

## SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF TRANSLATING NATIONAL-CULTURAL UNITS IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the semantic and pragmatic features involved in translating national-cultural units in children’s literature. Such units carry not only lexical meaning but also cultural memory, social values, and emotional resonance, which makes their translation a particularly sensitive task. In texts intended for children, the translator must preserve the cultural identity of the source text while ensuring clarity, readability, and age-appropriate comprehension. The paper argues that effective translation requires a careful balance between semantic accuracy and pragmatic accessibility.*

**Keywords:** *children’s literature, cultural mediation, national-cultural units, pragmatics, semantics, translation strategy.*

## BOLALAR ADABIYOTIDA MILLIY-MADANIY BIRLIKLARNI TARJIMA QILISHNING SEMANTIK VA PRAGMATIK XUSUSIYATLARI

**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu maqolada bolalar adabiyotida uchraydigan milliy-madaniy birliklarni tarjima qilishning semantik va pragmatik xususiyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Bunday birliklar nafaqat leksik ma’noni, balki madaniy xotira, ijtimoiy qadriyatlar va emotsional ta’sirni ham ifodalaydi, shu bois ularni tarjima qilish alohida ehtiyotkorlikni talab qiladi. Bolalar uchun mo’ljallangan matnlarda tarjimon asarning madaniy o’ziga xosligini saqlagan holda, matnning tushunarligi, ravonligi va yoshga mosligini ta’minlashi lozim. Maqolada semantik aniqlik va pragmatik qulaylik o’rtasidagi muvozanatning ahamiyati yoritiladi.*

**Kalit so’zlar:** *bolalar adabiyoti, madaniy vositachilik, milliy-madaniy birliklar, pragmatika, semantika, tarjima strategiyasi.*

## СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИЕ И ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ПЕРЕВОДА НАЦИОНАЛЬНО-КУЛЬТУРНЫХ ЕДИНИЦ В ДЕТСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ

**Аннотация:** В данной статье анализируются семантические и прагматические особенности перевода национально-культурных единиц в детской литературе. Такие единицы передают не только лексическое значение, но и культурную память, социальные ценности и эмоциональное воздействие, что делает их перевод особенно сложным. В текстах, предназначенных для детей, переводчик должен сохранять культурную самобытность оригинала, обеспечивая при этом ясность, доступность и возрастную понятность текста. В статье подчеркивается необходимость баланса между семантической точностью и прагматической доступностью.

**Ключевые слова:** детская литература, культурная медиация, национально-культурные единицы, прагматика, семантика, стратегия перевода.

### Introduction

Children’s literature occupies a distinctive place in translation studies because it performs multiple functions at once: aesthetic, educational, and cultural.<sup>9</sup> A translated children’s book does not simply transfer content from one language to another; it also introduces the child reader to a different cultural world, value system, and social imagination. For this reason, translators working with children’s literature must pay special attention to culture-specific linguistic units.

National-cultural units are words and expressions closely connected with the traditions, everyday life, historical experience, and mentality of a specific community. They may refer to food, clothing, festivals, social institutions, forms of address, or traditional practices. In children’s literature, these units often contribute to local color and narrative authenticity, but they may also create comprehension difficulties for readers who do not share the source culture.<sup>10</sup>

For example, the Uzbek word *sumalak* refers to a festive dish associated with Navruz and spring renewal. Translating it simply as “porridge” would remove the cultural associations embedded in the original term. Likewise, *mahalla* designates a neighborhood-based social institution with strong communal and cultural functions; rendering it as “street” or “district” would fail to convey its social significance.

### Semantic Dimension

From a semantic perspective, national-cultural units are meaningful because they combine denotative meaning with culturally embedded connotations. Their meaning cannot

<sup>9</sup> Arbeli, A., & Shlesinger, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Children's literature in translation: Texts and contexts*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

<sup>10</sup> Mustafina, E. (2024). *Linguistic and cultural aspects of lexical units in literary translation*. Scientific Bulletin.

always be reduced to a dictionary equivalent.<sup>11</sup> A term such as do‘ppi does not merely denote a hat; it evokes a specifically Uzbek form of dress and identity. Similarly, Navruz refers not just to a holiday, but to a culturally significant celebration of renewal, continuity, and seasonal transition.

In translation, the semantic problem emerges when the target language lacks a direct equivalent. If the translator generalizes a culturally marked item, part of the original meaning is lost. If the translator preserves the source term without any contextual support, the young reader may not understand it.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, semantic translation in children’s literature must preserve both reference and cultural load.

