

THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATION

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Annotation:

The article explores the problem of cultural equivalence in translation, focusing on the comparative analysis of English and Uzbek languages. It examines the theoretical foundations of translation and highlights how cultural and linguistic differences influence the process of conveying meaning across languages. The study emphasizes that translation is not only a linguistic act but also a cultural negotiation, requiring the translator to act as a mediator between two distinct worldviews. The paper discusses the main challenges in achieving cultural equivalence and reviews strategies such as adaptation, explication, and cultural mediation.

Keywords: translation, cultural equivalence, untranslatability, intercultural communication, linguistic differences, English–Uzbek translation, cultural mediation.

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается проблема культурной эквивалентности в переводе на примере английского и узбекского языков. Автор анализирует теоретические основы перевода и показывает, как культурные и языковые различия влияют на передачу смысла между языками. Подчеркивается, что перевод является не только лингвистическим процессом, но и культурным взаимодействием, требующим от переводчика роли посредника между двумя различными мировоззрениями. Рассматриваются основные трудности достижения культурной эквивалентности и стратегии их преодоления, такие как адаптация, экспликация и культурное посредничество. **Ключевые слова:** перевод, культурная эквивалентность, непереводаемость, межкультурная коммуникация, языковые различия, английско-узбекский перевод, культурное посредничество.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada tarjima jarayonidagi madaniy ekvivalentlik muammosi ingliz va o‘zbek tillari misolida tahlil qilinadi. Maqolada tarjima nazariyasining asosiy tamoyillari yoritilib, til va madaniyat o‘rtasidagi farqlar mazmuni yetkazish jarayoniga qanday ta’sir ko‘rsatishi tushuntiriladi. Tarjima faqat lingvistik jarayon emas, balki ikki madaniyat o‘rtasidagi muloqot ekanligi ta’kidlanadi. Shuningdek, madaniy ekvivalentlikka erishishdagi asosiy muammolar hamda ularni yengish strategiyalari — adaptatsiya, izoh berish va madaniy vositachilik haqida so‘z yuritiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: tarjima, madaniy ekvivalentlik, tarjima qilinmaslik, madaniyatlararo muloqot, til farqlari, ingliz–o‘zbek tarjimasi, madaniy vositachilik.

Translation has long been recognized not only as a linguistic act but as a cultural and communicative process that connects different communities and civilizations. It is the bridge that enables mutual understanding and the exchange of knowledge between diverse linguistic



and cultural systems. However, translation is never a neutral activity; it is deeply influenced by cultural, historical, and social factors.

One of the most significant challenges in translation studies is the problem of cultural equivalence, which refers to the translator's ability to convey the same cultural meaning in the target language as is present in the source text. Since every language embodies the worldview, traditions, and experiences of its speakers, finding full equivalence between two culturally distinct languages — such as English and Uzbek — is often impossible. Instead, translation becomes an act of negotiation, where meaning is reconstructed within the framework of another culture. This article aims to explore the theoretical foundations of cultural equivalence, its main challenges, and its implications for English–Uzbek translation. It will also consider how translators manage to navigate the cultural and linguistic barriers that arise in cross-cultural communication.

The study of cultural equivalence is rooted in the broader field of translation studies, which has evolved significantly over the past century. Early theories viewed translation mainly as a linguistic process — the transfer of words and structures from one language to another. However, as scholars began to recognize the centrality of culture in communication, translation was redefined as an intercultural act rather than a purely linguistic one. Eugene Nida (1964) introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence, emphasizing that a translation should produce the same effect on the target reader as the original did on its audience. Later, Peter Newmark (1988) proposed a distinction between semantic and communicative translation, arguing that translators must constantly balance fidelity to the original text with clarity for the target audience. Cultural equivalence thus represents a crucial middle ground — it does not demand literal accuracy but seeks a form of functional or emotional correspondence between the two cultures. In other words, it is not about translating words but about translating worlds.

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a repository of culture, values, and collective memory. Every word in a language reflects a specific way of perceiving and interpreting the world. According to anthropological linguistics, there exists an inseparable link between language and culture: the way we speak shapes how we think, and how we think determines how we express reality. In this sense, the problem of cultural equivalence is an inevitable result of cultural diversity. When two languages like English and Uzbek come into contact, they bring with them distinct social norms, belief systems, and historical experiences. English, shaped by Western individualism, industrial society, and global expansion, expresses ideas that are often abstract and analytical. Uzbek, on the other hand, rooted in Eastern collectivism and rich oral traditions, reflects emotional warmth, hospitality, and social harmony. Because of these cultural differences, many concepts in one language simply have no direct counterpart in the other. This creates the phenomenon of untranslatability, where linguistic forms and cultural meanings cannot be transferred without some degree of loss or adaptation.

Cultural Equivalence in the English–Uzbek Context

The English–Uzbek translation pair offers an especially rich field for examining cultural equivalence. The two languages belong to distinct linguistic families — Indo-European and Turkic — and represent different cultural worlds. In English, meaning is often constructed through implicit references, irony, and metaphorical usage. Uzbek, in contrast, tends to express ideas more explicitly and places greater emphasis on emotional tone and respect. These contrasts make literal translation ineffective and call for cultural mediation. In practice,



translators working between English and Uzbek must deal with differences in social hierarchy, interpersonal communication, and worldview. For example, the English language favors directness and equality in conversation, whereas Uzbek maintains strong patterns of politeness and deference to age or status. Such cultural norms influence how messages are formulated and interpreted, making cultural equivalence more a matter of social awareness than linguistic accuracy.

Strategies for Achieving Cultural Equivalence

Over the years, translation theorists have proposed various strategies to deal with cultural gaps. These strategies aim to preserve the communicative function of the source text while making it accessible to the target reader. In English–Uzbek translation, successful communication often requires a balanced application of these methods. The translator’s skill lies in choosing the strategy that preserves both meaning and cultural authenticity without alienating the target reader. The translator is not simply a linguistic technician but a cultural mediator. This role requires sensitivity, empathy, and a profound understanding of both cultures. A translator must interpret cultural nuances, emotional tone, and implicit meanings that are invisible on the surface of the text. In the English–Uzbek context, cultural mediation involves more than vocabulary choice. It includes awareness of historical background, religious traditions, and patterns of social behavior. A translator who lacks cultural competence risks distorting the message or creating unintended misunderstandings. Therefore, translation should be seen as a creative intercultural act, where linguistic fidelity is balanced with cultural adaptation. The ultimate goal is to produce a text that resonates with readers in the target culture while maintaining the spirit of the original. In English–Uzbek translation, achieving full equivalence is nearly impossible, but through creative strategies and cultural sensitivity, translators can bridge the gap effectively. The future of translation studies lies in understanding culture as the foundation of meaning, not just language.

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