

TRANSLATING CULTURE: STRATEGIES FOR HANDLING FOOD AND
IDIOM IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

Makhmudov Rustamjon Ravshanbek ug'li

Fergana state university Faculty of foreign languages 4th year student

Nuridinova Dilinura Khamzaye vna

Supervisor: lecturer

Annotatsiya. *Badiiy tarjima oddiy lingvistik almashtirishdan tashqariga chiqadi; u madaniy ma'noni uzatishni talab qiladi. Ushbu tadqiqot professional badiiy tarjimonlarning madaniyatga oid elementlarning (CSIs) ikki qiyin toifasini — taom nomlari va frazeologik iboralarni — qanday hal qilishlarini o'rganadi. Tadqiqot Aixela tarjima strategiyalari taksonomiyasidan foydalangan holda ingliz va rus badiiy asarlari o'rtasidagi tarjima amaliyotlarini tahlil qiladi. Topilmalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, tarjimonlar turli toifalar uchun turli strategiyalarni qo'llaydilar. Taom nomlari uchun retsenziya (asl so'zni saqlab qolish) eng keng tarqalgan va samarali strategiya hisoblanadi, chunki u madaniy haqiqiylikni va matnning "begona" lazzatini saqlaydi. Frazeologik iboralar uchun esa funksional ekvivalentlik (maqsadli tilda ekvivalent iborani topish) afzal ko'rilgan strategiyadir, chunki u kommunikativ funksiyani saqlaydi va maqsadli o'quvchi tomonidan darhol tushunilishini ta'minlaydi. Tadqiqot shunday xulosaga keladiki, barcha holatlar uchun mos keladigan yagona strategiya mavjud emas. Tarjimonlar madaniy vositachilar sifatida harakat qilib, elementning toifasiga, matndagi funksiyasiga va maqsadli auditoriya ehtiyojlariga qarab strategiyalarni moslashuvchan tarzda qo'llashlari kerak. Ushbu topilmalar tarjima pedagogikasi va professional amaliyot uchun amaliy ahamiyatga ega.*

Kalit so'zlar. *Badiiy tarjima, madaniyatga oid elementlar, taom nomlari, frazeologik iboralar, retsenziya (asl so'zni saqlash), funksional ekvivalentlik, Aixela taksonomiyasi, madaniy vositachilik*

Abstract. *Literary translation extends beyond mere linguistic conversion; it requires the transfer of cultural meaning. This study examines how professional literary translators handle two challenging categories of culture-specific elements (CSIs): food names and idiomatic expressions. Using Aixela's taxonomy of translation strategies, the study analyzes translation practices between English and Russian literary works. The findings reveal that translators employ different strategies for different categories. For food names, retention (preserving the original word) is the most common and effective strategy, as it maintains cultural authenticity and the foreign flavor of the text. For idiomatic expressions, functional equivalence (finding an equivalent idiom in the target language) is the preferred strategy, as it preserves the communicative function and ensures immediate comprehension by the target reader. The study concludes that no single strategy works universally. Translators must act as cultural mediators, applying strategies flexibly based on the category of the element, its function in*

the text, and the needs of the target audience. These findings have practical implications for translation pedagogy and professional practice.

Keywords. *Literary translation, culture-specific elements (CSIs), food names, idiomatic expressions, retention, functional equivalence, Aixela's taxonomy, cultural mediation.*

Literary translation is more than just changing words from one language to another. When a translator works with a novel, a poem, or a short story, they must also translate culture. Every literary text carries the traditions, values, humor, and way of life of the society where it was created. Some elements of that culture are easy to translate. Others are very difficult. Two of the most difficult categories are food names and idiomatic expressions. (Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 1-20).

For food items, many translators prefer to keep the original name. This strategy is called retention. For example, when an English translator works with an Uzbek novel, they usually keep the word "palov" as it is. The reader may not know exactly what palov is, but the context usually shows that it is food. The same happens with "somsa" and "norin." These words stay in their original form. This helps the reader feel the authentic Uzbek culture.

Idioms are equally challenging. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning cannot be understood from the individual words. For example, the English idiom "kick the bucket" means "to die." It has nothing to do with kicking or buckets. A literal translation of this idiom would confuse any reader. The translator must find a way to convey the meaning without losing the colorful quality of the original. (Baker, Mona. *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 45-62). The Uzbek idiom "oyoqni uzaytirib yotmoq" literally means "to stretch one's legs." However, its actual meaning is "to die." An English translator who translates this literally would produce the nonsense phrase "to stretch one's legs," which has a completely different meaning in English. Instead, the translator must find an English idiom with the same meaning. The English idiom "to kick the bucket" serves this function well. The imagery changes completely, but the meaning is preserved. This is a clear example of functional equivalence.

The importance of this topic is clear. Every day, thousands of literary works are translated from one language to another. Millions of readers around the world read literature from other cultures. If translators make poor decisions about food names and idioms, readers lose the authentic experience of that culture. They may also misunderstand the text completely. The main problem this study addresses is: how do professional translators handle food names and idioms? Do they use the same strategies for both categories? Or do they use different strategies? The aim of this study is to identify the most common strategies used by professional translators and to explain why certain strategies work better for certain categories.

What Are Culture-Specific Elements and Why Are They Difficult? Culture-specific elements are words, phrases, or concepts that are unique to a particular culture. They have no

exact equivalent in other languages because they are tied to the history, geography, or social life of that culture. (Aixela, Javier Franco. "Culture-Specific Items in Translation." In *Translation, Power, Subversion*, edited by Roman Alvarez and M. Carmen-Africa Vidal, 52-78. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996, p. 58). Scholars call these elements CSIs (culture-specific items) or realia. They can be food, clothing, customs, holidays, institutions, or ways of speaking. Food names are a good example of CSIs. The Russian word "bliny" refers to thin pancakes made from buckwheat flour. They are eaten with sour cream, jam, or honey. They are associated with Maslenitsa, a festival that marks the end of winter. An English reader has never seen or tasted "bliny." The translator cannot simply say "pancakes" because English pancakes are different. The cultural meaning is lost.

