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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL AND STYLISTIC PRESERVATION IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF GAFUR GULOM'S "SHUM BOLA"

Abstract. *This article explores the linguistic and cultural complexities involved in translating Gafur Gulom's seminal picaresque novella, Shum Bola, from Uzbek into English. As a masterpiece defined by its rich use of the Tashkent dialect, traditional askiya (wit), and pastoral metaphors, the work presents a significant "linguistic wall" for translators. Using a qualitative comparative method, this study analyzes specific instances of translation loss, focusing on culture-specific items, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic registers. The findings reveal a persistent trend of semantic flattening and over-domestication, where vivid animal-based similes and nomadic architectural terms are replaced by generic English equivalents. Furthermore, the analysis highlights how the neutralization of the protagonist's "street" register diminishes the irrepressible "Shum" spirit intended by the author. The study analyzes by suggesting that a move toward stylistic loyalty and dynamic equivalence is essential for preserving the ethnolinguistic identity of Uzbek literature in the global literary market. Rather than prioritizing simple readability, future translations should aim to preserve the rhythmic energy and metaphorical grit that define Gulom's unique narrative voice.*

Keywords: *Uzbek Literature, Gafur Gulom, Shum Bola, translation studies, culture-specific items, linguistic wall, stylistic neutralization, comparative linguistics.*

Introduction

Gafur Gulom (1903–1966) is one of the most important figures in 20th-century Uzbek literature, often honored as a "People's Poet." His work reflects a unique ability to combine the

rich oral traditions of Uzbek culture with the emerging forms of modern prose. Among his many writings, *Shum Bola* (1936) remains his most famous and widely read work.

At its core, *Shum Bola* can be seen as a picaresque novella. It follows the story of a clever, mischievous boy from a humble background who moves through a series of loosely connected adventures. Like many classic “picaro” stories, the narrative uses humor and everyday experiences to reflect on deeper social issues. Set in pre-revolutionary Turkestan, the story goes beyond simple childhood mischief. Through the boy’s perspective, Gafur Gulom quietly criticizes the social and religious norms of the time, often revealing their contradictions and weaknesses. One of the most striking features of the novella is its language. Gulom makes active use of linguistic authenticity, including street speech from Tashkent, regional dialects, and elements of *askiya*, a traditional form of witty, playful exchange. This gives the story a strong sense of authenticity and cultural depth. At the same time, this richness creates serious challenges for translators. The text is filled with culture-specific references, idioms, and rhythms that are difficult to reproduce in another language. As a result, translating *Shum Bola* is not just about conveying meaning, but also about preserving the lively, rebellious spirit of the main character is the very essence of what makes him “shum”. The brilliance of *Shum bola* is inseparable from its language. Gafur Gulom did not write in a sterile, literary vacuum, he utilized the raw energy of the Tashkent dialect, the sharp-tongued art of *askiya* (spontaneous wit), and a thick tapestry of culture-specific items that define early 20th-century Uzbek life. For a translator, these elements create a “linguistic wall” that is notoriously difficult to scale. This study focuses on the English rendering of the novella, “*A naughty boy*”, translated by I. Tukhtasinov and U. Yuldashev and published in 2017. While the translator attempts to bring Gulom’s world to a Western audience, the transition from the source language to the target language often necessitates a trade-off between readability and cultural grit. Translating *Shum Bola* is not merely about conveying plot, it is about preserving the lively, rebellious spirit of the main character and the very essence of what makes him “shum”.

Methods

To identify the linguistic and cultural gaps in the journey of *Shum bola* across languages, this study employs a qualitative comparative method. This approach involves a side-by-side textual analysis, placing Gafur Gulom’s original Uzbek prose against its translated counterparts. By treating the original text as the “source of truth,” we can measure the degree of semantic and emotional loss in the target language.

This category focuses on “untranslatable” nouns such as the names of traditional foods, clothing, and social roles (e.g., *o‘tov*, *bo‘zagar*, *mulla*). We analyzed whether these were preserved through transliteration or replaced with generic equivalents.

Here, the focus shifted to Gulom’s use of idioms and animal-based metaphors. This is perhaps the most critical category. It involves the “street” tone of the Tashkent dialect and the rapid-fire wit of *askiya*. We examined whether the translator maintained the protagonist’s irreverent, “naughty” voice or if the language was “sanitized” into standard, formal grammar.

