

## Translating Linguocultural Units: Challenges, Strategies, and Cultural Mediation

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**Abstract:** *This article investigates the challenges and strategies involved in translating linguocultural units, focusing on their function as carriers of culturally specific meaning. Linguocultural units such as realia, idiomatic expressions, symbolic lexemes, and nationally marked concepts reflect the worldview and values of a speech community and often lack direct equivalents in the target language. Drawing on both theoretical and descriptive approaches, the study analyzes how linguocultural units function within the Uzbek language and explores their transfer into English through various translation strategies. The research applies a qualitative methodology, incorporating examples from Uzbek literary and colloquial texts, and evaluates bilingual dictionaries and translated texts to identify common translation patterns and potential gaps. Key strategies identified include transliteration, modulation, descriptive translation, and functional equivalence. These are discussed in light of frameworks developed by Nida, Newmark, Vinay and Darbelnet, and other leading scholars in the field. The article argues that successful translation of linguocultural units requires not only linguistic competence but also deep intercultural awareness and the ability to act as a cultural mediator. It highlights the limitations of current lexicographic resources and the need for culturally enriched reference tools to better support translators. By emphasizing the translator's dual role as both linguistic and cultural interpreter the study contributes to ongoing discussions about preserving cultural identity in translation and proposes directions for future research and resource development.*

**Keywords:** *linguocultural units, translation strategies, cultural adaptation, Uzbek-English translation, realia, idiomatic expressions, symbolic lexemes, national concepts, intercultural communication, functional equivalence, descriptive translation, bilingual lexicography.*

### Introduction

In the context of globalization and multicultural exchange, translation plays a vital role in fostering mutual understanding among different linguistic and cultural communities. One of the most intricate aspects of translation is the transfer of culturally embedded language elements, known as linguocultural units. These units are linguistic expressions that encode specific cultural, historical, or social meanings and often reflect the worldview and identity of a speech community. According to Vorobyev (1997), linguoculture is the unity of language and culture in their inseparable connection, expressed through linguocultural units that reflect the worldview of a given people. Maslova (2001) further clarifies that linguoculturology examines language as a means of storing and transmitting culture. These insights underscore the deep relationship between language and cultural knowledge. Recent studies have emphasized the increasing complexity of cultural translation in the 21st century. Researchers like House

(2015), Katan (2009), and Cronin (2013) argue that effective translation today must consider not just linguistic meaning but also socio-cultural identity, context, and power relations. House (2015) suggests that culturally embedded meanings are often filtered through the translator's ideological position, making objectivity a challenge. Meanwhile, Katan (2009) discusses cultural frames as essential for interpreting meaning across languages, and highlights the need for translators to develop intercultural awareness. In language pairs such as Arabic-English, Chinese-English, and Russian-English, translators face similar challenges with non-equivalent linguocultural units. For instance, in Arabic, the concept of *wasta* (social influence/favor) has no direct English equivalent. In Chinese, idiomatic expressions rooted in Confucian values often require descriptive adaptation. These parallels with Uzbek-English translation demonstrate that the challenges discussed in this article are part of a broader global phenomenon. As Nida (1964) observed, cultural context often determines the success of translation: Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential part of the message. This is especially relevant for linguocultural units, which frequently include non-equivalent vocabulary that poses challenges for literal translation. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) also emphasized the necessity of adapting translation strategies to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. While much research has explored translation of linguocultural units in languages like French, Russian, and Chinese, fewer studies focus on Uzbek-English translation, despite the cultural richness of Uzbek. Terms such as *or-nomus*, *mahalla*, or *sumalak* are deeply meaningful in Uzbek and demand culturally sensitive handling. This paper investigates these challenges and outlines translation strategies that ensure linguistic and cultural integrity across languages.

## Methods

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology to explore the classification, characteristics, and translation strategies of linguocultural units in the Uzbek-English language pair. The study draws on key theoretical contributions from scholars such as Nida (1964), Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Newmark (1988), and Maslova (2001), whose frameworks provide both linguistic and cultural lenses for analysis. The first stage involved the classification of linguocultural units based on existing typologies *realia*, phraseological expressions, symbolic lexemes, and nationally marked concepts. This typology was refined using culturally salient examples drawn from Uzbek literary texts, folk expressions, journalism, and everyday speech. Each linguocultural units type was analyzed in terms of its semantic content, cultural load, and potential for equivalence or non-equivalence in English. In the second stage, the study conducted a comparative textual analysis to examine how these linguocultural units are rendered in translated materials. This involved close reading of Uzbek texts alongside their published English translations, where available, and original translations by the researcher when none existed. This allowed for critical observation of translation strategies such as transliteration, modulation, descriptive translation, and cultural substitution. Additionally, the research incorporated lexicographic review, assessing several Uzbek-English bilingual dictionaries and online glossaries to determine how linguocultural units are represented, whether with adequate cultural annotation or merely literal definitions. Particular attention was paid to the absence or oversimplification of culturally loaded terms. This qualitative approach enables a deep exploration of the linguocultural asymmetry between Uzbek and English, while also highlighting the practical tools and decisions translators use to navigate this space. By focusing on both theoretical principles and practical examples, the study bridges the gap between translation theory and applied translation practice.

## Results

The analysis of linguocultural units in Uzbek reveals a range of forms deeply rooted in national customs, beliefs, and values. These units fall into four main categories: *realia*, phraseological units, symbolic lexemes, and national concepts. Each of these categories presents distinct translation challenges and requires specific strategies to maintain both linguistic and cultural accuracy.

