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Qabul qilingan sana: 07.12.2025
Nashr etilgan sana: 30.01.2026

Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Faculty of English Philology, Teaching Methodology,

and Translation Studies Field of Study: Theory and

Practice of Translation 1st-Year Student, Group 101

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TRANSLATION OF HISTORICAL TEXTS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF UZBEK AND WORLD SCHOLARS

Abstract: The translation of historical texts is one of the most complex and responsible areas within the field of translation studies. It requires not only linguistic competence but also profound knowledge of history, culture, and the socio-political background of the original era. This paper explores the main theoretical approaches to the translation of historical documents and literary sources, focusing on both global and Uzbek scholarly contributions. The study emphasizes the challenges of translating archaic language, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific concepts. Furthermore, it discusses the strategies applied by translators to preserve the authenticity and readability of historical texts. Through a comparative analysis of international theories and Uzbek scholars’ experiences, the research aims to identify effective methods that ensure equivalence, cultural fidelity, and the transmission of historical meaning across languages. The paper

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concludes that translating historical texts is not merely a linguistic activity but a cultural mission that bridges civilizations and preserves collective memory.

Keywords: Translation, historical texts, linguistic equivalence, culture, Uzbek scholars, translation theory, interpretation, archaic language

Translation plays a vital role in human civilization, enabling the transfer of ideas, knowledge, and cultural values across time and space. Among the diverse branches of translation studies, the translation of historical texts occupies a special place, as it serves as a bridge connecting modern readers with the intellectual heritage of the past. Historical documents, chronicles, epic poems, and ancient manuscripts carry not only linguistic information but also deep cultural and ideological meanings. Therefore, translating such materials requires exceptional care, sensitivity, and scholarly precision.

The importance of translating historical texts goes beyond mere linguistic conversion. As **Eugene Nida (1964)** [1] stated, *"Translation is not a mere substitution of words, but a recreation of meaning."* This observation underscores the idea that translators act as mediators between civilizations. The translator must balance fidelity to the source text with clarity and accessibility for modern readers. When dealing with ancient or medieval materials, the translator faces additional difficulties such as obsolete vocabulary, non-standardized grammar, and concepts that may no longer exist in the target culture.

Over the past decades, both Western and Uzbek scholars have made significant contributions to the study of historical text translation. Internationally, theorists like **J.C. Catford**[2], **Lawrence Venuti**[3], and **Susan Bassnett**[4] have explored

[1] Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

[2] Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Catford, J. C. (1965). *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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linguistic equivalence, cultural adaptation, and the ethics of translation. In Uzbekistan, scholars such as **Shavkat Rahmatullayev**[5] , **Abduaziz Abduazizov**,[6] and literary figures like **G‘afur G‘ulom**[7] have played an essential role in developing the theory and practice of translation, particularly in rendering classical and historical works such as *“Boburnoma”*, *“Avesto”*, and *“Alpomish.”*

The present paper aims to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical challenges involved in translating historical texts, drawing upon the contributions of both world and Uzbek scholars. It will examine various translation strategies, explore the difficulties inherent in historical translation, and discuss case studies that illustrate how translators maintain the delicate balance between accuracy and artistic interpretation. By doing so, the study highlights the role of translation in preserving the continuity of human culture and history.

The translation of historical texts has long been considered a central issue within translation studies, combining linguistic theory with cultural, historical, and philosophical reflection. The theoretical foundation for analyzing historical translation rests on several key concepts: *equivalence*, *adequacy*, *cultural context*, and *interpretation*.

The notion of **equivalence**—that a translation should convey the same meaning as the original—has been one of the most debated topics in translation theory. According to **Eugene Nida (1964)**, there are two main types of equivalence: *formal equivalence*, which emphasizes fidelity to the linguistic form of the source text, and *dynamic equivalence*, which focuses on the impact of the message on the

[4] Susan Bassnett (born 1945) is a British scholar, translator, and one of the most influential figures in modern translation studies.
[5] Rahmatullayev, Sh. (1987). “*Til va Tarjima”* [Language and Translation]. Tashkent: Teacher

[6] Abduazizov, A. (1996). *Linguistics and Translation Theory in Uzbek Context*. Tashkent State University Press.

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target audience. Nida's theory is particularly relevant for historical texts, as literal adherence to archaic structures often makes the translation incomprehensible to modern readers. Therefore, translators must prioritize the communicative function of the text while preserving its historical integrity.

Similarly, **J. C. Catford (1965)** introduced the concept of *linguistic translation equivalence*, emphasizing that translation involves the replacement of textual material in one language with equivalent textual material in another. Catford also pointed out the existence of *translation shifts*, which occur when structures or meanings cannot be directly transferred between languages. In historical translations, such shifts are unavoidable because the source languages often contain outdated syntactic forms or culture-specific terms that lack direct counterparts in the target language.

