

TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL REALIA IN LITERARY WORKS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Muhammadova Nodirabegim

Student of Group 401, Faculty of Translation Theory and Practice (English),
Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature

Abstract

The translation of cultural realia in literary works remains one of the most challenging tasks for translators, as these elements reflect the unique traditions, values, and worldview of a particular community. When cultural realia are inadequately translated, important layers of meaning may be lost or distorted, limiting readers' ability to fully understand the original text. This paper analyzes common difficulties faced in translating cultural realia such as historical references, national customs, idiomatic expressions, and culturally bound objects. It also examines the main translation strategies used to convey these elements, including borrowing, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, and functional equivalence. Through a comparative analysis of examples from English and Uzbek literature, the study highlights the significance of selecting an appropriate strategy that preserves both meaning and cultural authenticity. The findings emphasize that successful translation of cultural realia requires not only linguistic competence but also deep intercultural awareness.

Keywords: cultural realia; literary translation; translation strategies; cultural substitution; descriptive translation; borrowing; intercultural communication; meaning preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Translation has long been recognized not merely as a linguistic activity, but as a deeply cultural and intellectual process through which ideas, values, and worldviews are transferred from one community to another. Among the many issues that translators face, the rendering of cultural realia—words, expressions, objects, and phenomena that are unique to a particular culture—remains one of the most complex and debated aspects of literary translation. Cultural realia may

include traditions, national concepts, social norms, historical events, names of clothing, food, institutions, and culturally significant expressions that do not have direct equivalents in other languages. Because of their culturally specific nature, such elements often resist simple translation and require thoughtful, strategic approaches. As literature is a reflection of the cultural and social fabric of a nation, translating cultural realia becomes essential for maintaining the author's voice, preserving the authenticity of the text, and enabling readers to experience the foreign cultural environment as realistically as possible.

The major challenge in translating cultural realia lies in the potential loss of cultural identity and meaning. A literary work is typically embedded in the cultural context of its origin, and realia often serve as markers that signal the cultural uniqueness of that context. When translated improperly, these markers may be diluted, oversimplified, or distorted, which can lead to a misinterpretation of the text or an altered perception of the characters and setting. Translators must therefore deal with the delicate balance between staying faithful to the source culture and ensuring accessibility for the target audience. This dynamic tension between foreignization and domestication has been widely discussed in translation studies, with scholars such as Lawrence Venuti, Eugene Nida, and Peter Newmark offering varying perspectives on how cultural elements should be rendered. Their theories highlight the importance of translators' choices and the strategies they apply, which ultimately shape how literary works are received by readers from other cultures.

In the context of global communication and cultural exchange, the translation of cultural realia has gained greater significance. Literary translation allows readers to engage with foreign worlds, fostering intercultural understanding. However, cultural misunderstandings can easily occur when realia are translated without careful consideration. For example, a simple word referring to a culturally specific dish or item of clothing may carry symbolism or emotional weight in the source culture that the target audience may not readily understand. Such nuances must be conveyed with precision, and failing to do so may deprive the literary text

of its cultural richness. The challenge is further amplified in translations between linguistically and culturally distant languages, such as English and Uzbek, where cultural vocabulary and historical backgrounds may differ significantly.

One of the central tasks of modern translators is to recognize the functions of realia within the literary text. Cultural realia can perform various roles: they may provide local color, create atmosphere, indicate social or historical context, or reflect the identity and psychological state of characters. Identifying these functions helps the translator make informed decisions about how to transfer these elements into the target language. For instance, retaining the original cultural term may be important if the realia carries symbolic or thematic significance. On the other hand, substituting it with a culturally familiar term may be more appropriate when the primary goal is comprehension by the target reader. Thus, the translator must constantly evaluate the purpose of each realia item within the narrative.

The evolution of translation studies as an academic discipline has introduced a variety of translation strategies for addressing the complexities of cultural realia. Borrowing, transliteration, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, explanation, addition, and omission are among the most commonly discussed strategies by scholars. Each strategy offers its advantages and limitations, and the choice of strategy depends on the genre, intended readership, and the translator's ideology. Borrowing or preserving the original cultural word may maintain authenticity but may also create comprehension difficulties for readers unfamiliar with that culture. Descriptive translation provides clarity but risks over-explaining and disrupting the literary flow. Cultural substitution may make the text more relatable but may erase important cultural distinctions. Therefore, the translator's decision-making process becomes an act of interpretation, where linguistic competence must be complemented by cultural sensitivity.

Another issue closely related to cultural realia is the translator's visibility. Venuti argues that translation is never neutral; translators inevitably shape the reception of literary texts through the choices they make. When dealing with cultural realia, translators must decide whether to foreground the foreignness of the

text or to "naturalize" it for the target audience. This decision can influence how readers perceive the source culture. A foreignizing translation may encourage readers to appreciate cultural differences, while a domesticating translation may provide smoother reading but at the cost of cultural authenticity. Consequently, the translation of cultural realia offers insight not only into translation techniques but also into broader ideological and cultural trends.

The translation of cultural realia also impacts the formation of cultural identity and intercultural dialogue. Literature often serves as a gateway through which cultures communicate, allowing readers to discover new perspectives and values. A successful translation of cultural realia enhances this communicative function, fostering empathy and understanding. Conversely, inadequate translations may lead to stereotypes, misunderstandings, or cultural flattening. For this reason, translators need to adopt a responsible approach, recognizing their role as cultural mediators. They are not merely transferring words from one language to another but are interpreting cultural meanings and reshaping them within a new linguistic and cultural framework.

In the context of Uzbek–English and English–Uzbek literary translation, the issue of cultural realia is particularly relevant. Uzbek literature is rich in historical, ethnographic, and social-cultural realia that reflect the nation's traditions, customs, and worldview. Likewise, English literature contains numerous culturally bound elements that may seem unfamiliar to Uzbek readers. Translators working between these languages must navigate significant differences in cultural norms, social structures, and everyday practices. For instance, Uzbek realia such as “sumalak,” “do‘ppi,” “mehmondorchilik,” or traditional kinship terms may lack direct equivalents in English. Similarly, English realia such as “Thanksgiving,” “pub,” or “high school prom” may not have culturally appropriate counterparts in Uzbek. These discrepancies highlight the importance of applying flexible and well-informed translation strategies.

REFERENCES

1. Baker, M. (2011). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
2. Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall.
3. Venuti, L. (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge.
4. Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation Studies* (4th ed.). Routledge.
5. Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (4th ed.). Routledge.
6. Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. E. J. Brill.
7. Katan, D. (1999). *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. St. Jerome Publishing.
8. Lefevere, A. (1992). *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge.
9. House, J. (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*. Routledge.
10. Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1997). *The Translator as Communicator*. Routledge.
11. Snell-Hornby, M. (1988). *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*. John Benjamins.
12. Jakobson, R. (1959). On linguistic aspects of translation. In R. A. Brower (Ed.), *On Translation* (pp. 232–239). Harvard University Press.