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INTERPRETATION OF TERMINOLOGICAL UNITS IN GUIDE-INTERPRETER ACTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

The present article investigates the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms underlying the interpretation of terminological units within guide-interpreter activity. Tourism discourse is characterised by a dense concentration of culturally marked terms, realia, historical designations, and specialised nomenclature that pose significant challenges for simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. Drawing on corpus-based analysis of authentic guide texts and translation studies theory, this study examines the principal strategies employed by guide-interpreters when rendering terminological units across English, Russian, and Uzbek, with particular attention to cultural adaptation, loan translation, descriptive equivalence, and functional substitution. The findings demonstrate that successful terminological interpretation depends not only on linguistic competence but also on encyclopaedic knowledge, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and situational pragmatics. The article contributes to the theoretical foundations of tourism translation studies and offers practical guidelines for professional guide-interpreter training.

Keywords: guide-interpreter, terminology, terminological units, tourism discourse, translation strategies, cultural equivalence, realia, interpretation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the global economy, and the guide-interpreter occupies a unique professional position at the intersection of linguistics, cultural mediation, and hospitality. Unlike literary translators or conference interpreters, guide-interpreters operate in real-time, face-to-face contexts where terminological precision must coexist with communicative fluency and cultural accessibility. The growing internationalisation of heritage tourism — particularly in countries with rich civilisational legacies such as Uzbekistan — has underscored the need for systematic investigation into how terminological units are interpreted in this specialised professional domain [1].

Terminological units constitute the conceptual backbone of any domain-specific discourse. In the context of guide-interpreter activity, they encompass historical designations (e.g., iwan, peshtak, madrasah), cultural realia (e.g., suzani, plov, dasturkhon), architectural nomenclature, administrative titles, and religious terminology. Each of these categories presents specific interpretive challenges that differ substantially from those encountered in general-purpose translation [2].

The purpose of the present article is threefold: (1) to define and classify the categories of terminological units most frequently encountered in guide-interpreter activity; (2) to analyse the principal interpretation strategies applied to such units in practice; and (3) to evaluate the theoretical and methodological implications of these strategies for translator training and tourism discourse studies. The research draws on the theoretical frameworks of V.N. Komissarov, P. Newmark, R. Jakobson, and A.D. Schweitzer, as well as empirical material from authentic guide scripts, museum commentary texts, and UNESCO heritage site descriptions [3].

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The Concept of Terminological Unit in Linguistic Theory

A terminological unit (TU) is defined as a lexical item or multiword expression that denotes a specialised concept within a particular field of knowledge or professional activity [4]. According to D.S. Lotte, terminology is distinguished from general vocabulary by its systematic character, semantic precision, stylistic neutrality, and the tendency toward univocal reference [5]. In contrast to common words, terminological units are ideally monosemantic within their domain: a given term should correspond to exactly one concept, and each concept should be expressed by exactly one term.

However, as B.N. Golovin and R.Yu. Kobrin have demonstrated, terminological practice frequently deviates from this ideal [6]. Polysemy, synonymy, and homonymy are not uncommon in specialised vocabularies, particularly in fields with prolonged historical development. Tourism terminology is especially susceptible to such variation because it is formed at the intersection of multiple source domains — history, art, religion, ethnography, gastronomy — and is frequently shaped by the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of both the speaker and the audience.

2.2. Guide-Interpreter Activity as a Specialised Communicative Situation

Guide-interpreter activity represents a distinctive mode of communicative mediation. Unlike standard conference interpretation, it combines elements of monologic narration, dialogic explanation, and cultural pedagogy. The guide-interpreter does not merely transfer information between linguistic systems; they also serve as a cultural broker, adapting the cognitive and emotional significance of cultural artefacts for a target audience that may possess radically different cultural schemata [7].

From a pragmatic perspective, guide-interpreter discourse is characterised by what Grice terms cooperative communication [8]: the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner all operate, but they do so within constraints imposed by time pressure, the cognitive load of simultaneous speaking and moving, and the need to maintain audience engagement. Terminological units, in this context, function not merely as denotative labels but as indices of cultural depth and scholarly authority, signalling the guide's expertise while also potentially alienating lay audiences if handled inappropriately.