Later theorists such as **Roman Jakobson (1959)**[8] expanded the understanding of translation by identifying three types: *intralingual* (within the same language), *interlingual* (between different languages), and *intersemiotic* (between verbal and non-verbal sign systems). Translating historical documents often involves elements of all three types, as translators must interpret linguistic forms, contextual symbols, and sometimes even visual or ritual elements embedded in the text.

The translation of historical texts also requires a careful consideration of the **cultural context**. As **Susan Bassnett (1980)** argued, every translation is an act of cultural negotiation. A translator must navigate between the linguistic norms of the source text and the cultural expectations of the target audience. This is especially critical when dealing with sacred or classical texts that hold ideological or national significance. For instance, the translation of ancient chronicles or religious writings

[8] Jakobson, R. (1959). *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*. In R. A. Brower (Ed.), *On Translation* (pp. 232–239). Harvard University Press.

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demands a respectful and scholarly approach that preserves both linguistic nuance and cultural depth.

Lawrence Venuti (1995)**'s** concepts of *domestication* and *foreignization* are particularly useful in historical text translation. *Domestication* makes a text more accessible to target readers by adapting it to their cultural framework, whereas *foreignization* retains the unique features of the source culture to emphasize its difference. Translators of historical texts often employ a balanced approach, choosing to domesticate linguistic forms while preserving foreign cultural elements to maintain authenticity. As Venuti observed, *"Every translation is an interpretation, and every interpretation is a form of rewriting."*

In summary, the theoretical basis for translating historical texts lies in the interplay between linguistic precision and cultural understanding. The translator's task is not only to transfer meaning but also to reconstruct the intellectual and emotional landscape of the past. The next section explores how world scholars have applied these theories in practice and how their contributions have shaped modern approaches to historical translation.

The development of translation theory has been profoundly influenced by a number of international scholars whose research has provided essential frameworks for translating historical materials. Their ideas have contributed to the balance between linguistic analysis and cultural interpretation in translation practice.

Eugene Nida is one of the foundational figures in modern translation theory. His work *"Toward a Science of Translating"* (1964) introduced the principles of dynamic and formal equivalence, reshaping how translators approach religious and historical texts. Nida emphasized the importance of *receptor response*—that the translation should evoke the same understanding and emotional effect as the original. His insights have been particularly influential in the translation of ancient

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religious texts such as the *Bible*, where linguistic fidelity and cultural sensitivity are equally essential.

J. C. Catford, in his book *"A Linguistic Theory of Translation"* (1965), contributed a structural-linguistic perspective. His analysis of translation shifts has been widely used to explain why certain linguistic forms cannot be directly reproduced in another language. This approach is valuable for translators of historical texts, who often face obsolete grammatical structures and expressions that no longer exist in modern languages.

Roman Jakobson's theory of intersemiotic translation expanded the field's scope beyond words. When translating ancient manuscripts that include symbols, metaphors, or visual elements, translators engage in an interpretive process that bridges linguistic and semiotic systems. Jakobson's framework highlights the interdisciplinary nature of historical translation.

Susan Bassnett further enriched translation studies by situating translation within the field of cultural studies. Her influential work *"Translation Studies"* (1980) argues that translation cannot be understood solely in linguistic terms; it must also consider cultural, ideological, and historical dimensions. This perspective is crucial for translating historical texts, as each document reflects the worldview and values of its time.

Lawrence Venuti, a key contemporary theorist, introduced the ethical dimension of translation. In *"The Translator's Invisibility"* (1995), Venuti emphasized that translators inevitably leave their mark on the text. His advocacy for *foreignization* urges translators to preserve the uniqueness of the source culture instead of fully adapting it to the target language. This principle aligns closely with the goals of historical translation, which aims to retain the authenticity and strangeness of the past rather than smoothing it into modern familiarity.

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Together, these scholars have laid the theoretical foundation that guides translators in handling historical materials with both accuracy and sensitivity. Their ideas form a bridge between linguistic precision and cultural empathy—an equilibrium that lies at the heart of every successful translation of historical texts.

While much of modern translation theory originated in the West, Uzbek scholars have also made valuable contributions to the study and practice of translating historical texts. Their work reflects the unique linguistic and cultural heritage of Central Asia, where Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Russian influences have intertwined over centuries. The process of translating historical documents in Uzbekistan has been closely tied to the nation's efforts to preserve and reinterpret its cultural memory.

One of the pioneering figures in Uzbek translation studies is **Professor Shavkat Rahmatullayev**, whose works on linguistic theory and translation methodology laid the foundation for academic translation research in Uzbekistan. Rahmatullayev emphasized the interconnection between language, culture, and worldview in translation. In his book *"Til va Tarjima"* ("Language and Translation", 1987), he wrote: *"Tarjima jarayoni — bu ikki madaniyat o'rtasidagi ko'prikdir"* ("The process of translation is a bridge between two cultures"). His research established that the translator is not only a linguistic mediator but also a cultural interpreter responsible for transmitting national identity and historical values across languages.