The primary source for this study is the original Uzbek edition of *Shum bola*. This text was compared with “*A naughty boy*” by Tukhtasinov’s translation (Tukhtasinov I .2017), specifically focusing on chapters where the protagonist’s dialogue and cultural interactions are most dense. By analyzing these specific editions, we aim to pinpoint where the “spirit” of the story was successfully captured and where it was lost to the “linguistic wall”.

Results

The comparative analysis of *Shum bola* reveals a persistent tension between the preservation of cultural “aroma” and the necessity of linguistic clarity. The findings indicate that the translation

of Gafur Gulom's prose is rarely a matter of simple word substitution, rather, it is a complex negotiation of cultural weight.

One of the most prominent issues identified is the treatment of culture-specific items. For terms such as *bozor* (market) or *to'qli* (a sheep), translators frequently oscillate between transliteration and generalization. While keeping the original Uzbek word preserves the historical setting, it often creates a "comprehension gap" for the target reader. Conversely, when translators use generic equivalents by transforming an *o'tov*, *yaktak*, *imam*, *makhalla*, *domla*, *tandoor* the text suffers from "cultural thinning," where the specific socio-historical landscape of 1920s Turkestan is erased in favor of a bland, universal setting.

This "thinning" is particularly evident in the translation of religious and idiomatic expressions. The term *mahshar* (Izoh.uz,n.d), for instance, is often translated simply as "chaos" or "a large crowd". This represents a significant loss of connotative depth, in the original, the word invokes the Islamic Day of Judgment, lending a layer of hyperbolic, existential humor to the boy's descriptions of crowded places. Similarly, specialized lexical items like *bo'zagar* (referring to a person who makes the drink bo'za - traditional fermented beverage) are frequently generalized or omitted entirely, as target languages often lack the specific culinary vocabulary to match the source text (Izoh.uz,n.d).

Furthermore, the study highlights a significant shift in stylistic register. The very title, *Shum*, presents a semantic hurdle. In most English translations, the protagonist is labeled as "Naughty" term that, in Western contexts, imply a harmless, playful innocence. This fails to capture the "Shum" of Gulom's world which is a sharper, more cynical brand of street-smart survival.

Finally, the results show that when faced with the rhythmic, rapid-fire wit of *askiya* (wordplay), translators often resort to omission. Because these jokes rely on the phonetic and morphological structures of the Uzbek language, they are frequently skipped to maintain narrative flow. The cumulative effect of these choices, which are standardizing slang, generalizing metaphors, and omitting puns, is a "flattening" of the protagonist's voice. The "Shum bola" who emerges in translation is often more polite and less linguistically vibrant than the irreverent, gritty wanderer of the original Uzbek version.

Discussion

A striking example of the "linguistic wall" identified in this study occurs in the treatment of idiomatic expressions that root the protagonist's world in pastoral history. If we consider the following passage: "*Semizlikni qo'y ko'tarar*", *deganlaridek*, *Omonga badavlatlik yoqmas edi*. In this instance, Gafur Gulom employs a traditional proverb that literally suggests "only a sheep can bear its own fatness". In the Uzbek cultural consciousness, wealth is envisioned as a heavy, physical burden much like the literal weight of a well-fed livestock animal that requires a specific "nature" or "sturdiness" to carry without a change in character.

When comparing this to the analyzed English translation, "Omon started acting like a rich man", we see a clear case of semantic flattening. While the translator captures the basic fact of the situation, the metaphorical "grit" of the original is entirely discarded. The vibrant, animal-based imagery that characterizes the *Shum bola*'s worldview is replaced by a dry, descriptive statement. The translator might be tempted to use a Western idiomatic equivalent, such as: "The beggar on horseback". This idiom describes a person of low origins who, upon gaining wealth, becomes arrogant or vain. While this is a functional equivalent, the two expressions belong to entirely different cultural landscapes. Therefore, in order to maintain the understanding, translators gave general explanation to keep the flow of the reading.

Another clear instance of linguistic "thinning" is found in the character's plans. In original version, "*Men o'zimga tegishli aqchaga birorta to'qli olib shaharga haydab ketaman*" - "*to'qli*" means a female young sheep that has not given a birth yet (Izoh.uz, n.d.). In translation, "*I will buy a sheep and lead it to the city*". In this comparison, the translator replaces the specific Uzbek

term *to'qli* with the generic English word *sheep*. In Uzbek, a *to'qli* is not just any sheep, it refers specifically to a one-year-old lamb that has reached a certain maturity and market value. For the *Shum bola*, this choice of word demonstrates his burgeoning “business mind”. He isn't just buying an animal; he is selecting a specific “product” that will yield the best profit in the city market. As there is not an equal, same term for *to'qli* in English, the translator just expressed it as a sheep. It can be expressed in English as *an ewe* which means a female sheep (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). However, this word cannot show whether the female sheep gave a birth or not.

