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# Challenges in Translating Cultural-Specific Concepts From Uzbek Into English

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## Article information:

**Manuscript received:** 12 Sep 2025; **Accepted:** 13 Oct 2025; **Published:** 14 Nov 2025

**Abstract:** This research investigates the language and cultural obstacles that arise when converting culturally unique Uzbek ideas into English. Using qualitative methods including translation sample analysis and translator discussions, the study pinpoints four main problem areas: family relationship words, traditional practices and ceremonies, culinary culture, and intangible cultural principles. Results show that word-for-word translation frequently misses the subtle meanings woven into Uzbek cultural ideas, requiring diverse approaches like detailed descriptions, cultural parallels, and explanatory notes. The research highlights how cultural expertise, not just language skills, is essential for successful cross-cultural exchange.

**Key terms:** translation obstacles, culturally-unique ideas, Uzbek language, English translation, cross-cultural exchange, concepts that resist translation

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## Introduction

Converting text between languages involves more than simply swapping words—it requires navigating between different cultural perspectives. This becomes even more complicated when working with languages from completely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, like Uzbek and English. Approximately 34 million people speak Uzbek, a Turkic language used mainly in Uzbekistan and surrounding Central Asian nations, and it contains many culturally-specific ideas that don't translate easily into English.

Culturally-specific ideas, sometimes called culturemes, are expressions that capture distinctive cultural experiences, principles, and customs unique to a particular community. Translators find these ideas especially difficult because target languages often have no direct matches, supporting what the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis proposes about connections between language and thinking. Poor translations of these ideas lose cultural subtleties, potentially causing confusion or oversimplified representations of the original culture.

## Methods

This research used a qualitative approach combining text examination and structured conversations. Data gathering took place from September 2024 through January 2025, drawing from two main information sources. First, researchers assembled and studied a collection of 50 Uzbek literary works, tourism materials, and ethnographic writings that had existing English versions. These materials were chosen to represent various genres and situations where culturally-specific concepts typically occur. Researchers reviewed each text to locate places where translators dealt with culture-specific vocabulary, then recorded and classified the translation approaches used.

Second, researchers conducted structured conversations with 15 professional translators specializing in Uzbek-English work. Participants included native Uzbek speakers translating to English and native English speakers with strong Uzbek skills. Discussion topics covered translators' thought processes, particular difficulties they faced, and methods they used when handling culturally embedded ideas. Data examination used an inductive thematic method. Translation examples from the collection were labeled by cultural concept type and translation technique used. Conversation records were studied to find repeating patterns concerning translation obstacles and answers. Categories developed through repeated coding and ongoing comparison, eventually producing four major thematic groups of translation challenges.

## Results

The examination identified four main categories of culturally-specific concepts that create substantial translation difficulties from Uzbek to English. Uzbek has a complex family relationship vocabulary system that's more detailed than English. Words like "aka" (older brother), "opa" (older sister), "tog'a" (father's brother), and "amma" (father's sister) communicate specific relationship and status meanings that their English counterparts lack. The word "oqsoqol," which literally translates as "white beard," describes respected community leaders and represents cultural principles of age-related authority that can't be conveyed by simply saying "elder." Translators explained that using broad English words like "brother" or "uncle" removes important social and status details embedded in the original Uzbek.

Uzbek culture includes many traditional activities with no English matches. "Hashar" describes community volunteer work where neighbors assemble to assist with major tasks, representing shared responsibility and mutual support. "Kelin salom" means the traditional greeting ceremony a new bride performs for her husband's family members, involving particular gestures and rules. These ideas can't be converted into single English words and need detailed explanations. Discussion participants mentioned that while these explanations are essential, they frequently interrupt story flow and turn cultural activities into academic subjects rather than authentic experiences.

Uzbek cooking features unique dishes and food-related ideas that don't translate well. While "palov" (the country's signature rice dish) sometimes becomes "pilaf" in English, this equivalence hides the cultural importance and particular cooking techniques unique to Uzbek palov. Similarly, "non" means more than just bread—it's a culturally important round flatbread with profound symbolic meaning in Uzbek tradition. Translators mentioned struggling to express the cultural importance these foods hold beyond their physical characteristics.

The most difficult challenges perhaps involve abstract ideas reflecting cultural beliefs and perspectives. "Mehribonlik" includes hospitality, warmth, and generous kindness but goes beyond what any single English word covers. "Ko'ngilchanlik" describes a specific characteristic of being cheerful, friendly, and warm-hearted that merges several English ideas. "Saxovatlilik" indicates particular forms of generosity connected to cultural expectations about sharing and hosting that differ from Western generosity concepts. These value-heavy words need extensive cultural understanding to translate properly, and simple translations inevitably diminish their complexity.

Concerning translation techniques, examination showed that translators mainly used four methods: keeping the original word with explanation (maintaining the Uzbek word with an English definition), detailed translation (using phrases to clarify the concept), cultural replacement (locating approximate English cultural matches), and notes or glossaries (supplying additional cultural details). Each method involved compromises between precision, readability, and cultural authenticity.

## Discussion

The results show that translation difficulties from Uzbek to English arise from basic cultural differences rather than just language gaps. These difficulties reflect wider theoretical questions in translation scholarship about impossibility of translation and cultural equivalence. The findings support Venuti's

domestication-foreignization model, demonstrating that translators must continually balance between making texts understandable to English readers and maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

The abstract value words create perhaps the most theoretically fascinating challenge, suggesting that languages encode different emotional and moral frameworks. English's lack of equivalents for words like "mehribonlik" shows not just language difference but possibly different cultural understandings of human connections and virtues. This confirms linguistic relativity theory while revealing practical consequences for cross-cultural exchange.

These discoveries have practical consequences for translators, indicating that successful Uzbek-English translation needs broad cultural understanding beyond language ability. Translator education programs should stress ethnographic knowledge and cultural immersion along with language training. Also, translation researchers should create more sophisticated models for assessing translations from less-studied languages. This study's limitations include its concentration on written translation, possibly missing challenges unique to spoken interpretation, and its comparatively small discussion sample. Future research should explore translation challenges in particular fields like legal or medical translation, and examine how digital tools might help with culture-specific translation obstacles.

### **Conclusion**

This research has identified and examined major challenges in converting culturally-specific concepts from Uzbek into English, recording four principal categories of translation difficulty: family relationship vocabulary, traditional practices, food culture, and abstract principles. The research stresses that translation between Uzbek and English represents more than a technical language exercise; it's an act of cultural interpretation demanding thorough understanding of both original and target cultures. Translators handling Uzbek and similar Central Asian languages must create advanced methods for expressing cultural meaning while recognizing that some cultural distinctiveness may unavoidably be lost during translation.

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