Another notable scholar, **Professor Abduaziz Abduazizov**, contributed significantly to the development of modern translation theory in Uzbekistan. His works explored the relationship between semantics, pragmatics, and cultural context in translation. Abduazizov argued that the translator must grasp not only the lexical meaning of historical texts but also the author's intention, emotional tone, and ideological background. This approach has proven particularly useful in

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translating ancient Uzbek and Persian chronicles, where context and nuance carry as much meaning as words themselves.

In addition to linguists, prominent Uzbek literary figures have made substantial contributions to the translation of classical and historical texts. **G‘afur G‘ulom**, a renowned writer and translator, played a pioneering role in rendering world literature into Uzbek and Uzbek classics into other languages. His translations of *Pushkin*, *Shakespeare*, and *Navoiy* are celebrated for their ability to convey not only linguistic accuracy but also the aesthetic and philosophical depth of the originals. G‘ulom once noted: *“A translator must hear the heartbeat of the author through the words.”* This poetic vision underscores the emotional and artistic dimensions of translation, which are especially critical when dealing with historical literature.

Uzbek scholars and translators have also played a vital role in preserving national epics and historical sources. The translation of **“Boburnoma”** (The Memoirs of Babur) into English, Russian, and modern Uzbek has been a cornerstone in introducing Central Asian history to the world. Similarly, the rendering of **“Avesto”** (the ancient Zoroastrian scripture) and **“Alpomish”** (the Uzbek heroic epic) has contributed to global understanding of the region’s ancient cultural identity. These translation projects, often led by Uzbek academics and linguists, demonstrate a commitment not only to linguistic precision but also to cultural preservation.

The collective efforts of Uzbek scholars reveal a translation philosophy that values *balance*—between fidelity and creativity, between national identity and global understanding. Their contributions have enriched both the theory and practice of historical translation, establishing Uzbekistan as an important voice in the international dialogue on intercultural communication.

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Translating historical texts is one of the most demanding and intellectually challenging tasks in the field of translation. Unlike contemporary literature, historical materials are often shaped by linguistic evolution, socio-political contexts, and cultural codes that may be unfamiliar to modern audiences. The translator must act as a historian, linguist, and cultural anthropologist simultaneously.

Historical documents frequently contain archaic words and expressions that have fallen out of use. For instance, terms found in medieval chronicles or ancient religious texts may have no direct equivalents in modern languages. Translators often face the dilemma of whether to retain these words in their original form (to preserve authenticity) or replace them with contemporary equivalents (to ensure comprehensibility).

As **Catford (1965)** observed, translation shifts are inevitable when the structures of two languages diverge significantly. In the case of Uzbek and English translations, the problem becomes more complex due to differences in grammatical systems, morphological structures, and historical terminology.

Historical texts are deeply embedded in their cultural and ideological environments. Translating them requires not only linguistic accuracy but also a deep understanding of the customs, beliefs, and values of the source culture. For instance, ancient Uzbek, Persian, or Arabic texts often refer to cultural concepts such as *“navro‘z,” “mehnat,” “haq,”* or *“taqdir,”* which carry philosophical meanings beyond literal translation. Translators must find creative ways to convey these cultural nuances without distorting the original intent.

As **Lawrence Venuti (1995)** suggests, translators can adopt either a *foreignizing* or *domesticating* strategy. When dealing with historical materials, the foreignizing method is often preferable, as it preserves the authenticity of the source culture and educates the target audience about its uniqueness.

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Historical texts often employ long, complex sentences and rhetorical structures that differ significantly from modern writing conventions. Translators must decide whether to preserve these structures or to simplify them for modern readers. While simplification improves readability, excessive modernization risks losing the stylistic flavor of the original.

This challenge is particularly evident in translations of *Navoiy's* poetic works or *Bobur's* memoirs, where classical syntax and rhythm are integral to meaning. Maintaining poetic or rhetorical style while achieving clarity requires both linguistic mastery and artistic sensitivity.

Another major challenge is the problem of *untranslatability*. Certain words or concepts refer to realities that do not exist in the target culture. For example, terms like *"so'fi," "bek," "mirshab,"* or *"madrasah"* have rich historical connotations in Uzbek culture that cannot be easily captured in English. In such cases, translators often use footnotes, glossaries, or contextual explanations to bridge the gap between cultures.

Finally, translators must handle sensitive historical materials with scholarly objectivity. Many historical texts reflect the political or religious ideologies of their time. Misinterpretation or biased translation can distort historical truth. Therefore, the translator must maintain a neutral stance and ensure that the translation reflects both accuracy and respect for the original author's worldview.

In conclusion, Uzbek scholars' contributions and the challenges discussed above demonstrate that translating historical texts is not simply an act of linguistic transfer—it is a process of *cultural reconstruction*. Each translation breathes new life into the past, allowing it to speak again in the language of the present.

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