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TRANSLATING UZBEK CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS INTO ENGLISH: A DECISION MODEL BASED ON AIXELÁ'S TAXONOMY

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Abstract. Uzbek texts contain many culture-specific items (CSIs) with no direct English equivalent: food (osh, somsa, sumalak), clothing (do'ppi, chopon), social institutions (mahalla, choyxona, hashar), ceremonies (to'y, beshik to'y, nahor oshi) and forms of address (aka, opa, domla). Translation students in Uzbek universities often treat these items inconsistently, sometimes transliterating, sometimes replacing them with a loose English equivalent, and sometimes omitting them. This article reviews approaches to culture-specific items in translation studies, including Vlahov and Florin's work on realia, Newmark's cultural categories, Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization, and Aixelá's taxonomy of strategies. It applies Aixelá's taxonomy to typical Uzbek CSIs and proposes a decision model based on three questions: Is the item central to the text's meaning? Is it known to the target reader? Does the text type favour local colour or fluency? An illustrative analysis and classroom exercises for translation courses complete the article.

Keywords: culture-specific items, realia, translation strategies, domestication, foreignization, Uzbek–English translation, translator training

O'ZBEK MILLIY-MADANIY XOS BIRLIKLARINI INGLIZ TILIGA TARJIMA QILISH: AIXELÁ TAKSONOMIYASIGA ASOSLANGAN QAROR QABUL QILISH MODELI

Annotatsiya. Maqolada o'zbek matnlaridagi milliy-madaniy xos birliklarni (osh, mahalla, to'y, do'ppi va boshqalar) ingliz tiliga tarjima qilish masalasi Aixelá taksonomiyasi asosida ko'rib chiqiladi. Birlikning matndagi ahamiyati, kitobxonga tanishligi va matn turiga asoslangan uch savollik qaror qabul qilish modeli hamda tarjima mashg'ulotlari uchun mashqlar taklif etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: milliy-madaniy xos birliklar, realiya, tarjima strategiyalari, domestikatsiya, forenizatsiya, o'zbek-ingliz tarjimasi

ПЕРЕВОД УЗБЕКСКИХ КУЛЬТУРНО-СПЕЦИФИЧЕСКИХ ЕДИНИЦ НА АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК: МОДЕЛЬ ПРИНЯТИЯ РЕШЕНИЙ НА ОСНОВЕ ТАКСОНОМИИ АЙШЕЛА

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается перевод узбекских культурно-специфических единиц (реалий) на английский язык на основе таксономии Айшела. Предлагается модель принятия решений, основанная на трёх вопросах (значимость единицы в тексте, знакомство читателя, тип текста), и упражнения для курсов перевода.

Ключевые слова: культурно-специфические единицы, реалии, стратегии перевода, доместикация, форенизация, узбекско-английский перевод

INTRODUCTION

A student translating a short Uzbek text for a tourism brochure meets the sentence Mahalla ahli hasharga chiqib, choyxonani ta'mirladi. A literal rendering, The neighbourhood residents went out to a hashar and repaired the teahouse, preserves the words but may leave an English reader puzzled. A fluent rendering, Local residents volunteered to repair the community café, reads easily but loses three culturally significant concepts. Which is better? That depends on the purpose of the text, its reader and how much each item matters.

Such items are known in translation studies as culture-specific items, realia or culture-bound terms. They are one of the classic problems of translation, discussed in Russian-language translation theory since Vlahov and Florin [1] and in English-language translation studies by Newmark [2], Venuti [3] and Aixelá [4], among others. Uzbek translation scholarship has paid attention to realia, especially in literary translation, but students rarely have a systematic procedure for deciding how to treat them.

This article offers such a procedure. It reviews the main approaches, applies Aixelá's [4] taxonomy to Uzbek CSIs and proposes a decision model for translation courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Realia and cultural categories

Vlahov and Florin [1] defined realia as words denoting objects, concepts and phenomena characteristic of a people's way of life, culture and history, which have no exact equivalents in other languages. They classified realia into subject groups (everyday life, geography, social and political life) and discussed translation methods such as transcription, calque, approximate translation and description. Newmark [2] proposed similar cultural categories: ecology, material culture (food, clothes, houses), social culture, organisations and customs, and gestures and habits. He listed translation procedures including transference (borrowing), cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent and couplet (combining two procedures).

Domestication and foreignization

Venuti [3] distinguished two broad orientations. Domestication brings the text closer to the target reader by replacing foreign elements with familiar ones, producing fluent translations in which the translator is "invisible". Foreignization keeps foreign elements and signals the text's origin, inviting the reader to encounter difference. Venuti criticised the dominance of domestication in English-language publishing as a form of cultural erasure. For translators from

Uzbek, this distinction raises a practical and ethical question: should Uzbek culture be made familiar or made visible?

Aixelá's taxonomy

Aixelá [4] defined CSIs as items whose function and connotations in the source text create a translation problem because they do not exist, or have a different value, in the target culture. He proposed a taxonomy of strategies on a scale from conservation to substitution:

• **Conservation:** repetition (keeping the item as it is), orthographic adaptation (transliteration), linguistic (non-cultural) translation, extratextual gloss (footnote, glossary), intratextual gloss (explanation within the text).

• **Substitution:** synonymy, limited universalisation (a more familiar item from the source culture), absolute universalisation (a neutral item), naturalisation (a target-culture item), deletion, autonomous creation.

