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CULTURAL CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING ART CRITICISM TEXTS

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Abstract. This article investigates cultural challenges in translating English art criticism texts into Russian, with particular attention to how evaluative stance, art-historical allusion, and institutional genres are reconfigured in cross-cultural transfer. The study aims to identify recurrent culturally driven translation problems and to outline a framework that preserves the critic's voice while maintaining interpretive responsibility. Methodologically, it combines discourse analysis with comparative translation analysis of a curated corpus of contemporary exhibition reviews, catalogue essays, and museum press releases. The paper's novelty consists in modeling culture-sensitive meaning in art criticism through three interacting dimensions: axiological positioning, intertextual art memory, and genre-institutional conventions, and in linking these dimensions to typical Russian rendering patterns. Practical relevance is demonstrated through decision principles that support terminological coherence, pragmatic adequacy, and stylistic credibility for translators and editors working with art-critical prose.
Keywords: art criticism; cultural transfer; evaluative language; intertextuality; translation strategies; English-Russian translation.

SAN'AT TANQIDI MATNLARINI TARJIMA QILISHDAGI MADANIY MUAMMOLAR

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola ingliz tilidagi san'at tanqidini rus tiliga tarjima qilishda uchraydigan madaniy muammolarni o'rganadi. Unda baholovchi til, san'at tarixiga oid ishoralar va institutsional diskursning turli madaniyatlarda qanday o'zgarishi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi madaniyatga bog'liq takroriy tarjima muammolarini aniqlash hamda tanqidchining uslubini soddalashtirmasdan uni saqlab qolish uchun tahliliy asoslangan yondashuvni taklif etishdir. Metodologik jihatdan ish diskurs tahlili va qiyosiy tarjima tahlilini birlashtiradi hamda zamonaviy ko'rgazma sharhlari, katalog maqolalari va muzey press matnlaridan iborat maxsus korpusga asoslanadi. Tadqiqotning yangiligi san'at tanqididagi madaniyatga xos ma'no qatlamlarini uch o'zaro bog'liq o'lchov orqali ajratib ko'rsatishdan iborat: aksiologik pozitsiya, intertekstual san'at xotirasi va janr-institutsional me'yorlar. Shuningdek, ushbu o'lchovlar rus tiliga xos tarjima yechimlari bilan bog'lanadi. Amaliy ahamiyati esa professional tarjima va tahrir jarayonida terminologik izchillik, pragmatik moslik va uslubiy ishonchlilikni ta'minlovchi qaror qabul qilish tamoyillari tizimi orqali ko'rsatilgan.
Kalit so'zlar: san'at tanqidi; madaniy transfer; baholovchi til; intertekstuality; tarjima strategiyalari; ingliz-rus tarjimasi.

КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ТРУДНОСТИ ПРИ ПЕРЕВОДЕ ТЕКСТОВ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ КРИТИКИ

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются культурные сложности перевода англоязычных текстов художественной критики на русский язык с акцентом на трансформации оценочной лексики, искусствоведческих аллюзий и институционального дискурса. Цель исследования состоит в выявлении повторяющихся культурно обусловленных переводческих проблем и в разработке аналитически обоснованного подхода, позволяющего сохранять авторский голос критика без смыслового уплощения. Методология включает дискурс-анализ и сопоставительный

переводческий анализ специально сформированного корпуса современных рецензий на выставки, текстов каталогов и музейных пресс-материалов. Научная новизна заключается в разграничении культурно специфических смысловых слоёв художественной критики по трём взаимосвязанным измерениям: аксиологическая позиция, интертекстуальная художественная память и жанрово-институциональные конвенции, а также в установлении связи этих измерений с типичными переводческими решениями на русском языке. Практическая значимость подтверждается принципами выбора, обеспечивающими терминологическую точность, прагматическую адекватность и стилистическую достоверность перевода.

Ключевые слова: художественная критика; культурный трансфер; оценочная лексика; интертекстуальность; переводческие стратегии; англо-русский перевод.

INTRODUCTION

Art criticism is a highly culture-saturated form of writing: it does not merely describe artworks but legitimizes judgments, positions audiences, and activates shared art-historical memory through allusions, metaphors, and genre-specific conventions. When such texts move from English into Russian, translation difficulties often arise not at the level of basic denotation but at the level of cultural pragmatics: what counts as persuasive evaluation, what kind of irony is acceptable, how authority is signaled, and how institutional voices sound in museum and gallery communication. The problem is intensified by the hybrid nature of art criticism, which routinely blends aesthetic philosophy, curatorial discourse, market language, and public-facing journalism, each with its own expectations of tone and evidence. Contemporary translation scholarship emphasizes that equivalence in such contexts must be rethought as functional and culturally negotiated rather than strictly lexical, particularly where evaluation and stance are central to meaning[1]. At the same time, research on the translation of culture-specific items shows that omissions and over-explanations are not simply technical choices but interventions into interpretive access and symbolic capital[2]. Within Russian translation studies, art-related discourse is often discussed through the lenses of terminology, style, and genre normativity, yet less attention has been paid to the systematic interaction between cultural evaluation and intertextual references in the specific subgenre of art criticism[3]. From an art-historical perspective, critical writing also operates as a mediator of "art worlds" where conventions of naming, periodization, and value attribution are institutionalized and therefore culturally uneven[4]. The present study addresses this intersection by asking how culturally conditioned meaning layers in English art criticism are transformed in Russian translation, and which translation decisions most strongly affect perceived credibility and interpretive precision.

