictionary equivalents but different cultural associations. The Uzbek word non can be translated as “bread,” yet in Uzbek culture non symbolizes blessing, respect and hospitality. Therefore, in cultural or literary translation, a short explanation may be necessary: Do not throw bread on the ground; in Uzbek culture, bread is treated with special respect.

This example shows that the translator should identify not only the denotative meaning of a word but also its connotative and symbolic value.

4.3. Rituals, Ceremonies and Social Customs

Uzbek culture contains many ceremony-related terms such as beshik to‘yi, sunnat to‘yi, kelin salom, sovchilik and fotiha to‘yi. These expressions cannot be translated literally without losing cultural meaning. For example, kelin salom is not simply “bride greeting”; it is a traditional ceremony in which the bride greets the groom’s relatives and guests after the wedding.

Therefore, descriptive translation is often more accurate: Kelin salom is a traditional Uzbek bride-greeting ceremony held after the wedding. Such translation gives the foreign reader enough information without replacing the Uzbek cultural element.

4.4. Idioms, Proverbs and Pragmatic Meaning

Idioms and proverbs are difficult because their meanings are figurative and culture-bound. For instance, Mehnat qilgan elda aziz should not be translated literally as “The one who works is dear among people.” A more natural version is: A hardworking person is respected by society. Similarly, Yaxshi niyat — yarim davlat may be rendered as Good intentions are a great blessing.

Religious and etiquette expressions also depend on context. Baraka toping may mean “May you be blessed,” “Thank you,” or “I appreciate it.” Its function changes according to the speaker, listener and situation. Thus, pragmatic meaning is as important as lexical meaning.

4.5. Kinship Terms and English Cultural Units

Uzbek kinship terms such as aka, opa, uka, singil, kelin, qaynona, qaynota, ovsin and pochcha express not only family relations but also respect and social hierarchy. The word aka means “elder brother,” but it is also used as a respectful address for an older man. Depending on context, Akmal aka may be translated as Akmal aka or Mr. Akmal.

Problems also occur in English-Uzbek translation. Thanksgiving is not simply Shukronalik; it is a specific American holiday. Pub is not only a bar but also a social meeting place in British culture. Privacy may be translated as shaxsiy hayot daxlsizligi, shaxsiy makon or yolg‘izlik huquqi depending on context. These examples prove that cultural concepts require flexible translation.

5. Examples of Cultural Units and Translation Strategies

Cultural unit	Suggested translation	Strategy
Mahalla	mahalla, a traditional local community institution	Transliteration + explanation
Hashar	hashar, voluntary collective community work	Transliteration + description
Sumalak	sumalak, a sweet	Transliteration +

Cultural unit	Suggested translation	Strategy
	wheat-germ dish prepared for Navruz	explanation
Do‘ppi	do‘ppi, a traditional Uzbek skullcap	Transliteration + cultural description
Kelin salom	traditional Uzbek bride-greeting ceremony	Descriptive translation
Baraka toping	may you be blessed / thank you / I appreciate it	Contextual adaptation
Oq yo‘l	good luck / have a safe journey	Functional equivalence

6. Translation Strategies

Transliteration is useful when a cultural unit is unique and has no equivalent in the target language. Words such as mahalla, sumalak, do‘ppi and hashar may be preserved in their original form, especially in academic and literary texts. However, transliteration should usually be supported by a short explanation.

Descriptive translation explains the meaning of a cultural unit. For example, beshik to‘yi can be translated as a traditional Uzbek ceremony celebrating the placing of a baby into a cradle. This method is accurate, although it may make the text longer.

Functional equivalence transfers the communicative function rather than the form. Oq yo‘l may be translated as “Good luck” or “Have a safe journey.” Contextual adaptation is necessary for etiquette formulas such as baraka toping, rahmat kattakon and duo qiling. Footnotes are useful in academic and literary translation because they preserve the original cultural word and explain it without overloading the main text.

Cultural substitution should be used carefully. Replacing Navro‘z with “New Year,” for example, is inaccurate because Navro‘z has a specific historical and cultural meaning. In many cases, preserving the original word with explanation is more appropriate.

7. Discussion

The analysis shows that cultural units are carriers of national identity. The translator must decide whether to preserve the foreign cultural element or adapt it to the target audience. This decision depends on text type, purpose and reader background. In literary translation, foreignization often preserves national color; in educational or informative texts, descriptive translation may provide better clarity.

Another important issue is pragmatic meaning. Uzbek expressions such as Assalomu alaykum, Inshaalloh, Xudo xohlasa, omin and duo qiling may express religion, politeness, hope, gratitude or respect. Their translation depends on who speaks, to whom and in what situation. Therefore, cultural units should be analyzed at three levels: lexical meaning, cultural meaning and pragmatic function.

8. Conclusion

Translation of cultural units in Uzbek and English is a complex process because many words and expressions contain meanings beyond dictionary definitions. The main difficulties are lexical non-equivalence, loss of cultural connotation, ritual-related vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, religious expressions and pragmatic functions.

Literal translation is often insufficient. Effective translation requires a combination of transliteration, descriptive translation, functional equivalence, contextual adaptation and footnotes. In Uzbek-English translation, special attention should be given to words related to mahalla life, ceremonies, food, clothing, family relations, religion and etiquette. In English-Uzbek translation, concepts such as Thanksgiving, pub, privacy, prom and small talk also require careful interpretation.

Successful translation depends on the translator’s linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness and ability to interpret context. Further research may examine the translation of Uzbek cultural units in literary works, tourism discourse, films and machine translation systems.

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