Davies [5] applied a similar set of strategies to the translations of the Harry Potter books and showed that translators often combine strategies and that consistency across a text matters.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Aixelá's [4] taxonomy is applied here to a set of typical Uzbek CSIs grouped by Newmark's [2] categories. For each item, possible English renderings were constructed and classified by strategy. The items and renderings are illustrative, chosen to represent frequent problems in student translations. Based on the analysis and on the literature, a three-question decision model was developed. The model is intended for translation teaching and for consistent decision-making by novice translators.

RESULTS

Typical Uzbek CSIs by category

Table 1. Uzbek culture-specific items and possible English renderings

Category	Uzbek item	Conservation (with gloss)	Substitution
Food	osh	osh (rice pilaf with meat and carrots)	pilaf (limited universalisation); rice dish (absolute universalisation)
Food	somsa	somsa (baked meat pastry)	meat pie (naturalisation)
Clothing	do‘ppi	doppi (embroidered skullcap)	skullcap (absolute universalisation)
Clothing	chopon	chapan (quilted robe)	robe, coat
Social institution	mahalla	mahalla (neighbourhood community)	neighbourhood, local community
Social practice	hashar	hashar (communal voluntary work)	volunteering, community work day
Place	choyxona	choyxona (traditional teahouse)	teahouse, café
Ceremony	to‘y	to‘y (wedding or family celebration)	wedding, celebration

Category	Uzbek item	Conservation (with gloss)	Substitution
Ceremony	nahor oshi	nahor oshi (morning pilaf served to guests at a celebration)	morning feast
Address	aka, opa	aka (elder brother; respectful address)	brother, sister; first name; omission

As the table shows, most items allow several strategies, and substitution often costs meaning. Volunteering captures part of hashar but not its traditional, collective, neighbourly character; wedding translates to‘y in many contexts but not in beshik to‘y, a celebration for a newborn’s cradle. Aka and opa are particularly difficult, since their function is often relational and respectful rather than referential.

A three-question decision model

Question 1: Is the item central to the meaning or purpose of the text? If the item carries cultural meaning that the text is about (for example, a tourism text about Uzbek cuisine, an ethnographic article, a literary scene where the mahalla shapes the plot), conservation is preferred. If the item is incidental (a character mentions drinking tea in a choyxona on the way to work), substitution may be acceptable.

Question 2: Is the item known to the target reader? Some items have entered international usage or are easily understood (pilaf, bazaar). Others are unknown (hashar, nahor oshi). Unknown items that are conserved need a gloss: intratextual (a short phrase after the item) for most texts, extratextual (footnote, glossary) for literary or academic texts.

Question 3: Does the text type favour local colour or fluency? Literary texts, tourism materials and cultural articles often benefit from local colour, which supports foreignization [3]. Technical, legal and business texts favour clarity and fluency, which supports substitution or functional equivalents.

Table 2. Decision outcomes

Central?	Known?	Text type	Recommended strategy
Yes	No	Literary / cultural	Conservation + intratextual or extratextual gloss
Yes	Yes	Any	Conservation (repetition or transliteration)
No	No	Informative / technical	Absolute universalisation or functional equivalent
No	Yes	Any	Conservation or universalisation, whichever reads more naturally

Consistency rule. Once a strategy is chosen for an item, it should be kept throughout the text, and the first occurrence of a conserved item should carry the gloss. Later occurrences can appear without explanation.

Transliteration rule. For conserved items, translators should choose a consistent English spelling. For items with established English forms (chapan, pilaf), the established form is usually preferable; for others, a simple transliteration from the Uzbek Latin alphabet, without apostrophes where possible (doppi), is easier for English readers. The exception is an item whose simplified form would coincide with an English word: toy for to‘y would be read as a plaything, so to‘y is better kept with its apostrophe.

Classroom exercises

Strategy spectrum. Students translate one CSI-rich paragraph in three versions: maximum conservation, maximum substitution, and a balanced version. They then discuss which suits a given purpose.

Purpose switch. The same Uzbek paragraph is translated for a tourism brochure and for a business report. Students compare their decisions.

Glossary building. The class builds a shared glossary of Uzbek CSIs with recommended spellings, short glosses and notes on use, which they can use in future translation tasks.

DISCUSSION

The decision model spells out what experienced translators do by instinct: they weigh the item's importance, the reader's knowledge and the text's purpose. For students, explicit questions reduce inconsistency and turn translation choices into reasoned decisions that can be explained and assessed.

The model also takes a position in the debate between domestication and foreignization. For Uzbek culture, which is little known to most English readers, routine domestication risks making it invisible. The model therefore favours conservation with glossing when cultural items are central, while allowing substitution where clarity is more important. This balance suits translators who want to be understood and, at the same time, to represent their culture accurately.

The analysis has its limits. The renderings in Table 1 are illustrative and were not drawn from a corpus of published translations. Different translators and publishers may have established other conventions. A corpus study of published English translations of Uzbek literature and tourism materials, classifying their treatment of CSIs with Aixelá's [4] taxonomy, would show current practice and test whether the decision model matches successful translations.

CONCLUSION

Uzbek culture-specific items such as osh, mahalla, hashar and to‘y present recurrent problems for translators into English. Aixelá's taxonomy offers a precise vocabulary for describing translation strategies, and the three-question model proposed here helps translators choose among them according to the item's centrality, the reader's knowledge and the text type. Used in translation courses, the model and its exercises can make students' decisions more consistent and more principled, and help them present Uzbek culture to English readers with both clarity and accuracy.

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