The purpose of the article is to analyze cultural challenges characteristic of English-to-Russian translation of art criticism texts and to propose an analytical framework that helps translators preserve the critic's evaluative posture and rhetorical integrity while ensuring accessibility for Russian-speaking readers. The objectives are to identify dominant categories of culturally marked content, to describe typical translation patterns and their consequences, and to formulate decision principles for professional practice. The scientific novelty is grounded in treating cultural difficulty not as a list of separate "realia" but as a structured interaction of three dimensions, axiological stance, intertextual art memory, and genre-institutional conventions, which together shape how art criticism persuades. The practical significance lies in the applicability of the framework to translation, editing, and quality assessment in museum publishing, art media, and academic catalogues.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is based on a specialized corpus compiled for analytical purposes, consisting of contemporary English art criticism texts and their published Russian translations, supplemented by parallel texts where multiple Russian versions exist for the same English source. The corpus includes

[1] Baker, M. In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. – London: Routledge, 2018. – P. 360.
[2] Aixelá, J. F. Culture-specific items in translation // Translation, Power, Subversion / R. Alvarez, M. C. A. Vidal (eds.). – Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996. – P. 52–78.
[3] Комиссаров, В. Н. Современное переводоведение. – Москва: ЭТС, 2011. – P. 424.
[4] Becker, H. S. Art Worlds. – Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. – P. 424.

exhibition reviews from major art media, catalogue essays accompanying institutional exhibitions, and museum press releases that employ critical vocabulary while serving promotional and educational functions. This selection reflects the communicative spectrum in which "criticism" often circulates today, from argumentative evaluation to institutional mediation. The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, discourse analysis is applied to the English source texts to identify recurring stance markers, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, metaphorical clusters, and intertextual triggers such as references to movements, canonical works, theory-laden terms, and culture-bound idioms. Second, a comparative translation analysis maps these features to Russian renderings, classifying shifts by type: intensification or mitigation of evaluation, explicitation or implicitness of references, register modulation, and genre re-framing. The methodological rationale follows functionalist translation thinking in which adequacy is measured by communicative purpose and target-culture norms, while still requiring accountability to the interpretive structure of the source[5]. Reliability is strengthened through repeated coding and cross-checking of representative cases across genres, ensuring that the framework is not derived from isolated examples but from patterned behavior in the corpus.

RESULTS

The analysis reveals three dominant clusters of cultural challenges that predict a large portion of translation difficulty in English-to-Russian art criticism. The first cluster concerns axiological stance, that is, how value judgments are linguistically encoded and socially legitimized. English art criticism frequently uses calibrated, hedged evaluation, combining mild adjectives with rhetorical balance and strategic concession, for example through devices such as "quietly radical," "oddly tender," or "refuses easy interpretation." In Russian translations, these stances often shift toward categorical evaluation, either through stronger adjectives, reduced hedging, or syntactic restructuring that foregrounds conclusion over process. A recurrent pattern is the compression of epistemic markers, resulting in statements that sound more authoritative but less dialogic. Another recurrent pattern is the translation of irony and playful skepticism into neutral or solemn tone, especially where English uses understatement as a marker of critical sophistication.

The second cluster concerns intertextual art memory. English art criticism often assumes shared familiarity with a network of references: canonical artists, Anglo-American academic debates, and institution-specific narratives. These references can be explicit, as in naming a movement or theorist, or implicit, as in metaphorical cues that activate prior texts and images. The corpus shows that Russian translations tend to handle explicit references with formal accuracy but vary widely in handling implicit ones. When an English critic invokes, for instance, modernist tropes of "flatness," "index," or "theatricality," the Russian rendering often oscillates between calque-like solutions that preserve terminological form and interpretive paraphrases that domesticate the concept at the cost of theoretical precision. A measurable outcome is terminological dispersion: the same English term may correspond to multiple Russian equivalents across texts, which reduces coherence of the critical discourse in the target culture. The analysis also identifies a common tendency to add brief explanatory elements for references perceived as unfamiliar, but such additions are inconsistent and sometimes shift the rhythm and authority of the original argument.

The third cluster concerns genre-institutional conventions. English art criticism and museum-adjacent writing frequently blends critical observation with institutional politeness, grant-friendly narratives, and audience-inclusive rhetoric. This hybrid voice relies on subtle register switching, where a sentence may move from colloquial immediacy to theoretical abstraction. Russian translations exhibit systematic smoothing: colloquial intensifiers are often removed, and register transitions are leveled toward a uniform "bookish" norm. In press releases and catalogue texts, another pattern appears: the English promotional-evaluative blend may be translated into either overtly promotional Russian, which can sound exaggerated, or overly academic Russian, which can sound detached from public communication. The results indicate that these shifts are not random but correlate with target-culture

[5] Nord, C. Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained. – Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997. – P. 154.

expectations of what museum and criticism language should sound like, producing a different institutional persona in Russian.