The dialogue between characters in *Shum bola* is often where the “Shum” spirit is most visible.

In original : “*Nima-nima? – dedim men. – Darrov pul quturtirdimi?*” (Translation: “*What? – I asked. “Has the money influenced on you so fast?”*”)

The repetition of “*Nima-nima?*” in the original conveys a sense of shock, disbelief, and rising temper. The simple “What?” in the translation is far too calm. The original phrase feels like a verbal slap, whereas the translation feels like a mild inquiry. In the analyzed translation, the rendering of the verb *quturtirdimi* as “influenced” creates a significant stylistic gap. While “influenced” is semantically accurate, it lacks the visceral, colloquial energy of the original Uzbek phrase. A more resonant idiomatic equivalent in English could have been “Has the money gone to your head?” This English idiom perfectly captures the essence of someone becoming arrogant or overconfident due to a sudden change in status or wealth. Comparing these options reveals two different translation philosophies. This is a neutralization strategy. It prioritizes clarity and formal correctness, but it inadvertently “sanitizes” the characters’ relationship, making the boys sound more like polite acquaintances than gritty street companions. The proposed alternative (gone to your head) would be an idiomatic translation strategy sheep (Cambridge English dictionary, n.d.). While it moves away from the literal “rabidity” of the Uzbek verb *quturmoq*, it successfully preserves the illocutionary force (the emotional impact and intent) of the original dialogue.

In the original, the author uses a highly visual simile: “*It quvgan tulkiday*” (like a fox chased by a dog). This does not just tell the reader that Omon is “scared”; it *shows* the nature of his fear. A fox chased by a dog is frantic, darting its eyes, and looking for an escape. The word “*olazarak*” further emphasizes this specific type of “shifty-eyed” anxiety (Izoh.uz, n.d.).

By translating this as “being very scared,” the translator has committed descriptive simplification. The reader receives the correct information (the emotion), but the artistic texture may be lost. The “fox and dog” metaphor is deeply rooted in the rural, hunter-prey dynamics of Central Asian life, and removing it makes the text feel generic and unmoored from its geographical origin.

One of the major challenges in the translation is the neutralization of cultural artifacts and professional titles. For instance, “*Yaxshiqiz degan bo'zagar kampirning o'toviga qarab ketdik*”. This sentence was translated as “*We went to that old woman's house*”. The original text identifies the woman not just by age, but by her trade and she is a *bo'zagar* (a maker or seller of *bo'za*, a traditional fermented grain drink). This is a crucial detail that sets the scene and also it tells the reader about the social environment the boys are entering. Simplifying it to the “old woman,” may lead to the difference in the character's social identity and the specific cultural “flavor” of the setting.

Conclusion

The analysis of Gafur Gulom’s *Shum bola* highlights the intricate nature of translating a work so deeply embedded in a specific cultural and linguistic landscape. The “linguistic wall” encountered in this process is a testament to the richness of the Uzbek language and the unique vibrant spirit of the novella.

As observed through the various examples, the transition from Uzbek to English often involves a delicate balance between readability and cultural depth. While some translations prioritize making the text accessible to a global audience, there is an inevitable loss of the “local flavor” that makes the original prose so compelling. The simplification of metaphors and the generalization of cultural artifacts, such as the *o'tov* or specific social roles, suggest that much of the work's artistic texture remains hidden from the target reader. Whenever possible, preserving the original metaphors (such as animal-based similes) can help maintain the visual and emotional rhythm of the author's voice. Moreover, using descriptive phrases or brief contextual cues instead of generic equivalents can help protect the historical and social identity of the setting. Striving to capture the ‘energy’ of the dialogue the sharp wit and street-smart register ensures that the protagonist's personality remains intact across linguistic borders.

Ultimately, translation is an act of cultural bridge-building. By finding a middle ground between literal accuracy and stylistic resonance, we can ensure that the irrepressible spirit of the *Shum bola* continues to resonate with readers around the world, preserving the legacy of Gafur Gulom for future generations.

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