

**CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC  
EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS:  
STRATEGIES FOR PRESERVING MEANING AND CONTEXT**

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***Abstract:*** This article explores the challenges involved in translating culture-specific expressions between English and Uzbek literary texts. Such expressions reflect deeply rooted cultural values, traditions, social norms, and historical experiences that are often difficult to transfer accurately into another language. The study examines how linguistic and cultural differences influence translation choices and discusses strategies that help preserve both meaning and contextual integrity. By focusing on literary translation, the article highlights the translator's role as a cultural mediator and emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness in achieving functional and meaningful equivalence.

***Keywords:*** cultural expressions, literary translation, English and Uzbek, cultural context, translation strategies

### **Introduction**

Literary translation is not merely a linguistic activity but a complex cultural process that requires deep understanding of both source and target cultures. When translating literary texts between English and Uzbek, one of the most significant difficulties arises from culture-specific expressions. These expressions include idioms, proverbs, metaphors, forms of address, and references to traditions or social practices that carry meanings beyond their literal sense. Such elements play a crucial role in shaping the aesthetic and emotional impact of a literary work.

In recent years, increased cultural exchange and global interest in national literatures have drawn attention to the quality of literary translation. Modern

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translation studies emphasize that preserving cultural meaning is just as important as maintaining linguistic accuracy. Uzbek and English literary traditions differ greatly in worldview, symbolism, and modes of expression, which makes the translation of culturally bound elements especially challenging. A literal translation often fails to convey the intended message, while excessive adaptation may result in the loss of cultural identity.

This article aims to analyze the main challenges encountered in translating culture-specific expressions between English and Uzbek literary texts and to discuss effective strategies for preserving meaning and cultural context. The focus is placed on contemporary translation approaches that view translation as an act of intercultural communication rather than simple word substitution. The translation of culture-specific expressions represents one of the most intellectually demanding aspects of literary translation. These expressions function as carriers of collective memory and cultural identity, embedding social norms, historical experiences, and emotional values within language. In both English and Uzbek literary texts, such expressions are not decorative elements but essential components that shape narrative voice, character identity, and thematic depth.

One of the primary difficulties in translating culture-specific expressions lies in their implicit nature. Writers often assume that readers share cultural background knowledge, allowing meanings to remain unstated. When such texts are transferred into another linguistic and cultural system, this shared knowledge disappears. For instance, Uzbek literary expressions related to family hierarchy, traditional ceremonies, or moral obligations often rely on cultural assumptions that are not immediately accessible to English readers. Similarly, English literary references rooted in Western social practices or historical events may lose significance when translated into Uzbek without contextual support.

Another significant challenge is the symbolic dimension of culture-specific language. Many expressions operate metaphorically, drawing on culturally recognizable symbols such as nature, religion, or everyday practices. In Uzbek literature, symbolism is frequently connected to concepts of honor, patience, fate,

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and spirituality. English literary symbolism, by contrast, may emphasize psychological states, individual struggle, or social critique. Translators must identify the symbolic function of an expression rather than focusing solely on its surface meaning. Failure to recognize this function may result in translations that are linguistically accurate but culturally misleading.

The issue of register and tone further complicates the translation process. Culture-specific expressions often signal social relationships, levels of politeness, or emotional distance between characters. Uzbek literary language traditionally places strong emphasis on respect and indirectness, especially in dialogues involving elders or authority figures. English literary dialogue, however, tends to be more direct. When translating between these languages, preserving the original tone without distorting character relationships becomes a delicate task. A literal rendering may sound unnatural, while excessive adaptation may alter the author's stylistic intent.

Modern translation strategies emphasize functional equivalence rather than formal correspondence. This approach encourages translators to focus on the communicative purpose of an expression within the text. Cultural substitution can be effective when a target-language expression fulfills the same narrative and emotional function as the source expression. However, this strategy must be used cautiously, as it risks erasing cultural uniqueness. In contrast, foreignization allows the translator to retain the original cultural element, inviting readers to engage with unfamiliar concepts and expanding their cultural awareness.

Paratextual strategies, such as footnotes or brief explanations embedded within the narrative, have gained renewed relevance in contemporary literary translation. While once considered disruptive, they are now seen as tools for preserving cultural depth without oversimplification. In translations between English and Uzbek, such strategies can help maintain authenticity while ensuring comprehension.

Ultimately, the translator's role extends beyond linguistic transformation to cultural interpretation. Translators must constantly negotiate between loyalty to the

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source text and responsibility toward the target audience. This process requires not only advanced language proficiency but also cultural literacy, literary sensitivity, and ethical awareness.

Culture-specific expressions are deeply embedded in the collective experience of a speech community. In Uzbek literature, such expressions often reflect traditional values such as respect for elders, community solidarity, hospitality, and spiritual beliefs. In contrast, English literary texts may emphasize individualism, personal space, and indirect emotional expression. These cultural differences create difficulties for translators who must decide whether to preserve the original form, adapt the expression, or replace it with a culturally equivalent element.