Across all three clusters, the corpus shows recurrent micro-level phenomena. Metaphors grounded in everyday English material culture, sport, or legal language are frequently replaced with abstract Russian equivalents, reducing imagery density. Syntactic rhythm changes are common: long English sentences built on coordination and parenthetical qualification are often restructured into Russian sentences with clearer hierarchy, which improves readability but can reduce the performative quality of the critic's hesitation or exploratory thinking. Finally, evaluative collocations tied to Anglo-American critical etiquette, such as praise that is deliberately tempered, are often converted into more direct approval or disapproval, altering the perceived critical distance.

DISCUSSION

The findings align with broader translation research indicating that evaluative and stance-related meaning is among the most culturally sensitive layers of discourse, especially in genres that rely on socialized norms of taste and authority[6]. In English art criticism, persuasion often operates through calibrated uncertainty and the performance of open-ended viewing, whereas Russian critical tradition, especially in institutional settings, more readily tolerates categorical formulations and a declarative authorial posture. The observed shifts toward stronger evaluation can therefore be interpreted as a form of cultural accommodation rather than mere translator "error." Yet accommodation has costs: it may distort the epistemic ethics of the original, where the critic's restraint and self-positioning are integral to meaning and credibility. This suggests that translators should treat hedging and understatement as content, not ornament, and evaluate whether strengthening is justified by target genre constraints or is simply an unconscious normalization.

Intertextual challenges confirm that art criticism functions as a secondary discourse embedded in art-historical narratives and theoretical debates. When culturally anchored conceptual terms are calqued without establishing their place in Russian discourse, translations may become formally faithful but pragmatically opaque. Conversely, when translators over-domesticate theoretical vocabulary, they risk erasing conceptual lineage and misaligning the text with its intellectual context. Prior work on translating culture-specific items highlights the ethical dimension of such decisions, because they regulate access to cultural capital and interpretive tools[7]. The present results refine this point by showing that intertextuality in art criticism is not limited to named references; it also includes metaphoric triggers and genre-coded phrases that signal membership in a critical community. A practical implication is the need for controlled terminological policy within publishing houses and museums, including translation memories and style guides for recurrent theoretical terms, while allowing context-sensitive variation where the English term itself is strategically ambiguous.

Genre-institutional shifts can be interpreted through the sociology of "art worlds," where institutions coordinate conventions of description, evaluation, and audience address[8]. Translating a press text is not only transferring information but re-creating an institutional voice that audiences trust. The corpus indicates that Russian translations frequently re-voice the institution, either making it sound more didactic or more promotional than in the English original. This supports the argument that institutional discourse is culturally authored and that translators act as co-authors of institutional ethos. Functionalist translation theory implies that such re-voicing may be legitimate if the target purpose differs[9], but in many museum and catalogue contexts the purpose is precisely to mediate an international institution's identity. Therefore, uncontrolled register leveling may undermine brand consistency and scholarly credibility.

The study has limitations. The corpus, while diverse in genres, is centered on contemporary texts and primarily reflects mainstream institutional and media channels; avant-garde zines, social-media

[6] Baker, M. In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. – London: Routledge, 2018. – P. 360.
[7] Aixelá, J. F. Culture-specific items in translation // Translation, Power, Subversion / R. Alvarez, M. C. A. Vidal (eds.). – Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996. – P. 52.
[8] Комиссаров, В. Н. Современное переводоведение. – Москва: ЭТС, 2011. – P. 424.
[9] Salomov, G'. M. Tarjima nazariyasi va amaliyoti. – Toshkent: O'qituvchi, 1983. – P. 240.

criticism, and older Soviet-era translation norms are not systematically included. In addition, the analysis focuses on English-Russian directionality; reverse translation and multilingual relay situations common in biennials require separate investigation. Future research could expand the corpus chronologically, incorporate reception studies with Russian readers to measure perceived credibility and accessibility, and model translator decision-making processes through interviews and eye-tracking or keystroke logging. A further promising direction is the development of controlled vocabularies for recurring art-theoretical terms validated by both translators and art historians, which could reduce terminological dispersion without enforcing rigid uniformity.

CONCLUSION

The article demonstrates that cultural challenges in translating English art criticism into Russian are best understood as interactions among axiological stance, intertextual art memory, and genre-institutional conventions. The analysis shows that Russian translations frequently shift calibrated English evaluation toward greater categorical force, reconfigure irony and understatement, and level register transitions that are meaningful for the critic's rhetorical persona. Intertextual references create persistent risk of either opacity through uncontextualized calques or conceptual loss through over-domestication, while institutional genres amplify the stakes by turning translation into a re-voicing of organizational ethos. The proposed three-dimensional framework clarifies where meaning is culturally concentrated and provides a basis for more consistent translation and editing decisions. Overall, preserving the intellectual and stylistic integrity of art criticism in translation requires treating stance, intertextuality, and genre voice as primary semantic components rather than peripheral stylistic features.

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