

CULTURAL REALITIES AND TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN THE GERMAN VERSION OF “BOBURNOMA”

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Annotation: This article analyzes the translation of cultural realities in the German version of “Boburnoma” by Helmut Dalov. The study explores the types of cultural-specific elements present in the text and identifies the strategies used by the translator to convey these elements to German-speaking readers. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how national and cultural identity is preserved or transformed during translation.

Key words: Linguistic-methodological features, cultural adaptation, Chagatai Turkish, Persian and Arabic influences, historical literature, translation fidelity, readability and accessibility, multilingual elements, central Asian culture, literary translation

INTRODUCTION

“Boburnoma” is one of the most remarkable autobiographical works in Eastern literature, written by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire. More than just a historical chronicle, it reflects the author’s worldview, cultural environment, political experiences, and deep observations of nature and society. As a literary and historical source, “Boburnoma” contains a wealth of cultural realia — words and expressions related to the unique traditions, foods, clothing, administrative systems, religious practices, and daily life of Central Asia in the 15th–16th centuries.[1]

Translating such a culturally rich text into a foreign language presents significant challenges. Each culture has its own worldview and conceptual system, and many terms in “Boburnoma” do not have direct equivalents in European languages. This becomes particularly complex when the target language and audience — in this case, German readers — may lack familiarity with Eastern cultural and historical contexts.

Helmut Dalov’s German translation of “Boburnoma” plays a vital role in introducing this heritage to the Western world. However, it also raises important questions: How were the cultural realia of the original text handled? What strategies did the translator use to preserve both meaning and cultural identity? This article aims to explore these questions by analyzing the translation methods used for culture-specific items and evaluating their effectiveness in conveying the original spirit of the text to German readers.

METHODS

This study employs qualitative comparative analysis of selected excerpts from “Boburnoma” and its German translation by Helmut Dalov. The research focuses on identifying and categorizing cultural realia in the text and analyzing the translation techniques used to render these items in German.

The process involved the following steps:

- Selection of representative excerpts containing culture-specific elements, such as names of dishes, social customs, religious practices, local geography, and traditional terms.
- Classification of realia into categories: material culture (e.g., clothing, food), social institutions (e.g., titles, administrative roles), and religious or ceremonial practices. [3]

- Application of translation theory, especially models proposed by Peter Newmark, Javier Franco Aixelá, and Vinay & Darbelnet, to categorize the strategies used:
 1. *Literal translation*
 2. *Transliteration*
 3. *Descriptive translation*
 4. *Footnoting*
 5. *Cultural substitution*
- Evaluation of how these choices affected the reader's understanding and preserved the cultural identity of the source text.

The data was contextualized using theories of intercultural communication and translation studies, with a focus on how texts travel across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

RESULTS

The analysis revealed that Helmut Dalov applied a flexible, hybrid approach combining both foreignization and domestication strategies depending on the complexity and familiarity of the term for the target audience. The key findings are as follows:

- Literal and transliterated translations were common for names and formal titles. For instance, titles like *Khan*, *Emir*, and *Beg* were preserved in their original form with occasional explanatory notes. This preserved historical authenticity.
- Descriptive translation was used when cultural terms required more explanation. For example, the term *so'fi* (a Sufi) was translated as *Der Sufi-Mystiker* with brief contextual explanation. [3]
- Footnotes and endnotes were frequently employed to provide background on unfamiliar cultural items. For example, the food item *palov* was transliterated as *Plov* with a footnote describing its ingredients and cultural significance.
- Cultural substitution was rare. In some cases, to maintain fluency, Dalov opted to use equivalent German expressions for general cultural concepts, such as translating *majlis* as *Versammlung* (gathering), though this risked reducing the cultural flavor. [1]

These strategies demonstrate Dalov's awareness of the importance of cultural authenticity while also considering the cognitive and cultural distance of German readers.

DISCUSSION

The translation of cultural realia in "Boburnoma" reveals a conscious effort by Helmut Dalov to balance fidelity to the original with clarity for the target audience. His strategy shows alignment with the foreignization approach described by Lawrence Venuti, wherein the translator maintains a degree of "foreignness" in the target text to reflect the source culture.[1,2]

However, the translator also employed domestication techniques where necessary to maintain narrative flow and reader engagement. This duality reflects the nature of literary translation — not as mere word-for-word conversion but as an act of intercultural communication. [2]

While many of Dalov's choices succeed in preserving Babur's cultural world, some nuances — especially religious or poetic metaphors — are inevitably flattened in the process. For example, poetic references with Islamic symbolism lose some of their depth in German due to the cultural gap. [6]

Moreover, the translator's use of footnotes may be helpful for academic readers but could be seen as intrusive or distracting for general audiences. This highlights a key tension in literary translation: how to serve both scholarly accuracy and reader accessibility. [4]

Ultimately, the German version of “Boburnoma” reflects a thoughtful translation process that acknowledges the richness of the source material while making it intelligible and meaningful in a new linguistic and cultural context.

CONCLUSION

Translating “Boburnoma” into German is more than a linguistic exercise — it is a cultural endeavor that requires sensitivity to both historical accuracy and modern readership. Helmut Dalov’s translation demonstrates an effective combination of strategies that allow German readers to access the historical and cultural essence of Babur’s world. [5]

This case study underscores the importance of translation as a bridge between civilizations. It also suggests that translators of culturally rich texts must be not only linguists but also cultural mediators. As global interest in Eastern literature grows, such translations play a crucial role in fostering intercultural understanding and literary appreciation.

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