One major challenge lies in the lack of direct equivalents. Many Uzbek idioms and proverbs are rooted in nomadic life, agricultural practices, or Islamic traditions, which may not have parallel concepts in English culture. Similarly, English expressions based on historical or social realities may sound unfamiliar or meaningless to Uzbek readers if translated literally. This mismatch often leads to semantic loss or misinterpretation.

Another challenge is maintaining stylistic and emotional impact. Culture-specific expressions often carry emotional connotations, humor, irony, or symbolism. Translating these elements requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and creativity. A translator must understand how a particular expression functions within the narrative and how it influences character development or thematic meaning.

Culture-specific expressions in literary texts operate as condensed representations of a community's worldview. They encapsulate shared beliefs, moral values, historical memory, and emotional attitudes that cannot be separated from their cultural environment. When translating between English and Uzbek literary traditions, these expressions often resist direct transfer because they function beyond the level of lexical meaning. Their interpretation depends on cultural competence rather than linguistic knowledge alone.

A fundamental challenge in this process is the asymmetry between cultural systems. Uzbek literary discourse is traditionally shaped by collectivist values, strong family structures, and ethical norms rooted in social harmony and respect. These values are frequently encoded in figurative language, indirect expressions, and culturally marked forms of address. English literary discourse, while equally rich, often prioritizes individual perspective, internal conflict, and explicit emotional expression. When culture-specific expressions move between these systems, translators face the risk of either cultural distortion or semantic reduction.

The cognitive dimension of translation plays a crucial role in handling such expressions. Readers of the target language interpret texts through culturally conditioned mental frameworks. If a translation ignores these frameworks, meaning becomes opaque or misleading. For example, an Uzbek expression associated with patience or destiny may carry positive moral evaluation, whereas a literal English equivalent might suggest passivity or resignation. In such cases, the translator must reconstruct meaning rather than replicate form, ensuring that the cultural evaluation embedded in the original expression is preserved.

Another important aspect is the narrative function of culture-specific expressions. In literary texts, these elements often contribute to characterization and atmosphere. A character's use of culturally marked language signals social status, education, emotional state, or ideological position. Removing or neutralizing such expressions can flatten characters and weaken narrative authenticity. Therefore, translators must analyze not only what an expression means but also what it does within the text.

Contemporary translation studies increasingly recognize translation as an ethical practice. Translators make interpretive choices that shape how cultures are represented to one another. Excessive domestication may produce a fluent and accessible text but risks erasing cultural difference. Excessive foreignization, on the other hand, may preserve cultural markers but alienate readers. The challenge lies in achieving a dynamic balance that respects the source culture while maintaining literary readability in the target language.

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Technological advancements and globalization have also influenced modern approaches to literary translation. Today's readers are more exposed to foreign cultures and may be more receptive to unfamiliar expressions. This shift allows translators greater freedom to preserve culture-specific elements without over-adaptation. In translations between English and Uzbek, this creates opportunities to introduce readers to culturally unique concepts while fostering intercultural understanding.

Ultimately, successful translation of culture-specific expressions requires interdisciplinary competence. Linguistic knowledge must be complemented by cultural studies, literary analysis, and pragmatic awareness. The translator's task is not to eliminate cultural difference but to mediate it thoughtfully, allowing the translated text to function as a bridge between cultures rather than a simplified replica of the original.

Modern translation theory suggests several strategies for addressing these challenges. Cultural adaptation allows the translator to replace a source expression with a culturally appropriate equivalent in the target language while preserving its function and emotional effect. Explication can be used when an expression requires additional context to be understood by target readers. In some cases, borrowing or transliteration is preferred to retain cultural authenticity, especially when the expression represents a key cultural concept.

Ultimately, the translator's decision depends on the purpose of the translation, the target audience, and the literary value of the text. Successful translation balances fidelity to the source culture with accessibility for the target readership.

### **Conclusion**

Translating culture-specific expressions between English and Uzbek literary texts presents significant challenges due to differences in cultural values, historical experiences, and modes of expression. These challenges cannot be resolved through literal translation alone. Instead, they require a thoughtful and flexible approach that considers both linguistic meaning and cultural context.

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This study highlights the importance of cultural competence in literary translation and emphasizes the translator's role as an intercultural mediator. By applying appropriate translation strategies such as cultural adaptation, contextual explanation, and selective preservation of original elements, translators can maintain the integrity of the source text while ensuring meaningful communication in the target language.

Preserving cultural meaning in translation not only enhances the quality of literary works but also contributes to mutual understanding between cultures. As global interest in English and Uzbek literature continues to grow, culturally sensitive translation practices will remain essential for effective literary exchange.

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