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THE INTERPRETATION OF GENDER-MARKED UNITS IN TRANSLATION STUDIES OF TIMURID MEMOIR LITERATURE: THE CASE OF THE “BABURNAMA”

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Abstract. This article examines the linguistic, cultural, and translation-related aspects of gender-marked units occurring in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s “Baburnama”, one of the outstanding examples of memoir literature of the Timurid period. The study focuses primarily on the representation in English translations of personal names, titles, kinship terms, social-status markers, and units denoting family and gender relations. The research material consists of the original text of the Baburnama and its English translations. Comparative-analytical, linguocultural, contextual, and translation-transformation methods were employed in the analysis. The results demonstrate that gender-marked units are not merely nominative devices; they also convey historical perceptions of social hierarchy, kinship relations, the social status of women and men, and the court-cultural environment of the Timurid period. In particular, the translation of such units as *begim/begum*, *khanum*, *bibi*, *ag‘acha/agacheh*, *oruk*, and *haram* raises the issue of preserving the cultural component alongside semantic equivalence.

Keywords: *Baburnama*, Timurid period, gender, gender-marked unit, translation studies, linguocultural studies, national coloring, *begim*, *khanum*, *haram*, translation transformation.

INTRODUCTION

The Timurid period holds a special place in the history of Central Asia and the peoples of the East as one of the significant stages of political, cultural, and literary development. Historical and memoir works created during this period reflect not only political events, military campaigns, and the activities of rulers, but also the everyday life of people, family relations, social status, customs, and cultural values of the period. From this perspective, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s *Baburnama* is an important source for studying the historical and cultural worldview of the Timurid period.

One of the distinctive features of the *Baburnama* is that it provides information not only about the political activities of historical figures but also about their kinship relations, family status, and personal qualities. In this respect, the text contains a considerable layer of lexical

units associated with gender. These units serve to distinguish female and male individuals, indicate their social status, express kinship relations, define court hierarchy, and identify an individual's position in society.

The concept of gender in modern linguistics is broader than biological sex and encompasses socially and culturally constructed roles, behavioral norms, and an individual's position within society. In literary and historical texts, gender semantics is often manifested not through the separate words “man” or “woman,” but through titles, kinship terms, occupational designations, forms of address, and units denoting social status.

The research material consisted of the original text of the Baburnama and its English translations. Comparative-analytical, linguocultural, contextual, and translation-transformation methods were employed. The results demonstrate that gender-marked units are not merely nominative devices but also express historical perceptions of social hierarchy, kinship relations, the status of women and men in society, and the court-cultural environment of the Timurid period. In particular, the translation of such units as *begim/begum*, *khanum*, *bibi*, *ag‘acha/agacheh*, *oruk*, and *haram* presents the problem of preserving the cultural component alongside semantic equivalence.

The translation by Beveridge is of particular scholarly significance. She consulted the original Turkic text of the Baburnama and included notes, additions, and an extensive index in her translation. Thackston, in contrast, sought to convey the content and style of the work in a manner that would be as accessible as possible to the modern English-speaking reader.

METHODS

The comprehensive application of several research methods made it possible to reveal not only the lexical meanings of gender-marked units but also their historical and cultural contexts.

First, the **comparative-analytical method** was used to compare units in the original text of the *Baburnama* with their English translations. Particular attention was paid to the translations by Beveridge and Thackston.

Second, **linguocultural analysis** was employed to identify meanings of gender-marked units associated with a particular historical and cultural environment. For example, units such as *begim/begum*, *khanum*, and *bibi* do not merely convey the meanings of “woman” or “lady.” They may also express a particular social status, respect, and position within the court hierarchy.

Third, **contextual analysis** was applied. The meaning of gender-marked units is often determined not only by their lexical form but also by their context. The same unit may acquire different sociocultural and semantic connotations in different contexts.

The theoretical basis of the study consists of scholarly approaches to translation equivalence, the translation of culture-specific units, linguocultural studies, and gender linguistics.

RESULTS

The gender-marked units identified in the Baburnama can conventionally be divided into the following groups:

Group	Main function of the units
Units denoting female status	Expressing the social position of female individuals

Units denoting male status	Indicating the political or social position of male individuals
Kinship units	Expressing relations such as mother, father, sister, brother, and child
Court titles	Indicating the status of women and men within the ruler’s family
Family and domestic units	Referring to the family, household, women, and children
Gender-cultural units	Expressing gender relations characteristic of a particular historical and cultural environment

Among these groups, units denoting the status of women at court are of particular importance. Researchers note that terms such as *begum*, *khanum*, *bibi*, and *agacheh* were used with various social functions in the *Baburnama* and early Mughal sources.

The units *begim/begum* and *khanum* occupy an important position in expressing the social status of women in the *Baburnama*. A significant feature of these units is that translating them simply as “woman” or “lady” does not always ensure full equivalence. This is because *begum* is not merely a designation for a woman from a historical and cultural perspective; it also denotes a social status used in courtly and aristocratic contexts. For example, scholarly literature records female figures such as Bega Begum, Bibi Mubarika Yusufzay, and Bigeh Begum with specific social statuses in the *Baburnama* and related sources.

In translating such units, the strategy of transliteration plus explanation can be considered effective. For example: **begim** → **Begum**. The advantage of this approach is that the historical and cultural unit of the source language is retained. If the translator renders it simply as *lady*, its semantic component associated with historical social status may be partially lost.