V.N. Komissarov's concept of communicative equivalence is particularly relevant here [9]. The goal of interpretation is not always formal linguistic correspondence; rather, it is the production of a target-language text that achieves the same communicative effect as the source. For terminological units, this means that the guide-interpreter must assess whether the term should be (a) borrowed with explication, (b) translated by functional equivalent, (c) rendered through descriptive paraphrase, or (d) culturally adapted.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGICAL UNITS IN GUIDE-INTERPRETER DISCOURSE

3.1. Culturally Marked Terms and Realia

Realia constitute the most challenging category of terminological units for guide-interpreters. Following S. Vlakhov and S. Florin, realia are defined as words and word combinations of popular speech designating objects, phenomena, and concepts that are characteristic of the lifestyle, culture, social development, or historical peculiarities of one

people, which are foreign to another people [10]. For Uzbek guide-interpreters working with English-speaking tourists, realia include architectural terms (gumbaz, iwan, muqarnas, girikhs), social-historical designations (khokim, mirza, qushbegi), textile arts (ikat, suzani, atlas), and culinary terms (plov, samsa, shurpa, non).

The primary difficulty with realia is the absence of denotative equivalents in the target language. No English word captures the full semantic and cultural content of suzani (a type of embroidered textile of ritual-domestic significance in Central Asian societies). The guide-interpreter must choose between transliteration, descriptive paraphrase, or functional analogy, each of which entails different trade-offs between precision and accessibility [11].

3.2. Architectural and Artistic Terminology

Architectural terminology represents a second major category. Terms such as peshtak (monumental portal), muqarnas (stalactite vaulting), gumbaz (dome), and minaret (tower) are of Arabic, Persian, or Turkic origin and have varying degrees of currency in European languages. While minaret has been fully integrated into English and most European languages, peshtak and muqarnas remain specialist art-historical terms requiring explication for general audiences [12].

A significant interpretive challenge arises from the fact that many architectural terms are not stable across scholarly traditions. The same feature may be designated differently by Arabist, Iranist, and Turkologist traditions, and the guide-interpreter must navigate these terminological variants in real time.

3.3. Religious and Historical Terminology

Religious terminology presents particular challenges because of its ideological sensitivity. Terms such as waqf, fatwa, ulema, madrasa, imam, muezzin are widely borrowed into English but carry nuanced connotations in their original cultural contexts that may be misunderstood or stereotyped by target audiences. The guide-interpreter must balance informational accuracy with cultural respect, avoiding both oversimplification and inadvertent offence [13].

Historical titles and administrative designations constitute a further subcategory. Rendering Timurid-era titles such as amir, sultan, khan, mirza, biy for Western audiences requires both philological accuracy and contextualisation within the broader medieval Islamicate political tradition. Inappropriate equivalences — for instance, translating khan simply as 'king' — can produce anachronistic and culturally distorted representations [14].

4. INTERPRETATION STRATEGIES FOR TERMINOLOGICAL UNITS

4.1. Transliteration with Contextual Explication

Transliteration is the most frequently employed strategy for culturally unique realia and architectural terms. The guide-interpreter borrows the source-language term phonologically and supplements it with a brief explicatory gloss. For example: "The central hall features a remarkable muqarnas — an intricate honeycomb vaulting characteristic of Islamic architecture, created by subdividing the surface into hundreds of tiny prismatic niches." This strategy preserves the authenticity of the term while ensuring communicative accessibility [15].

P. Newmark's framework of communicative versus semantic translation is directly applicable here [16]. Transliteration with explication represents a hybrid strategy: the semantic layer is preserved through the retention of the source-language signifier, while communicative effectiveness is secured through the explicatory gloss. The optimal length and depth of the gloss depends on audience characteristics, temporal constraints, and the centrality of the term to the tour narrative.

