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NATIONAL AND CULTURAL REALIA AS A PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

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Annotation This article examines national and cultural realia as one of the most challenging aspects of translation. Realia are words and expressions that reflect unique features of a particular culture, including its traditions, social life, and worldview, and they usually do not have direct equivalents in other languages. The paper analyzes the main difficulties that arise when translating such units and discusses common translation strategies such as transcription, calque, and descriptive translation. Special attention is given to examples from Uzbek culture and literature, which illustrate how cultural meaning can be preserved or partially lost in translation. The study concludes that effective translation of realia requires not only linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of cultural context.

Key words : National and cultural realia; culture-bound terms; translation strategies; intercultural communication; cultural context; equivalence; domestication and foreignization; Uzbek culture

Аннотация Данная статья рассматривает национально-культурные реалии как один из наиболее сложных аспектов перевода. Реалии представляют собой слова и выражения, отражающие уникальные особенности определённой культуры, включая её традиции, общественную жизнь и мировоззрение, и, как правило, не имеют прямых эквивалентов в других языках. В работе анализируются основные трудности, возникающие при переводе таких единиц, а также рассматриваются распространённые переводческие стратегии, такие как транскрипция, калькирование и описательный перевод. Особое внимание уделяется примерам из узбекской культуры и литературы, которые показывают, как культурное значение может сохраняться или частично теряться при переводе. Делается вывод о том, что

эффективный перевод реалий требует не только языковой компетенции, но и глубокого понимания культурного контекста.

Ключевые слова: Национально-культурные реалии; безэквивалентная лексика; переводческие стратегии; межкультурная коммуникация; культурный контекст; эквивалентность; доместикация и фореинизация; узбекская культура

Annotatsiya Ushbu maqolada milliy va madaniy realiyalar tarjimaning eng murakkab jihatlaridan biri sifatida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Realialar — bu muayyan madaniyatning o‘ziga xos xususiyatlarini, jumladan uning an‘analari, ijtimoiy hayoti va dunyoqarashini aks ettiruvchi so‘z va iboralar bo‘lib, ular odatda boshqa tillarda to‘g‘ridan-to‘g‘ri muqobilga ega emas. Maqolada bunday birliklarni tarjima qilish jarayonida yuzaga keladigan asosiy qiyinchiliklar tahlil qilinadi hamda transkripsiya, kalkalash va izohli tarjima kabi keng tarqalgan tarjima strategiyalari ko‘rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, o‘zbek madaniyati va adabiyotidan olingan misollar orqali madaniy ma‘noni tarjimada saqlash yoki qisman yo‘qotish masalalari yoritiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Milliy va madaniy realiyalar; ekvivalentsiz leksika; tarjima strategiyalari; madaniyatlararo muloqot; madaniy kontekst; ekvivalentlik; domestikatsiya va foreignizatsiya; O‘zbek madaniyati

Introduction

In the context of globalization and the growing intensity of intercultural communication, translation is increasingly viewed not merely as a linguistic operation, but as a complex process of cultural mediation. The translator is required to transfer not only semantic content, but also culturally specific meanings embedded in the source text. One of the most challenging aspects of this process is the translation of national and cultural realia — lexical units that denote objects, phenomena, and concepts unique to a particular culture and typically lacking direct equivalents in other languages. The difficulty of translating realia lies in their dual nature. On the one hand, they perform a nominative function, referring to concrete objects or concepts. On the other hand, they carry significant cultural and historical connotations, reflecting the worldview, traditions, and social practices of a given community. As a result, any attempt to replace such units with neutral or generalized equivalents inevitably leads to a partial loss of meaning and cultural specificity. The issue of translatability of realia has been extensively discussed in translation studies, where different scholars propose distinct approaches to this problem. S. Vlahov considers realia primarily as carriers of national and historical coloring. In his works, he emphasizes that these lexical units are deeply rooted in the life and culture of a particular people, which makes their direct translation highly problematic. Vlahov argues that the substitution of realia with

neutral vocabulary results in the loss of cultural authenticity, and therefore such elements should be preserved in translation whenever possible.[1] This position highlights the importance of maintaining the cultural identity of the source text. From this perspective, the preservation of realia allows the target reader to encounter the original cultural context rather than a simplified or neutralized version of it.