Therefore, when translating gender-marked units, it is necessary to consider not only lexical equivalence but also socio-semantic equivalence.

Units expressing kinship relations constitute an important part of the gender system in the *Baburnama*. English units such as *mother*, *father*, *brother*, *sister*, *daughter*, *son*, and *wife* make it possible to express kinship relations in the source text relatively clearly. However, certain historical units cannot be fully represented by a single word in English. For example, the unit *oruk* cannot simply be equated with the concept of “family.” Studies indicate that *oruk* in the Chaghatay-Turkic context may refer to women and children or, in a broader sense, to the household or family sphere. Thus, the gender component of *oruk* is directly dependent on context. Translating it as *family* in every instance may fail to fully convey its social and gender-related characteristics.

The translator therefore faces two major tasks: first, to make the meaning comprehensible to the English-speaking reader; and second, to preserve its historical and cultural characteristics.

One of the most complex gender-cultural units in the *Baburnama* is *haram*. Although the word *harem* exists in modern English, its contemporary cultural associations may not fully correspond to the historical context of the Timurid period.

Historical studies interpret the concept of *haram* as a complex sociocultural notion associated with the women’s quarters of the court, family members, and the household.

Therefore, a contextual approach is more important than simple lexical correspondence when translating this unit. For example, the translation *people of the haram* in certain contexts demonstrates that the term refers not only to a physical space but also to a particular social group. This illustrates the importance of semantic expansion and contextual explicitation as translation strategies.

One of the most complex categories of gender-marked units consists of historical terms denoting the social status of women. *Ag‘acha/agacheh* is one such unit. Failure to take historical context into consideration in translating this term may result in semantic shift. Scholarly literature emphasizes that automatically translating *agacheh* as “concubine” is not always accurate, because such a translation may impose later cultural perceptions onto the earlier historical text.

Therefore, in translating historical gender-related units, it is necessary to distinguish between historical semantics and the associative meanings of modern language.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate three major problems in translating gender-marked units in the Baburnama. The first problem is semantic equivalence. It is not always possible to convey all semantic layers of a source-language unit through a single English equivalent. This is particularly evident in historical titles and kinship units. The second problem is the preservation of the cultural component. Units such as *Begum*, *Khanum*, *bibi*, and *agacheh* embody historical and cultural meanings. Fully naturalizing them into English may reduce the national and cultural coloring of the text. Conversely, transliterating them without explanation may make the text more difficult for the English-speaking reader to understand. The third problem is the transformation of gender semantics. During translation, the component indicating the social status of a woman or man may be lost or generalized.

From this perspective, translation strategies can be characterized as follows:

Translation strategy	Application	Advantage	Limitation
Transliteration	<i>Begum</i> , <i>Khanum</i> and similar units	Preserves cultural coloring	May require explanation
Functional equivalence	<i>wife</i> , <i>mother</i> , <i>daughter</i> and similar units	Makes the meaning clear	May reduce historical coloring
Descriptive translation	Complex historical units	Reveals semantic content	Increases textual length
Explicitation	Culture-specific units	Explains the context	Reduces textual compactness
Generalization	When no precise historical equivalent exists	Facilitates reading	Gender or status component may be lost

A comparison of the translations by Beveridge and Thackston demonstrates that the translator’s historical period and translation purpose have a considerable influence on the strategies employed. Beveridge’s translation shows a stronger tendency toward explaining

historical and cultural details, whereas Thackston’s translation places greater emphasis on accessibility for the modern English-speaking reader. The balance between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence is particularly important in translating gender-marked units. If a translator focuses exclusively on preserving the formal structure, the English-speaking reader may fail to understand the historical context. If the translator relies solely on dynamic equivalence, the gender-related and cultural characteristics of the source text may be lost. Therefore, a combined translation strategy appears to be the most appropriate approach for historical memoir texts such as the Baburnama. In this approach, the key culture-specific unit may be retained through transliteration and supplemented, where necessary, by contextual or explanatory translation. Another important finding is that the translation of gender-marked units is not simply a matter of distinguishing women from men.

CONCLUSION

As an important example of Timurid memoir literature, the Baburnama provides extensive linguistic and cultural material for studying gender relations. The gender-marked units used in the work do not merely nominate female and male individuals; they also express their positions within kinship relations, social structures, and court hierarchy.

The translation of units such as *Begum*, *khanum*, *bibi*, *agacheh*, *oruk*, and *haram* is particularly complex because their meanings cannot be reduced to lexical equivalence alone. Alongside the gender component, these units contain historical, social, and cultural semantics. Consequently, the translation of historical memoir texts requires consideration of the triad of gender semantics + historical context + cultural component. In particular, excessive generalization of terms denoting court titles and the social status of women may lead to the loss of historical hierarchy represented in the source text.

In general, the study of gender-marked units in the Baburnama from the perspective of translation studies contributes not only to a deeper understanding of equivalence in English translations of the work but also to a more comprehensive understanding of the gender, social, and cultural perceptions of the Timurid period. This field may serve as a promising direction for further comparative research involving translations of the Baburnama into other foreign languages, as well as studies of gender metaphors, the discursive representation of female characters, and the preservation of gender identity in translation.

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