

BRIDGING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: DEVELOPING TRANSLATION COMPETENCE AMONG UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article investigates the intersection of language and culture in the development of translation competence among Uzbek learners studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Drawing on qualitative research conducted at two Uzbek universities, the study explores how linguistic limitations, cultural unfamiliarity, and traditional pedagogical models hinder learners' progress in acquiring professional translation skills. The research incorporates classroom observation, student surveys, and instructor interviews. Results indicate that while learners possess foundational language knowledge, they often struggle with cultural adaptation, pragmatic equivalence, and context-sensitive translation. The article recommends pedagogical reforms centered on authentic materials, technology-enhanced learning, and collaborative translation tasks to foster well-rounded competence. These findings have implications for curriculum design and translator training in similar EFL contexts.

Keywords: translation competence, EFL learners, Uzbek education, language and culture, translator training, intercultural competence, CAT tools

Introduction

Translation competence is increasingly recognized as a key outcome in EFL-based translator training programs, especially in non-native English-speaking countries like Uzbekistan. It encompasses not only linguistic proficiency in both source and target languages but also deep intercultural awareness, pragmatic judgment, and familiarity with professional translation tools (PACTE, 2005; Hurtado Albir, 2017). In post-Soviet educational systems, however, translation is often taught within rigid academic frameworks that focus heavily on literal translation and grammar-based instruction, frequently neglecting the contextual and cultural dimensions vital to professional translation.

Uzbek students majoring in English translation typically demonstrate competence in grammar and vocabulary acquisition, but they face considerable challenges when navigating idiomatic language, culture-bound expressions, and style equivalence in real-world translation tasks. These challenges are further compounded by limited access to authentic materials, minimal exposure to intercultural environments, and insufficient use of technology in the classroom (Karimova, 2020).

This study seeks to examine how the integration of language and culture impacts the development of translation competence among Uzbek EFL learners. It also aims to identify pedagogical barriers and suggest strategies that promote contextually appropriate, culturally aware, and professionally relevant translation training.

Materials and Methods

This study utilized a qualitative, multi-method approach to gather insights into the translation learning experiences of Uzbek EFL students. The research was conducted across two state universities in Tashkent between October 2024 and February 2025.

Participants included 60 third- and fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in translation-focused English programs, and five instructors with extensive teaching experience in translation pedagogy. Three data collection methods were employed:

- Classroom Observations: A total of 10 sessions (5 per institution) were observed. The focus was on teaching methodology, student engagement, use of authentic materials, and types of translation tasks.

- Student Surveys: A structured questionnaire consisting of 25 items (Likert scale and open-ended questions) was distributed to gather student perceptions about translation difficulty, cultural adaptation, and preferred learning methods.

- Instructor Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with five instructors explored their approaches to teaching culture-sensitive translation and their evaluation of student competence.

Thematic analysis was applied to all qualitative data following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Patterns of difficulties, strategies, and perceptions were coded and categorized to interpret the core issues faced by learners.

Results and Discussion

Findings from the data indicate several key challenges in developing translation competence among Uzbek EFL learners:

- Cultural and Pragmatic Blind Spots: Students frequently misinterpreted culture-specific references, humor, idioms, and politeness norms. Instructors reported that students often translated texts literally without regard for social or communicative context. This supports existing literature emphasizing the gap in pragmatic competence in EFL translation education (Hurtado Albir, 2017).

- Limited Use of Authentic Materials: Course content was largely theoretical, with little emphasis on real-world text genres such as press releases, contracts, or subtitled media. Students expressed a desire for exposure to practical tasks and real-life translation challenges, echoing Kiraly's (2000) argument for authenticity in translator training.

- Minimal Integration of Technology: Only a small portion of students (18%) had ever used CAT tools. Instructors cited lack of institutional resources and limited digital

literacy training as major barriers. Yet, students indicated strong interest in technology-enhanced learning if made accessible.

- **Positive Response to Collaborative Learning:** Peer translation projects and discussion-based tasks were positively received. 72% of students stated that peer feedback helped them better understand cultural meaning and stylistic nuances, reinforcing the value of collaborative methods in competence development (Pym, 2013).

These findings highlight a persistent mismatch between student needs and institutional teaching models. To bridge this gap, Uzbek translator education must adopt a more integrative pedagogy that balances linguistic instruction with cultural immersion and technology-driven translation practice.

Conclusion

Translation competence cannot be cultivated in isolation from cultural and contextual awareness. For Uzbek EFL learners, success in translation requires more than lexical knowledge; it demands critical reflection, intercultural understanding, and adaptive thinking. This study has shown that traditional methods focused solely on linguistic equivalence are insufficient to prepare learners for the complexities of professional translation.

To close the gap between language and culture in translator training, educational institutions must revise their curricula to include:

- Authentic, domain-specific texts reflecting real-world usage;
- Digital tools and platforms such as CAT software;
- Collaborative translation projects that encourage peer learning;
- Explicit teaching of intercultural and pragmatic competence.

Such reforms will not only improve learner outcomes in Uzbekistan but may also serve as a model for translation education in comparable EFL environments. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of these pedagogical interventions and to examine learner progress across various types of translated content.

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