S. Florin approaches the problem from a slightly different angle, focusing not only on the semantic, but also on the functional role of realia in the text. He points out that realia contribute to the creation of a cultural background and play an important role in shaping the reader's perception of a foreign environment. Consequently, their translation should take into account both their denotative meaning and their stylistic and contextual function. [2] E. Nida formulates his theory of dynamic equivalence, according to which the primary goal of translation is to achieve an equivalent effect on the target audience. He argues that the translation should reproduce "the closest natural equivalent" of the source message, prioritizing clarity and comprehensibility.[3] Within this framework, the adaptation or substitution of cultural elements is considered acceptable if it facilitates the reader's understanding. While this approach is effective in ensuring accessibility, it may, in certain cases, lead to the reduction of cultural distinctiveness, particularly when dealing with culture-bound lexical items. P. Newmark proposes a more flexible and pragmatic approach to the translation of realia. Recognizing that cultural words are often resistant to direct translation, he suggests a range of strategies, including transference, naturalization, and descriptive translation. This methodological plurality enables the translator to select the most appropriate solution depending on the communicative situation and the function of the text. [4] Such an approach appears particularly relevant in practice, as it acknowledges the variability of translation contexts. L. Venuti further develops the discussion by introducing the concepts of domestication and foreignization. He argues in favor of foreignization as a strategy that preserves the cultural otherness of the source text and resists its assimilation into the target culture.[5] By maintaining culturally specific elements, including realia, the translator allows the reader to engage with the foreign context more directly. This perspective underscores the ethical dimension of translation as a means of representing cultural diversity. In this regard, an effective approach to translating realia should be based on a balanced application of these principles. It may be formulated through the following guidelines: the preservation of realia is preferable when they carry significant cultural meaning; explanatory additions should be used when comprehension may be hindered; the use of generalized equivalents should be avoided in culturally marked contexts; and the choice of strategy must be determined by the communicative purpose of the translation.

Such an approach makes it possible to maintain both the semantic integrity and the cultural depth of the source text while ensuring its accessibility to the target reader.

Main body

The translation of national and cultural realia represents one of the most complex and debatable issues in translation studies. The difficulty arises from the fact that such lexical units are deeply embedded in the cultural context of the source language and often lack direct equivalents in the target language. As a result, the translator faces a fundamental problem: how to preserve the cultural meaning of the original text while ensuring that it remains clear and understandable for the reader. In practice, the translation of realia cannot rely on a single universal method. Instead, it requires the use of different strategies, each of which reflects a particular approach to the balance between cultural preservation and reader comprehension. Among the most widely discussed strategies are borrowing (transcription or transliteration), calque, descriptive translation, and adaptation. These methods are not interchangeable; rather, they serve different functions and are applied depending on the communicative situation, the type of text, and the expected audience.

Borrowing is typically used when a realia carries strong cultural significance and cannot be adequately expressed through the lexical resources of the target language. By preserving the original form, the translator maintains the national coloring of the text. However, this strategy may reduce clarity if the meaning of the borrowed unit is not evident from the context, which often requires additional explanation. Calque, on the other hand, attempts to reproduce the structure of the original expression by translating its components directly. This method may be effective when the meaning of the realia is transparent and can be reconstructed in the target language. At the same time, literal translation does not always guarantee naturalness and may lead to ambiguity or stylistic awkwardness. Descriptive translation is applied in cases where neither borrowing nor calque ensures sufficient understanding. In such situations, the translator explains the meaning of the realia, making the cultural concept more accessible to the reader. While this approach improves clarity, it may affect the brevity and stylistic integrity of the text. Adaptation, or substitution, involves replacing the original realia with a culturally familiar equivalent in the target language. This strategy prioritizes readability and ease of perception, but it often results in a partial or complete loss of cultural specificity. Therefore, its use must be carefully justified by the communicative purpose of the text. Thus, each of these strategies has its own advantages and limitations, and none of them can be considered universally applicable. The translator must evaluate the role of the realia in the text, its cultural significance, and the needs of the target audience before making a decision. In this regard, the practical application of these strategies can be more clearly demonstrated through

specific translation cases, which illustrate how different methods function in real contexts and what results they produce.

