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METHODS OF TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS IN UZBEK PROSE INTO ENGLISH

Based on Mehribon Abdurahmonova's Novella "A Portrait of Twilight"

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Abstract
This article examines seven culture-specific items selected from five sections of the English translation of Mehribon Abdurahmonova's Uzbek novella A Portrait of Twilight. Examples relating to clothing, textiles, household objects, agricultural tools, and local plants are analyzed in terms of their functions within the literary text. The analysis identifies translation strategies involving the retention of culture-specific terms, the addition of explanatory words, and the use of functional equivalents. Generic nouns accompanying the terms atlas and iroqi help readers identify the relevant objects, while hoe conveys the function of the agricultural implement. The example of piyola explores the extent to which a local term becomes comprehensible through its contextual association with the English word cup.
Keywords: literary translation, culture-specific items, cultural specificity, retention, in-text clarification, functional equivalence, Uzbek prose.

Introduction

In the exhibition episode of A Portrait of Twilight, the narrator recalls a school trip from her childhood. During that journey, the village girls' atlas dresses and embroidered iroqi skullcaps attracted the attention of city dwellers. Years later, the narrator observes girls wearing similar traditional clothing at an exhibition, experiencing a sense of admiration and delight [1, Section 1].

The references to traditional clothing establish a connection between these two episodes and reveal the narrator's attitude toward her cultural environment. In such contexts, the translator must consider not only how to make the objects recognizable to the target reader but also how to preserve their cultural significance within the narrative.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

A culture-specific item refers to an object, garment, phenomenon, or other element associated with a particular cultural environment that may require context-dependent clarification in translation. Newmark [2, pp. 94–103] classifies cultural vocabulary into thematic categories, while Aixelá [3, pp. 52–78] relates the translation challenges posed by culture-specific items to their status within the receiving culture.

Accordingly, the analysis of a plant name as a culture-specific item, for example, depends on the role it plays in representing the local environment.

Results and Discussion

The selected material comprises seven culture-specific items from Sections 1, 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the English translation. The analysis considers the original Uzbek terms, their English renderings, and their narrative functions.

The Uzbek terms in the table serve as lexical reference points. Since the complete Uzbek source text was unavailable for analysis, the English expressions were taken from the working translation [1].

Uzbek term	English rendering and section	Translation strategy
atlas	atlas silk dresses — Section 1	Retention with clarification of the fabric type

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iroqi do‘ppi	embroidered iroqi skullcaps — Section 1	Retention of the local term combined with a generic noun
adras	adras-patterned scarves — Section 1	Retention with emphasis on the pattern
oqquray	aqquray plants — Section 9	Adapted spelling with identification of the general category
yaktak	a white yaktak — Section 10	Retention supported by context
ketmon	the hoe — Section 11	Functional equivalent
piyola	a cup / the piyola — Section 12	Sequential use of a generic noun and a local term

Names of Traditional Clothing and Textiles

In the expression atlas silk dresses, the word silk identifies the type of fabric for English-speaking readers, while atlas preserves its culture-specific name. Similarly, in embroidered iroqi skullcaps, the noun skullcaps identifies the objects as headwear, whereas embroidered indicates their decorative needlework. The term iroqi specifies a particular type of traditional skullcap.

The recurrence of iroqi in the exhibition scene also connects the description of clothing during the school trip with the later narrative setting [1, Section 1].

In the expression adras-patterned scarves, the word patterned draws attention to the scarves’ decorative designs. However, this rendering does not necessarily indicate that the scarves themselves are made of adras fabric.

UNESCO describes atlas and adras within the tradition of ikat textile production. An example of Bukhara adras preserved in the Smithsonian collection features a silk warp and cotton weft [4, 5].

If the original Uzbek text refers specifically to the material from which the scarves were made, adras scarves may be a more precise translation. Conversely, if the emphasis is on the visual pattern, the expression used in the working translation adequately conveys that feature.

In Section 10, a white yaktak is described as being draped over a character’s head. The action itself helps readers understand how the object is being used, although identifying its precise category as a traditional garment may be more challenging for English-speaking readers [1, Section 10].

In this instance, a brief explanation upon the term’s first occurrence could help distinguish the garment itself from its temporary function within the episode.

Agricultural Implements, Household Objects, and Plant Names

In Section 11, Amir works the ground with a spade, while the narrator picks up a hoe [1, Section 11]. The English translation distinguishes between the two agricultural implements and makes the actions performed on the hard ground comprehensible.

Although hoe does not provide detailed information about the physical appearance or culturally specific form of the Uzbek ketmon, the implement’s function is more significant in this particular episode, as the characters are attempting to dig into hard soil.

Therefore, the use of a functional equivalent allows readers to follow the scene without unnecessary descriptive detail.

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In the tea-drinking scene in Section 12, the artist pours himself some tea and drinks it. The drinking vessel is initially referred to as a cup, but when it is placed on the table, the expression the piyola is used [1, Section 12].

The sequence of actions indicates that both expressions refer to the same object. The word cup enables readers to identify the vessel immediately, while piyola preserves its culture-specific name within the narrative.

Nevertheless, the general English word cup does not necessarily communicate the bowl-like shape of a traditional Uzbek piyola. If this physical characteristic is important to the scene, a descriptive expression such as a small tea bowl could be introduced at the first occurrence.

In Section 9, the expression aqquray plants identifies oqquray as a type of plant. The description of its rounded leaves and sharp scent carried by the wind further integrates the unfamiliar term into the surrounding landscape [1, Section 9].

Even without knowing the plant's precise botanical classification, readers can understand its role in the descriptive passage.

In this context, the generic noun plants provides sufficient clarification when the term first appears. In the following sentence, aqquray is used without additional explanation, allowing readers to recognize it as the previously mentioned plant.

Conclusion

The examples analyzed demonstrate that the effectiveness of a translation strategy depends on the function of a culture-specific item within a particular narrative episode.

When a traditional garment serves to connect two scenes, retaining a term such as iroqi alongside a generic noun helps readers recognize the relationship between them. When an agricultural implement primarily serves to explain an action, a functional equivalent such as hoe may be sufficient to convey the meaning of the scene.

The examples of piyola and aqquray demonstrate that the meanings of culture-specific terms can be made accessible through generic nouns, contextual descriptions, and sequences of actions.

The expression adras-patterned, however, illustrates the importance of consulting the original source text before reaching a definitive conclusion about the appropriateness of a particular translation choice.

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