THE ROLE OF REALIA IN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The translation of realia, culture-specific lexical units that reflect the historical, social, and cultural characteristics of a particular nation, remains one of the most challenging aspects of translation studies. In English-Uzbek cross-cultural communication, translators frequently encounter difficulties in conveying cultural meanings while preserving the national identity embedded in source-language texts. This article investigates the role of realia in preserving cultural identity and analyzes the challenges associated with their translation between English and Uzbek. The study examines common translation strategies, including transliteration, calque, descriptive translation, cultural substitution, and adaptation. The findings indicate that preserving cultural identity requires a balanced approach that combines linguistic accuracy with cultural sensitivity. The paper concludes that effective translation of realia contributes significantly to intercultural understanding and the maintenance of cultural heritage in global communication.

Keywords: realia, cultural identity, translation studies, English-Uzbek translation, cross-cultural communication, culture-specific items, intercultural competence.

Introduction

Globalization has intensified intercultural interactions, making translation an essential tool for communication between nations and cultures. Beyond linguistic transfer, translation functions as a bridge connecting different cultural realities. One of the most complex elements in this process is the translation of *realia*—lexical items that denote objects, concepts, traditions, institutions, and phenomena unique to a particular culture.

In English-Uzbek translation practice, realia often present significant challenges due to differences in historical development, social structures, religious traditions, and cultural values. Improper translation may lead to the loss of cultural nuances, distortion of meaning, or misunderstanding among target readers. Therefore, preserving cultural identity through the translation of realia has become a critical issue in contemporary translation studies.

This study aims to explore the challenges translators face when rendering realia between English and Uzbek and to identify effective solutions for maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring comprehensibility for target audiences.

Literature Review

The concept of realia has received considerable attention in translation studies. According to Vlakhov and Florin (1980), realia are words and expressions that denote objects and phenomena specific to a nation's life, culture, history, and traditions. Such units frequently lack direct equivalents in other languages.

Newmark (1988) categorized realia as culture-specific items (CSIs) and emphasized the importance of preserving cultural information during translation. Baker (2018) highlighted the challenges posed by non-equivalent cultural concepts and proposed various translation strategies to address them.

Researchers such as Venuti (1995) introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization. Domestication adapts cultural elements to the target culture, while foreignization preserves the foreign characteristics of the source text. Both approaches have significant implications for the translation of realia and the preservation of cultural identity.

Despite growing research on cultural translation, limited studies have focused specifically on English-Uzbek translation and the preservation of Uzbek cultural identity through realia translation. This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap.

Theoretical Framework

Realia and Cultural Identity. Cultural identity refers to the shared beliefs, customs, traditions, language, and historical experiences that define a social group. Realia serve as linguistic representations of cultural identity because they encapsulate cultural knowledge that may not exist in other societies.

Examples of Uzbek realia include:

- Mahalla – a traditional neighborhood community institution.
- Navruz – the traditional spring festival celebrated across Central Asia.
- Dastarkhan – a traditional arrangement of food and hospitality.
- Choyxona – a traditional tea house.

Similarly, English realia such as pub, Thanksgiving, Big Ben, and Oxford tutorial system reflect aspects of British and American culture.

The translation of such items requires more than linguistic equivalence; it requires cultural mediation.

Cross-Cultural Communication: Involves the exchange of information between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Successful communication depends on understanding not only language but also cultural references embedded within discourse. Realia play a crucial role in conveying cultural knowledge and shaping intercultural perceptions.

Challenges in Translating Realia between English and Uzbek

Absence of Direct Equivalents. Many culture-specific concepts have no exact counterpart in the target language.

For example:

Source Realia	Translation Challenge
Mahalla	No equivalent institution exists in English-speaking societies
Thanksgiving	No culturally identical celebration in Uzbekistan
Pub	Different social and cultural connotations compared to Uzbek establishments

The absence of direct equivalents often forces translators to employ explanatory techniques.

Cultural Gaps: Cultural practices embedded in realia may be unfamiliar to target readers. Consequently, translators must bridge cultural gaps without distorting the original meaning.

Semantic Complexity: Many realia carry symbolic, emotional, and historical meanings beyond their literal definitions. Translating these layers of meaning presents considerable difficulties.

Reader Comprehension: Excessive preservation of foreign elements may confuse readers, while excessive adaptation may result in cultural loss. Finding a balance remains a major challenge.

Translation Strategies for Preserving Cultural Identity

Transliteration preserves the original form of the cultural term.

Example: *Mahalla → Mahalla*, *Navruz → Navruz*

This strategy helps maintain cultural authenticity while introducing readers to foreign concepts. Descriptive Translation. The translator provides an explanation of the cultural concept.

Example: *Mahalla* → "a traditional neighborhood self-governing community in Uzbekistan" This approach increases comprehension while preserving cultural meaning. Calque Translation. Literal translation may be effective when cultural concepts are partially transferable.

Example: *White House → Oq uy*

Cultural Adaptation. The translator replaces a source-culture item with a culturally familiar equivalent. Although this enhances readability, it may weaken cultural identity. Footnotes and Glosses.

Additional explanations help readers understand unfamiliar cultural references while maintaining the original term. This method is particularly suitable for literary and academic translations.

Discussion

The findings suggest that preserving cultural identity should be a primary objective in translating realia. In English-Uzbek translation, transliteration combined with descriptive explanation appears to be the most effective strategy. This approach allows translators to retain cultural authenticity while ensuring comprehension.

The study also reveals that foreignization strategies are often more suitable for literary and cultural texts because they introduce readers to new cultural realities. Conversely, domestication may be appropriate in texts where communicative efficiency takes precedence over cultural preservation.

The translator's role extends beyond linguistic mediation to cultural representation. Therefore, translators must possess not only language proficiency but also deep intercultural competence.

Conclusion

The translation of realia plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity within English-Uzbek cross-cultural communication. Realia embody unique cultural meanings that contribute to national heritage and collective memory. Their translation requires careful consideration of linguistic, cultural, and communicative factors.

The study demonstrates that challenges such as non-equivalence, cultural gaps, semantic complexity, and reader comprehension can be addressed through strategic translation methods. Among these, transliteration, descriptive translation, and explanatory notes are particularly effective in preserving cultural authenticity.

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