Realia, such as cultural artifacts, social institutions, national dishes or customs that are closely associated with everyday life in a specific culture. In Uzbek, such terms include *sumalak* (a ceremonial dish made for Navro'z), *mahalla* (a traditional neighborhood self-governing unit), and *karnay-surnay* (traditional musical instruments) often lack direct equivalents in English. Newmark (1988) refers to these as “cultural words” that require either transference or descriptive translation to retain meaning. Phraseological units include idioms and fixed expressions that convey figurative meaning. For example, the Uzbek expression *ko'ngli tushmoq* (to feel sad or discouraged) may be translated as “feel down,” requiring functional equivalence. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) classify this as “modulation” - changing the semantics to fit the cultural logic of the target language. Symbolic lexemes such as colors and animals also carry embedded meanings. The word *oq* (white) symbolizes purity in Uzbek, similar to Western usage, but can also imply blessing or peace in broader cultural contexts. Recognizing symbolic overlaps and divergences is crucial for maintaining cultural resonance in translation. National concepts, such as *or-nomus* (honor) or *uyat* (shame/modesty), are closely tied to the Uzbek worldview. These are often untranslatable in their full cultural richness. Maslova (2001) emphasizes that such culturemes are understood only within the native cultural frame and lose part of their meaning in foreign-language contexts. As such, translators must be aware of both denotative and connotative layers of meaning.

## Discussion

The findings confirm that translating linguocultural units requires a multifaceted approach that accounts for both linguistic form and cultural substance. The inherent cultural asymmetry between source and target languages often renders literal translation ineffective, and in some cases, misleading. Translators must therefore engage in interpretive and adaptive processes to preserve meaning, emotional tone, and cultural resonance. As Nida (1964) points out, translation consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in meaning and secondly in style. This definition captures the translator's challenge in balancing accuracy with cultural readability especially when linguocultural units are involved.

### The Translator as a Cultural Mediator

The translator's role extends beyond lexical substitution. They act as a cultural mediator, interpreting embedded meanings and recontextualizing them for a new audience. According to Baker (2018), the translator must constantly make choices that reflect their cultural awareness and ethical responsibility. This is particularly vital when translating culturally sensitive concepts, such as *uyat* or *or-nomus*, which are deeply entwined with Uzbek social values.

### Strategic Approaches to Translating linguocultural units

Several well-established strategies emerge from both theory and practice:

**Transliteration:** Useful for realia and names (e.g., *sumalak*, *Navro'z*) but often requires footnotes or contextual clarification.

**Descriptive Translation:** Recommended when cultural background must be explained (e.g., *mahalla* → “a traditional neighborhood self-governing community”).

**Cultural Substitution:** Employed cautiously, substituting a similar item from the target culture to maintain readability (e.g., *shirinlik* → “dessert”).

**Modulation and Functional Equivalence:** Especially effective for phraseological expressions. As Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) explain, modulation “changes the semantics and point of view of the source language” to fit the target context.

**Footnotes and Annotations:** Particularly useful in academic or literary texts where preserving cultural richness is more important than fluency.

Each strategy has limitations. Overuse of cultural substitution risks erasing cultural specificity, while too many explanatory footnotes can disrupt the text's flow. The translator must therefore assess the genre, audience, and communicative purpose to strike the right balance.

### The Role of Lexicography

Lexicographic tools particularly bilingual and culturally annotated dictionaries can support translators, but often fail to include sufficient cultural data. Newmark (1988) criticized general-purpose dictionaries for being blind to cultural loading. This makes it imperative to develop specialized glossaries and corpus-based resources tailored to linguocultural units.

### Conclusion.

The translation of linguocultural units is one of the most sensitive and intellectually demanding areas in the field of translation studies. Linguocultural units are not mere words; they are cultural signifiers embedded in the socio-historical experiences of a nation. They encode traditional knowledge, values, and worldviews that are often untranslatable in a direct or literal sense. As this study has demonstrated, these elements require context-aware strategies that go beyond formal equivalence and delve into cultural adaptation, semantic reinterpretation, and pragmatic reconfiguration. This article identified four major categories of linguocultural units: realia, phraseological units, symbolic lexemes, and nationally marked concepts and examined the specific challenges that arise when translating these from Uzbek into English. By analyzing both theory and practice, the paper highlighted that a combination of strategies such as transliteration, modulation, descriptive translation, and functional equivalence can be effective when applied thoughtfully. However, no single strategy offers a universal solution. The translator must exercise both cultural empathy and linguistic flexibility in making interpretive decisions that serve the communicative intent and preserve cultural integrity. The discussion also emphasized the role of the translator as a cultural mediator. This role extends beyond technical accuracy and requires a nuanced understanding of both source and target cultures. Without such awareness, there is a risk of misrepresenting culturally charged concepts such as *or-nomus* or *uyat*, thereby distorting the values they represent. Likewise, idiomatic expressions and symbolic elements often require contextual adaptation that cannot be automated or standardized. One of the key findings of this study is the insufficiency of existing lexicographic resources for culturally rich languages like Uzbek. Many bilingual dictionaries fail to reflect cultural nuances or provide functional equivalents, leaving translators to rely on their own intercultural knowledge and intuition. Therefore, the need for culturally annotated dictionaries and example-based corpora is urgent and growing. Looking forward, the field would benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, anthropologists, and technologists to build more robust translation tools. Machine translation systems must be culturally trained, and translator education programs must prioritize cultural theory alongside linguistic proficiency. The future of translation lies not just in technology but in the human ability to understand and convey meaning across cultural divides. Ultimately, translating linguocultural units is not just about bridging two languages it is about facilitating respectful intercultural dialogue. In an increasingly interconnected world, where misunderstanding can lead to misrepresentation, the translator's role in preserving cultural identity becomes not only a professional responsibility but also a social and ethical one.

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