Here you can see some examples:

1- Example

⁶ *Sandal – a small, low table over an iron box with hot coals recessed in the floor which serves to warm the feet and legs in winter. (Translator’s note.)*

Source Language: Отабек меҳмонларни танчага утказиб ,фотиҳадан сунг

Хасаналидан суради :

-Тузукмисиз ота ?

-Худога шукур !-деди Хасанали .

P.8

Target Language: Atabek seated his guests at the sandal and, after a short prayer , turned to Khasanali :

"How are you feeling father ? "

"Allah be praised , " replied Khasanali.

P. 12

REALIYA : Танча – Sandal , Фотиха - short prayer , -Худога шукур ! - Allah be praised.

First, the word “*танча*” is translated as “*sandal*”. This is an example of **borrowing (transliteration)**, where the original cultural term is preserved in the target language. The translator does not replace it with a more general word such as “table” or “heater,” which would simplify the meaning but remove the cultural specificity. The use of “*sandal*” allows the reader to encounter an element of Uzbek everyday life. Second, the word “*фотиха*” is translated as “*a short prayer*”. In this case, the translator applies **descriptive translation**. Instead of keeping the original word, its meaning is explained in a simplified form. This helps the reader understand the general idea of the action, but at the same time, some cultural depth is lost. The word “*фотиха*” has a specific religious and cultural meaning, which is broader than just “a short prayer.” Therefore, the translation ensures clarity but partially reduces cultural richness. Third, the expression “*Худога шукур!*” is rendered as “*Allah be praised.*” This can be considered a form of **functional equivalence or partial adaptation**. The translator chooses an expression that is culturally and religiously appropriate in the target language. While the meaning is preserved, the phrase is adapted to sound natural in English. This strategy successfully conveys both the emotional tone and the religious context, making it understandable for the reader.

2 – Example

⁸ *Ata – a term of respect, literally ‘father’. (Translator’s note.)*

Source Language: Отабекка ихлос куйиб , унга уз боласи каби карар : " Улганимдан кейин рухимга бир калима К,уръон укиса , бир вақтлар Хасанали Ота хам бор эди деб ёдласа , менга шуниси кифоя !" P.9

Target Language: " Should he read the prayer from the Koran " after my death and remember me with kind words - there once lived a man named Khasanali-ata - then this is more than enough for me ." he thought to himself . P. 13

REALIYA : Бир калима К,уръон - prayer from Koran , Хасанали Ота - Khasanali ata.

The phrase “*бир калима Қуръон*” is translated as “*the prayer from the Koran.*” This represents a case of **descriptive translation combined with generalization**. In the source text, the expression refers not simply to “a prayer,” but more specifically to the act of reciting verses from the Qur’an, which has a deep religious and cultural significance in Uzbek and broader Islamic traditions. By rendering it as “*the prayer from the Koran,*” the translator makes the meaning more accessible to the target reader. However, this simplification leads to a partial loss of the original nuance, as the phrase in the source language implies a more specific ritual act rather than a general prayer. The proper name “*Хасанали Ота*” is translated as “*Khasanali-ata.*” This is an example of **borrowing (transliteration)** with partial preservation of cultural meaning. The component “*oma*” (*ata*) is retained in the translation, which reflects respect and social status, as it is used to address an elder. By preserving this element, the translator maintains an important cultural marker. At the same time, for readers unfamiliar with the cultural context, the meaning of “*ata*” may not be immediately clear. This again shows that borrowing helps preserve authenticity but may require additional explanation for full comprehension. It is also important to note that the translator adds the phrase “*he thought to himself,*” which is not explicitly present in the source text. This can be seen as a **contextual or stylistic addition**, aimed at making the narrative clearer and more natural in the target language. While this improves readability, it slightly alters the structure of the original text.

