

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL CONTEXT IN TRANSLATION: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS IN TRANSLATING UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS INTO ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Translating literary texts is not merely a linguistic task; it also involves transferring the cultural nuances embedded in the source language. This paper explores the challenges translators face when translating Uzbek literary texts into English. It discusses the strategies used to convey cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and historical contexts, while also highlighting the limitations of literal translation methods. Through analysis of selected Uzbek novels, this study examines how translators can maintain the balance between faithfulness to the original and accessibility for foreign readers. The article concludes with recommendations for future translations of Uzbek literary works, focusing on enhancing cultural understanding through context-aware translation techniques.

Key words: Translation, cultural context, literary translation, Uzbek literature, idiomatic expressions, literal translation, cross-cultural understanding.

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Translation is an essential tool for cross-cultural communication and the dissemination of literary traditions across languages. In literary translation, particularly when translating from one language with a specific cultural and historical context to another, the challenge extends far beyond mere word-for-word translation. For a literary translator, it is crucial to carry over not just the content, but the cultural essence, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic choices that make a text resonate with its original audience. When it comes to translating Uzbek literary texts into English, the task becomes even more complex due to the deeply rooted cultural aspects that are often unique to Uzbek society and history. Uzbek literature, with its rich narrative traditions and historical backgrounds, presents challenges that require thoughtful strategies to avoid losing essential meaning.

A literal translation can strip away the richness of these cultural references, reducing the impact of the text for an English-speaking audience. This article aims to delve into the challenges faced by translators when translating Uzbek literary works into English, the role of cultural context in this process, and potential strategies for overcoming these challenges. By examining specific Uzbek texts and their translations, we will discuss methods that have proven successful and propose solutions for future translation projects to better preserve the cultural and literary value of the original texts.

Literary translation is not just the act of converting text from one language to another; it is a process of conveying the worldview, history, and cultural nuances embedded in the source text. The target language, in this case, English, may not have equivalents for many cultural concepts or idiomatic expressions found in Uzbek. For instance, Uzbek literature often reflects the country's historical experiences, such as Soviet rule, the fight for independence, and the ongoing influence of ancient traditions. The portrayal of such events and experiences in Uzbek literary texts is not only linguistically specific but also steeped in cultural significance. When a translator encounters references to traditional practices such as "beshik to'y" (cradle ceremony) or "navruz" (New Year celebration), they must decide how to

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maintain the original's cultural integrity while making the text understandable to a reader unfamiliar with Uzbek culture.

Similarly, Uzbek idiomatic expressions pose a challenge in translation. Expressions such as "bir navi odamlar" (people of a certain type) or "oyoq ostida gul" (flower underfoot) are deeply metaphorical and rooted in cultural understanding. Translating such idioms literally would result in loss of meaning and emotional impact. Therefore, one of the key tasks of the translator is to navigate these complexities in a way that retains the cultural weight of the original while still making the text accessible to foreign readers.

Uzbek literature is rich with cultural references, including descriptions of traditional events, customs, and values. These references may be difficult for English-speaking readers to grasp without sufficient context. For example, the use of specific terms for family relations, such as "kelin" (bride), carries cultural connotations that may not have a direct equivalent in English. Moreover, many literary works emphasize the importance of communal values, which may contrast with the individualism typically found in Western literature.

The historical allusions present in Uzbek literature also pose challenges for translators. Works such as *O'tgan Kunlar* by Abdulla Qodiriy often reference significant historical events, like the fall of the Bukhara Khanate or Soviet rule, which are central to the narrative but may not be well-known to an English-speaking audience. In this context, providing adequate historical background within the translation, perhaps through footnotes or appendices, becomes essential.

Idiomatic expressions are another obstacle in translating literary works. For example, the Uzbek idiom "gapni bir tishlam qilsin" (to break one's word) might not convey its full meaning if translated literally into English. Translators often have to find equivalent expressions or reformulate sentences to preserve the meaning and emotional weight of the original.

Translators often employ a range of strategies to overcome these challenges. These include:

Cultural Substitution

One strategy is to replace culturally specific references with equivalents that are more familiar to the target audience. This approach, while effective in making the text more accessible, risks losing the original's cultural essence. For instance, replacing Uzbek celebrations with Western counterparts can make the translation more understandable, but it strips the text of its cultural significance.

Transliteration with Annotations

Another method is transliteration, where specific words or phrases are kept in their original form and explained through footnotes or endnotes. This technique is useful for maintaining cultural authenticity while providing necessary context. For example, terms like "so'm" (Uzbek currency) or "dastarkhan" (a traditional meal setting) can be transliterated, with additional explanations provided to clarify their meaning.

Literal vs. Free Translation

Deciding between a literal and a free translation is a crucial part of the process. While literal translations strive to stay as close as possible to the source text, they often fall short in conveying the cultural nuances of the original. Free translations, on the other hand, focus more on the message and cultural meaning, which can make the text more relatable but less faithful to the original structure and wording.

One of the most prominent examples of the complexities of translating Uzbek literature into English is Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tgan Kunlar* (*Days Gone By*). The novel is widely regarded as one of the foundational works of modern Uzbek literature, and its themes of social reform and national identity are deeply rooted in the historical context of early 20th-century Central Asia. Translating *O'tgan Kunlar* into English requires navigating numerous cultural and historical references that may be unfamiliar to English-speaking readers. For

example, the portrayal of the traditional Central Asian "mahalla" (community) system and the depiction of women's roles within this system are central to the novel's narrative. However, these concepts do not have direct counterparts in Western cultures, making it challenging to convey their full significance.

Translating Uzbek literary texts into English is a delicate balancing act that requires the translator to navigate cultural, historical, and idiomatic differences between the two languages. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, translators can employ strategies such as cultural substitution, transliteration with annotations, and choosing between literal and free translation to maintain the integrity of the original work while making it accessible to the target audience.

In particular, the translation of Uzbek literary works such as Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tgan Kunlar* highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and historical context behind the text. Translators must be sensitive to these nuances in order to produce translations that are not only linguistically accurate but also culturally resonant.

Future efforts to translate Uzbek literature into English should focus on fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. This could be achieved through more collaborative projects involving translators who are deeply familiar with both Uzbek and English-speaking cultures, as well as the use of supplementary materials such as glossaries, footnotes, and translator's notes to help bridge the cultural gap for foreign readers.

By paying close attention to the cultural dimensions of translation, we can ensure that Uzbek literature is not only translated, but also truly understood and appreciated by a global audience.

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