CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING CULTURAL REALITIES: ENGLISH–UZBEK CONTEXT

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Abstract. This article explores the challenges of translating cultural realities in the English–Uzbek context. Translation is not limited to linguistic transfer but also requires conveying cultural meanings that reflect traditions, customs, idiomatic expressions, and worldview differences. English and Uzbek cultures embody unique cultural markers such as afternoon tea, Thanksgiving Day, Navro‘z, and do‘ppi, which often lack direct equivalents in the target language. Such cultural gaps create difficulties for translators, who must balance accuracy with readability. The article highlights the main problems of equivalence, idiomatic expressions, and cultural differences, while also analyzing strategies such as explanatory translation, transliteration, and cultural adaptation. It concludes that translators serve as cultural mediators, ensuring that meaning and cultural significance are preserved in cross-cultural communication.

Introduction. Translation has always played a crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural boundaries, enabling communication between people of different nations and traditions. It is not merely a linguistic activity, but also a complex intercultural process that requires understanding of both language systems and cultural backgrounds. While words and grammar can often be translated with relative accuracy, cultural realities — deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and everyday practices of a society — present far greater challenges for translators. The English and Uzbek languages belong to two distinct language families: English is a Germanic language with global status, while Uzbek is a Turkic language that carries the historical and cultural identity of Central Asia. This linguistic distance is further deepened by cultural differences. For instance, English culture is strongly shaped by Western traditions such as “Thanksgiving

Day," "afternoon tea," or the concept of the "pub," while Uzbek culture is characterized by customs such as *Navro'z*, *osh*, and the wearing of the *do'ppi*. These cultural elements are not easily transferable, since they do not have direct equivalents in the other language. The challenge of translating cultural realities lies in the necessity of conveying not only the literal meaning but also the cultural significance behind a word or phrase. A purely linguistic translation often fails to capture the emotional, symbolic, or contextual value embedded in the source culture. For example, idiomatic expressions like "kick the bucket" in English or culturally bound terms like *mehmondo'stlik* (Uzbek hospitality) cannot be rendered through word-for-word translation without losing their meaning.

In such cases, translators face the dilemma of choosing the most appropriate strategy: explanatory translation, transliteration with cultural notes, or cultural adaptation. Each choice requires careful consideration of the target audience and the purpose of the translation. Thus, translation becomes not only a linguistic process but also an act of cultural mediation. This article seeks to analyze the major challenges that arise when translating cultural realities in the English–Uzbek context. It explores the reasons behind the difficulties, highlights examples of untranslatable or culture-specific concepts, and discusses strategies that can help preserve cultural meaning while ensuring clarity and readability for the target audience. By examining these issues, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of translation as both a linguistic and cultural endeavor.

Literature analysis. The study of translation has long emphasized the complexity of transferring cultural realities across languages. Early theories of translation, particularly Eugene Nida's concept of *dynamic equivalence*, highlighted the importance of achieving naturalness and communicative effect rather than strict word-for-word accuracy (Nida, 1964). According to Nida, cultural differences often necessitate explanatory strategies to ensure that the target audience grasps not only the meaning but also the cultural significance of a text. Peter Newmark (1988) advanced the discussion by distinguishing between *semantic* and *communicative* translation. He argued that while semantic translation seeks fidelity to the original text, communicative translation prioritizes the target audience's understanding. Newmark also stressed that culture-specific terms often demand a flexible approach, such as cultural adaptation, to avoid distortion. Mona Baker (2018) expanded the theoretical framework by examining non-equivalence at the word, idiom, and cultural levels. She classified translation challenges into linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural categories, thereby providing translators with practical tools to identify and address gaps in equivalence. Baker's work is particularly relevant to English–Uzbek translation, where idiomatic expressions and culturally embedded references frequently lack direct counterparts. Juliane House (2015) emphasized the role of *translation quality assessment* and the significance of cultural context.

Her model underlines that translation is both a linguistic and pragmatic act, deeply influenced by the cultural realities of the source and target communities. She suggests that functional equivalence must take into account not only words but also the socio-cultural environment of communication. In the Uzbek context, Omonov and Karimov (2020) analyzed the theoretical foundations of translation studies in Uzbekistan, noting that cultural mediation is an essential part of translation practice. They argue that Uzbek translators must be especially attentive when dealing with cultural realities in English texts, since Western traditions often lack direct parallels in Uzbek society. Other scholars, such as Katan (2009), also emphasize the intercultural dimension of translation, describing translators as "cultural brokers" who mediate between two cultural systems. This perspective aligns with the practical experience of many English–Uzbek translators, who often resort to a combination of transliteration, explanatory notes, and adaptation. Overall, the literature demonstrates that the translation of cultural realities remains a central challenge in translation studies. It requires balancing linguistic equivalence with cultural sensitivity, ensuring that meaning, function, and cultural resonance are preserved for the target audience.