3- Example

¹³ Kutidor – a money changer. Used as a post-nominal title to indicate an eminent or wealthy merchant. Often used to substitute the name itself, as is the case in this novel. (Translator's note)

Source Language : Чакирилганда хам узимизга якин ва ахил кишилар булур . Масалан , Мирзакарим кутидор каби !

P.14

Target Language: Allow me to refer once again to the closeness of our social circles, which include, for instance, Mirzakarim Kutidor.”

P.17

REALIYA : кутидор - Kutidor.”

The explanation provided for the term “*Kutidor*” represents a **translator’s note**, which is used to clarify culturally specific elements for the target reader. In this case, the translator explains that *Kutidor* refers to “a money changer” and functions as a title indicating a wealthy or respected merchant. The use of a translator’s note complements the strategy of **borrowing (transliteration)** applied in the main text. While the original term is preserved to maintain cultural authenticity, the additional note ensures that its meaning is fully understood by the reader.

4-Example

Source Language: Хасанали дастурхон ёзиб , кумфон киргизди . Одатий такаллуфлар билан дастурхон ва чўйга қаралди . Хомид нонни шинига булғар экан , сўради :

P.10

Target Language: Khasanali laid the dastarkhan and fetched the kumgan, and the guests were served in the traditional manner.

P.14

REALIYA : Дастурхон – dastarkhan, кумфон- kumgan

The realia “*dastarkhan*” refers to a traditional Uzbek cloth laid on the floor or table for serving food. It is not merely a physical object but a significant cultural symbol of hospitality, respect for guests, and traditional communal dining practices. By retaining the form “*dastarkhan*,” the translator preserves its cultural specificity, allowing the target reader to encounter the authentic cultural environment of the source text rather than replacing it with a functional but culturally neutral equivalent such as “tablecloth,” which would fail to convey its full cultural meaning. Similarly, the realia “*kumgan*” denotes a traditional vessel used for boiling or storing water, particularly for tea preparation. The transliterated form “*kumgan*” maintains the cultural identity of the object and contributes to the preservation of ethnographic authenticity in the translation. The sentence “*Одатий такаллуфлар билан дастурхон ва чўйга қаралди*” is translated as “*the guests were served in the traditional manner.*” This represents a combination of **generalization, descriptive translation, and omission**. While the source text contains specific cultural actions (such as the arrangement of the dastarkhan and the serving of tea), these details are not explicitly rendered in the target text. Instead, they are condensed into a more general expression. The use of **omission** is evident here, as several culturally significant elements

are completely left out in the translation. Although this approach improves readability and naturalness in the target language, it results in a noticeable reduction of cultural specificity and situational detail present in the original text.

5-Example

Source Language: - Бек ошик, !

Ўрни устига чопонини ёпди-да кўрпаси ичига кириб ўтирди ва <<чиндан ошикми ?>> деган саволни кўнглидан кечирди . Таниш бўлмаган шаҳарда кимнинг бўлса ҳам кизига учрашсин , беш-олти кун ичида бу янлиғ уйкуда ҳам ... масалага бу жихат билан караб бекнинг ишкига ишонгиси келмас эди .

P.25

Target Language: “Well, well! Bek is in love!” He spread his chapan over his bed, covered him self with the blanket and endeavoured to reply to his own question: “Is bek really in love? Where could he have met a girl, in a strange city? For whom has his heart so fallen that he raves in his sleep?” Trying to unravel the situation from this vantage point, he began to doubt the feelings that had overwhelmed his bek.