This is especially important because children are still acquiring vocabulary and cultural knowledge. A translation that is semantically too vague may weaken the educational value of the text. A translation that is too literal may preserve the form but obscure the meaning. The translator must therefore seek a solution that retains the cultural concept while remaining intelligible to the target audience.

#### Pragmatic Dimension

Pragmatics concerns the use of language in context and the effect that utterances produce on readers. In children’s literature, pragmatic adequacy is crucial because the text must not only be understood but also enjoyed, imagined, and emotionally processed by the child reader.<sup>13</sup> A culturally specific term may be semantically correct, yet still fail pragmatically if it interrupts narrative flow or creates unnecessary confusion.

The pragmatic value of a national-cultural unit lies in its role within the story. It can establish setting, reveal character identity, and transmit social or moral values. For instance, a story that mentions hayitlik immediately evokes a festive and relational context that goes beyond the simple idea of a “gift.” The same applies to mahalla, which may represent communal life, solidarity, and social organization rather than a neutral residential space.

For child readers, pragmatic success depends on accessibility and emotional resonance. A translation should allow the reader to grasp the function of the cultural item without feeling excluded by unfamiliarity. If the translator removes the unit entirely, the text may become more transparent but also less culturally meaningful. If the translator overexplains, the narrative may become heavy and lose its natural rhythm. Pragmatic balance is therefore essential.

#### Translation Strategies

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<sup>11</sup> Yildirim, S. (2025). *Semantic and pragmatic approaches in translation*. Interdisciplinary Studies Journal.

<sup>12</sup> Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

<sup>13</sup> Yildirim, S. (2025). *Semantic and pragmatic approaches in translation*. Interdisciplinary Studies Journal.

Several translation strategies are commonly employed when dealing with national-cultural units in children’s literature.

Transliteration. The original term is retained in a form close to the source language.

Descriptive translation. The meaning is explained through additional wording.

Cultural substitution. A more familiar target-language item is used.

Adaptation. The expression is adjusted to fit the target culture and the needs of the child reader.<sup>14</sup>

Among these strategies, no single method is universally best. The choice depends on the function of the unit in the source text, the age of the target audience, and the degree of cultural distance between the two languages.<sup>15</sup> When a unit is central to the cultural identity of the story, transliteration or descriptive translation is often preferable. When the item is secondary and may obstruct comprehension, adaptation may be more effective.

For example, *sumalak* may be translated as “*sumalak*, a traditional dish prepared for Navruz.” This solution preserves the original item while adding a brief explanation. Likewise, *atlas* may be rendered as “*atlas*, a brightly colored traditional Uzbek fabric.” In both cases, the translation maintains the cultural identity of the term without leaving the child reader confused.

#### Examples and Discussion

The following examples illustrate how semantic and pragmatic considerations operate in practice:

1. Do‘ppi → “do‘ppi, a traditional Uzbek cap.”
2. Navruz → “Navruz, a spring festival marking renewal.”
3. Mahalla → “mahalla, a traditional neighborhood community.”
4. Hayitlik → “a gift given during a religious holiday.”
5. Sumalak → “a festive dish prepared for Navruz.”

These examples show that the translator must preserve the term’s cultural specificity while also making its meaning available to the child reader. A purely literal translation would often be too narrow, while a purely functional equivalent might erase the cultural identity of the source text. In children’s literature, the best translation is often the one that reveals culture gently and naturally, without overwhelming the reader.

This issue becomes especially important in stories that present family life, seasonal rituals, or communal celebrations. Such texts do more than tell a story; they teach children

<sup>14</sup>Zhang, X. (2021). *The treatment of cultural items in the translation of children's literature* (Doctoral thesis). University of Sheffield.

<sup>15</sup>Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

how cultural identity is represented in language. The translation of national-cultural units therefore contributes not only to comprehension but also to intercultural learning.

#### Conclusion

The translation of national-cultural units in children’s literature requires both semantic precision and pragmatic sensitivity. Semantically, the translator must preserve the cultural meaning and conceptual richness of the source unit. Pragmatically, the translation must remain clear, engaging, and appropriate for the developmental level of the child reader.

The examples of *sumalak*, *do‘ppi*, *mahalla*, *Navruz*, *atlas*, and *hayitlik* demonstrate that national-cultural units carry meanings that go far beyond their dictionary definitions. For this reason, children’s literature translation should be understood as a process of cultural mediation rather than simple linguistic transfer. The translator serves as a bridge between cultures, helping young readers enter the world of another community while still following the narrative with ease.

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