4.2. Functional Equivalence

Functional equivalence involves replacing a source-language term with a target-language expression that fulfils a similar function within the target culture, even if the denotative content differs. For example, caravanserai may be rendered as 'inn' or 'trade hostelry' for audiences

unfamiliar with the Silk Road context, though both equivalents lose the specific architectural, commercial, and cultural connotations of the original [17].

Following E. Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence, functional equivalence prioritises the effect of the message over the form of its expression [18]. This is particularly appropriate when the guide-interpreter is addressing a lay audience with limited specialist knowledge, and when the primary goal is to convey the historical or cultural significance of a site rather than its precise technical classification.

4.3. Descriptive Paraphrase

Descriptive paraphrase involves replacing a term with a noun phrase that defines or describes the referent. This strategy is employed when both transliteration and functional equivalence are deemed inadequate — typically for terms that are highly specialised, culturally specific, and not established in the target language. For instance, the Uzbek term ganchkori (the technique of ornamental carving in alabaster gypsum) might be rendered as 'carved alabaster plasterwork decoration' when a single-word equivalent is unavailable [19].

A disadvantage of descriptive paraphrase is verbosity: extended descriptions can disrupt the narrative flow of the guided tour and, if overused, may signal the guide-interpreter's uncertainty rather than expertise. Skilled guide-interpreters therefore tend to use descriptive paraphrase selectively, reserving it for terms of high cultural significance where precision is paramount.

4.4. Loan Translation (Calque)

Loan translation or calque involves translating the constituent morphemes of a compound term individually to produce a target-language neologism. This strategy is particularly effective for compound architectural or decorative terms: ko'k tosh (literally 'blue stone', i.e., lapis lazuli) may be calqued as 'blue stone' with a subsequent gloss. Similarly, Registon (from Persian, literally 'sandy place') has been retained in English as a proper noun but is often glossed as 'the central square' or 'the public square' [20].

4.5. Cultural Adaptation and Neutralisation

Cultural adaptation involves modifying a term or its explicatory context to align with the cultural knowledge framework of the target audience. This is a higher-order interpretive operation that goes beyond simple lexical substitution. For example, when describing the role of the madrasah in medieval Central Asian society, a guide-interpreter may draw an analogy with the European university to facilitate cognitive accessibility: "The madrasah functioned as the university of its time — a centre of theological, philosophical, and scientific education." [21].

Neutralisation, conversely, involves removing culturally specific elements to produce a semantically reduced but pragmatically functional target-language expression. This strategy carries the risk of cultural impoverishment and is generally considered a last resort. However, in contexts where the guide-interpreter is addressing a highly mixed-competence audience, controlled neutralisation may be preferable to prolonged explication.

5. COGNITIVE AND PRAGMATIC DIMENSIONS OF TERMINOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of terminological units is not merely a lexical operation; it is fundamentally a cognitive and pragmatic one. From a cognitive standpoint, the guide-interpreter must manage the simultaneous activation of multiple knowledge domains: the source-language cultural frame, the target-language cultural frame, and the situational context of the tour. This constitutes what Setton terms 'model-building' in interpretation — the continuous construction and revision of a mental representation of the discourse that integrates linguistic, encyclopaedic, and situational information [22].

From a pragmatic standpoint, the choice of interpretation strategy is governed by an assessment of audience characteristics, communicative goals, and contextual constraints. As House has argued, pragmatic equivalence requires not just the transfer of propositional content

but the alignment of illocutionary force [23]. A term rendered with excessive technical precision may achieve semantic accuracy but fail pragmatically if it alienates a lay audience. Conversely, over-simplified functional equivalents may sacrifice the cultural depth that gives the guided tour its distinctive educational and aesthetic value.

Research conducted by the Uzbek State Institute of Arts and Culture and the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages has identified encyclopaedic knowledge as the single most significant predictor of terminological interpretation quality among student guide-interpreters [24]. Linguistic competence alone is insufficient; the guide-interpreter must possess deep background knowledge of history, art history, architecture, religious studies, and ethnography in order to select contextually appropriate interpretive strategies.

6. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: CASE STUDIES

6.1. Case Study 1: The Term iwan in Architecture

The term iwan (also eivan, eyvan) designates a vaulted hall or space walled on three sides and open on one side to a courtyard. It is one of the fundamental spatial elements of Islamic architecture and is a prominent feature of the major monuments of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Analysis of 47 authentic English-language guided tour transcripts from UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan revealed that the term was handled in the following ways: transliteration with full architectural explication (68%), functional translation as 'vaulted portal hall' (19%), descriptive paraphrase (9%), and omission (4%) [25].

The predominance of transliteration reflects the growing currency of iwan as an established art-historical term in English-language scholarship. However, the high proportion of accompanying explications indicates that guide-interpreters recognise that the term remains opaque to general audiences and requires contextualisation.

6.2. Case Study 2: Culinary Terminology

Culinary terminology presents a distinct interpretive profile. Terms such as plov, samsa, chuchvara, lag‘mon, shurpa are increasingly recognised internationally due to the growth of culinary tourism and Central Asian diaspora communities. However, analysis of restaurant and bazaar tour commentary texts indicates considerable variation in interpretive strategy: transliteration (52%), functional equivalence (31%), descriptive paraphrase (14%), and calque (3%) [26].

An important finding in this case study was the role of sensory description in terminological explication. Effective guide-interpreters frequently supplemented terminological introduction with multimodal reference (visual, olfactory, tactile), leveraging the experiential context of the bazaar environment to convey cultural meaning beyond what purely verbal strategies could achieve. This finding suggests that guide-interpreter training should incorporate multimodal communicative competence alongside purely linguistic skills.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR GUIDE-INTERPRETER TRAINING

The findings of this research have several significant implications for the professional training of guide-interpreters. First, terminological preparation must be systematised and domain-specific. Generic translation training is insufficient; guide-interpreter programmes should include specialised modules covering architectural terminology, art history, Islamic studies, ethnography, and culinary culture, with explicit attention to interpretation strategies for each category [27].

Second, the importance of audience assessment must be emphasised in training. The guide-interpreter who applies the same terminological strategy irrespective of audience characteristics will frequently achieve suboptimal results. Training should develop the skill of rapid audience profiling — assessing educational background, cultural familiarity, and information needs — and adapting interpretive strategies accordingly.

Third, the development of glossaries and terminological databases specific to Uzbek cultural heritage would substantially support guide-interpreter practice. A systematic, multilingual (Uzbek-English-Russian-Chinese-German-French) glossary of architectural, historical, and ethnographic terms, with recommended interpretive strategies for different audience types, would constitute a valuable professional resource. Such a resource is partially available through UNESCO's documentation for Uzbekistan's World Heritage sites but remains unsystematically compiled and unevenly distributed among practitioners [28].

8. CONCLUSION

This article has examined the interpretation of terminological units in guide-interpreter activity, focusing on the categories of terms most frequently encountered in tourism discourse and the strategies employed for their rendering. The analysis has demonstrated that guide-interpreter terminology is characterised by cultural specificity, domain plurality, and high communicative stakes, making it a particularly demanding interpretive environment.

Five principal interpretation strategies have been identified and analysed: transliteration with explication, functional equivalence, descriptive paraphrase, loan translation (calque), and cultural adaptation. Each strategy involves distinct trade-offs between terminological precision and communicative accessibility, and the optimal strategy in any given instance depends on the nature of the term, the characteristics of the target audience, and the pragmatic goals of the guided tour.

The research confirms that terminological interpretation in guide-interpreter activity is not reducible to lexicographic lookup but requires the integration of linguistic competence, encyclopaedic knowledge, cultural mediation skills, and situational pragmatics. These findings have direct implications for guide-interpreter training and for the development of specialised terminological resources in the tourism sector.

Future research should investigate the effects of digital technologies — augmented reality, AI-assisted interpretation tools, and real-time terminological databases — on guide-interpreter terminological practice, as well as the specific interpretive challenges posed by the expansion of heritage tourism to new source markets such as China, India, and South Korea.

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