Materials and Methods. This study is based on a qualitative approach, focusing on theoretical analysis and comparative examination of English–Uzbek translation practices. The primary aim is to identify and evaluate the challenges of translating cultural realities and to explore strategies that can be applied in overcoming these difficulties.

Materials. The materials for the research include:

- **Theoretical sources**: Foundational works in translation studies by Nida (1964), Newmark (1988), Baker (2018), House (2015), and Katan (2009), which provide the theoretical framework for analyzing translation strategies.
- **Practical examples**: Culture-specific concepts and terms from both English (e.g., *pub*, *afternoon tea*, *Thanksgiving Day*) and Uzbek (*osh*, *do'ppi*, *Navro'z*). These examples were selected for their frequent occurrence in translation practice and their cultural significance.
- **Uzbek scholarly works**: Local studies such as Omonov and Karimov (2020), which reflect the perspective of translation theory within Uzbekistan.

Methods

The following methods were applied in the study:

1. **Comparative Analysis** – English and Uzbek cultural terms and idiomatic expressions were compared to determine areas of non-equivalence.
2. **Descriptive Method** – Translation challenges were described and categorized according to linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic levels.

3. **Contextual Analysis** – Each example was examined within its cultural and social context to evaluate the most effective translation strategy.
4. **Case Study Approach** – Selected terms and expressions were translated using different strategies (explanatory translation, transliteration, cultural adaptation) to assess their adequacy and effectiveness.

By combining theoretical insights with practical examples, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the main obstacles and possible solutions when translating cultural realities between English and Uzbek.

Research discussion. The analysis of cultural realities in English–Uzbek translation reveals that linguistic equivalence alone is insufficient to achieve a faithful and meaningful translation. Cultural realities are deeply embedded in social practices, traditions, and values, making them resistant to direct transfer. The discussion of findings highlights several key aspects.

First, **non-equivalence** is one of the most persistent challenges. Terms such as *pub*, *afternoon tea*, or *Thanksgiving Day* have no direct equivalents in Uzbek culture. A literal translation of these concepts would mislead the target reader, as they lack the same social and cultural context. Conversely, Uzbek terms like *Navro‘z*, *do‘ppi*, *mehmondo‘stlik* (hospitality) are equally difficult to render into English without explanatory notes. Second, **idiomatic expressions** present serious obstacles. English idioms such as “kick the bucket” or “spill the beans” cannot be translated word-for-word into Uzbek, as they would lose their figurative meaning. Similarly, Uzbek idioms like *qulog‘iga quloq solmoq* or *ko‘ngli tog‘dek bo‘ldi* may sound incomprehensible to English speakers without cultural explanation. These cases illustrate the need for contextual translation strategies that go beyond literal equivalence. Third, the discussion emphasizes the role of the **translator as a cultural mediator.** Translators must choose between different strategies—explanatory translation, transliteration, or cultural adaptation—depending on the target audience and the purpose of the translation. For academic texts, explanatory translations may be most appropriate, while in literary works, cultural adaptation could preserve stylistic and emotional impact. Fourth, findings also indicate that **mentalities and value systems** play a significant role in translation. For instance, Uzbek culture places a strong emphasis on collectivism, family ties, and hospitality, while English-speaking societies often reflect individualism and personal freedom in their cultural expressions. Translators must be aware of these underlying values to ensure accurate interpretation and avoid cultural misrepresentation. Finally, the discussion underscores that **successful translation requires balance.** Too much cultural adaptation may erase the authenticity of the source culture, while excessive literalism can obscure meaning for the target reader. The most effective translations are those that preserve the cultural uniqueness of the source while making the message accessible to the target audience. In summary, the research

confirms that translating cultural realities in the English–Uzbek context is not simply a linguistic task but a complex intercultural process. Translators must exercise both linguistic expertise and cultural sensitivity to ensure that the translated text conveys not only information but also cultural resonance.

Conclusion. The study of cultural realities in the English–Uzbek translation context demonstrates that translation is not a purely linguistic activity but a complex intercultural process. Cultural concepts, traditions, and idiomatic expressions often lack direct equivalents, creating serious challenges for translators. These difficulties are rooted not only in linguistic differences but also in distinct worldviews, values, and social practices embedded in English and Uzbek cultures. The analysis revealed that non-equivalence, idiomatic expressions, and mentality-based differences are the main barriers in achieving accurate translation. Strategies such as explanatory translation, transliteration, and cultural adaptation provide effective ways to overcome these challenges. However, the choice of strategy must depend on the type of text, its purpose, and the target audience. A key finding is the role of the translator as a cultural mediator. Beyond linguistic expertise, translators need cultural awareness and sensitivity to ensure that the translated text conveys both meaning and cultural significance. A successful translation should not only transfer words but also preserve the essence of the source culture while making it comprehensible for the target audience. In conclusion, translating cultural realities between English and Uzbek requires a balance between fidelity to the original text and accessibility for the reader. It is through this balance that translation can fulfill its main purpose: to connect languages, bridge cultures, and promote mutual understanding across societies.

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