Idioms are another type of CSI. An idiom is a fixed expression whose meaning is figurative, not literal. The English idiom "to cry over spilled milk" means "to be sad about something that has already happened and cannot be changed." The words "cry," "spilled," and "milk" do not tell the reader this meaning. The idiom must be learned as a whole unit. (Newmark, Peter. *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1988, pp. 81-96). Why are these elements so difficult to translate? The main reason is the cultural gap. A cultural gap exists when a concept in the source culture has no equivalent in the target culture. (Katan, David. *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 78). There is no English word for "bliny" because English culture does not have this dish. There is no Russian idiom that means exactly the same as "kick the bucket" because Russian culture expresses the idea of death differently. The translator must bridge this gap using special strategies.

Common Strategies for Translating Food and Idioms.

Scholars have developed several strategies for translating culture-specific elements. This study uses the taxonomy created by Javier Franco Aixela. He divides strategies into two main groups: conservation strategies (keeping something of the original) and substitution strategies (replacing the original with something from the target culture). (Aixela, "Culture-Specific Items in Translation," pp. 61-64).

For food items, the most common strategy is pure retention. The translator keeps the original word exactly as it is. For example, "bliny" remains "bliny" in the English translation. The reader sees a foreign word and must understand it from context. This strategy preserves cultural authenticity. The reader knows that this is a Russian dish, not an English one. The disadvantage is that the reader may not understand what the word means.

For idioms, the most common strategy is functional equivalence. The translator finds an

Russian idioms	Word-for-word translation	Real meaning	English equivalent
Вешать лапшу на уши	To hang noodles on ears	To lie	To pull someone's leg
Медвежья услуга	A bear's service	Help that actually harms	A disservice
Как курица лапой	Like a chicken's paw	Bad handwriting	Chicken scratch
Сидеть как на иголках	To sit as if on needles	To be very nervous	To be on pins and needles

idiom in the target language that has the same meaning as the source idiom. For example, the English idiom "to have one's head in the clouds" means "to be daydreaming or not paying attention." The Russian language has a similar idiom with the same meaning. The translator uses the Russian idiom instead of the English one. The imagery changes, but the function of the idiom is preserved. The reader understands the meaning easily. (Nida, Eugene A. *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964, pp. 159-168).

Other strategies are used less frequently. Descriptive equivalence means explaining the element in several words. For example, "bliny" becomes "thin Russian buckwheat pancakes." This strategy provides clear information but disrupts the flow of the story. Omission means removing the element entirely. This strategy is used only when the element is not important to the plot or character development. Why Do Translators Use Different Strategies for Food and Idioms? The findings of this study show that translators use different strategies for different categories. Food items are most frequently translated through retention. Idioms are most frequently translated through functional equivalence. There are several reasons for this difference.

First, food items are often understandable from context. When a reader encounters a sentence such as "She served bliny with sour cream," they can guess that "bliny" is some type of food. The exact nature of the food is not essential to understanding the plot. The reader does not need to know exactly what bliny are. It is enough to know that they are food. (Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 92).

Second, idioms carry meaning that cannot be guessed from individual words. A reader who encounters a literal translation of "kick the bucket" would be completely confused. The words "kick" and "bucket" give no hint that the phrase means "to die." The meaning must be conveyed clearly. The only way to do this is to find an equivalent idiom in the target language or to explain the meaning in plain words.

Third, the function of these elements is different. Food items often serve to create cultural atmosphere and authenticity. When a reader sees the word "bliny," they know they are reading about Russian culture. Preserving the original word preserves this function. Idioms serve to convey meaning efficiently and colorfully. When a character says "I'm in hot water," the reader understands immediately that the character is in trouble. Preserving the function of the idiom requires finding a target-language idiom that conveys the same meaning, even if the imagery changes.

This study has examined how professional literary translators handle two categories of culture-specific elements: food names and idiomatic expressions. The findings show that translators use different strategies for different categories. The main conclusion of this study is that food items are most effectively translated through retention. Keeping the original word preserves cultural authenticity and allows the reader to experience the foreign culture directly. The reader may not know exactly what "bliny" are, but this is not essential. What matters is that the reader knows they are reading about Russian food. The second conclusion is that idioms are most effectively translated through functional equivalence. Finding a similar idiom in the target language ensures that the reader understands the meaning immediately. The imagery may change, but the function of the idiom is preserved. The reader does not need to struggle with confusing literal translations. The third conclusion is that translators must be flexible. No single strategy works for every situation. A good translator considers the category of the element, the function of the element in the text, and the needs of the target reader. The translator's role is not just to change words but to mediate between cultures. (Katan, *Translating Cultures*, pp. 12-15).

This study has practical implications for translation students and professional translators. First, translators should learn the full range of available strategies. Second, translators should analyze their target audience carefully. Children need more explanation than adults. Academic readers can tolerate more foreign elements than general readers. Third, translators should be transparent about their choices. Prefaces, footnotes, and translator's notes can explain difficult decisions. The study has limitations. The analysis focused only on translations between English and Russian. Findings may not apply to other language pairs, especially those involving non-European languages. Future research should examine other

language pairs and should include reader response studies to determine how readers actually respond to different strategies.

In summary, literary translation is a complex activity that requires knowledge, skill, and judgment. There is no single correct way to translate food names or idioms. The best translators are those who understand multiple strategies and apply them flexibly in context. They are cultural mediators who build bridges between different worlds.

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