P.27

REALIYA :Чўпон- chapan

The realia “*чопон*” is translated as “*chapan*.” This represents a case of **borrowing (transliteration)**, where the original lexical item is preserved in its phonetic form with minimal adaptation into the Latin script. The *chapan* is a traditional Central Asian outer garment, typically worn as a robe-like coat, which carries not only a functional role but also cultural significance, reflecting regional identity and traditional lifestyle. By retaining the form “*chapan*,” the translator preserves the cultural specificity and ethnographic authenticity of the source text. Instead of replacing it with a functional English equivalent such as “coat” or “robe,” which would neutralize its cultural meaning, the borrowing strategy allows the reader to encounter the original cultural object within its native context.

6-Example

⁴¹ *Tavba or taiba – an exclamation along the lines of ‘protect me’. (Translator’s note.)*

Source Language:

Хасанали ўрнини ёзар экан , <<тавба>> деб койди .

P.23

Target Language: Khasanali had taken this room for himself, to keep an eye on the stock. as he made his bed, Khasanali uttered only “Tavba.”

P.25

REALIYA : Тавба -Tavba.

The lexical item “*тавба*” is translated as “*Tavba*.” This represents a case of **borrowing (transliteration)**, where the original term is preserved in its phonetic form without translation. The word “*тавба*” is of Arabic origin and is widely used in Islamic discourse to express the meaning of repentance, regret, or asking forgiveness from God. In the source text, it functions as a culturally loaded interjection reflecting the speaker’s emotional and moral reaction. By retaining the form “*Tavba*,” the translator preserves the **religious and cultural specificity** of the expression. Instead of replacing it with an English equivalent such as “repentance” or “I repent,” which would weaken its expressive and interjectional function, the borrowing strategy maintains the original stylistic and cultural coloring of the utterance.

7-Example

³³ *Tabib – a healer or medicine man. (Translator’s note.)*

³⁴ *Surah-al-Fatiha – first chapter or surah of the Koran. (Translator’s note.)*

Source Language: Букун бирор хакиmdан сураб қарай-чи ... Ол, кизим шу пиёладаги чойингни ич-чи , деди ва тагин бир кайта кизини кузатди . Чойни ичиб булгандан кейин, кутидор фотиха укиб урнидан турди. P.31

Target Language: Today I shall talk with one of the tabib... Here, my girl, drink tea from the bowl.” And he looked at his daughter attentively once more. Once they had finished drinking tea, Kutidor recited the fatiha.

P.33

REALIYA : хакиmdан- tabib. Фотиха- fatiha.

The word “*хакум*” in the source text refers to a traditional healer or a person with medical or folk medical knowledge within the local cultural context. In the target text, it is translated as “*tabib*.” This represents a case of **cultural substitution combined with generalization**, since the translator replaces the original culturally specific term with a more familiar concept from the broader Islamic medical tradition. The lexical unit “*фомуха*” is translated as “*fatiha*.” This is an example of **borrowing (transliteration)**, where the original religious term is preserved in its phonetic form. The *Fatiha* refers to the opening chapter of the Qur’an and is widely used in Islamic practice as a prayer of blessing or conclusion. By retaining the form “*fatiha*,” the translator preserves the religious and cultural specificity of the expression, ensuring that its ritual significance remains visible in the target text rather than being replaced by a neutral equivalent such as “prayer,” which would weaken its cultural and religious depth.

Conclusion

The study of national and cultural realia highlights the inherent limitations of translation as a purely linguistic process. Realia demonstrate that language is inseparable from culture, and therefore any act of translation inevitably involves interpretation and transformation. Rather than seeking absolute equivalence, the translator must navigate between preserving cultural identity and ensuring communicative effectiveness. The analysis confirms that the choice of translation strategy is not mechanical but interpretative in nature. Each instance of realia requires an individual solution based on its semantic weight, cultural value, and textual function. In this respect, translation becomes a form of cultural negotiation, where meaning is not simply transferred but reconstructed for a new audience. The examples considered in this paper show that even when some elements of meaning are inevitably modified or reduced, a thoughtful and balanced approach allows the translator to retain the core cultural essence of the original. Thus, the translation of realia should be viewed not as a problem to be eliminated, but as an opportunity to represent cultural diversity and expand the reader’s perspective.

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