

The Transfer of Culture-Specific Lexical Units Within the Framework of Translation Strategies in Translation Studies

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260579>

ABSTRACT

The intensification of intercultural communication in the contemporary era, accompanied by the accelerating processes of globalization, has significantly increased interaction among diverse cultural systems. Within this context, the accurate rendering of culture-specific lexical units has acquired particular importance, as it directly influences the adequacy of comprehension in international communication, as well as in literary and academic discourse. Consequently, the systematic investigation of such units within the framework of translation strategies represents a significant area of inquiry in contemporary translation theory and practice.

The primary aim of this article is to conduct a systematic analysis of the strategies employed in the translation of culture-specific lexical units, to identify their functional and pragmatic characteristics, and to propose both theoretical and applied approaches to achieving translational adequacy.

Keywords: culture-specific lexical units; translation strategies; domestication; foreignization; translational adequacy; intercultural communication; translation studies; cultural transfer.

INTRODUCTION

Culture embodies the distinctive values, beliefs, traditions, and everyday practices of a particular linguistic and social community.

For this reason, culture-specific lexical units must be examined not only at the linguistic level but also within their broader cultural and communicative contexts. Such lexical items frequently lack direct equivalents in other languages, which makes their translation particularly challenging. The rendering of holidays, customs, symbolic expressions, and emotionally charged concepts often presents difficulties due to the absence of exact lexical or conceptual correspondences between cultures.

In such cases, the translator is required to employ specific translation strategies involving the deliberate selection of methods and procedures that ensure the adequate transfer of meaning while taking into consideration the cultural and contextual characteristics of the source text. The primary objective of this process is to preserve both the informational and aesthetic functions of the original text while enabling the recipient to comprehend the message in a form that remains as close as possible to the source.

In addition to the theoretical considerations outlined above, it is also necessary to emphasize the methodological dimension of analyzing culture-bound lexical units within translation practice. Contemporary translation studies increasingly rely on functional and communicative approaches, particularly those associated with Skopos theory, which regards the purpose of translation as the principal determinant of translational decisions. Within this

framework, culture-specific elements are not treated as isolated linguistic units; rather, they are understood as components embedded within a communicative situation whose functions must be carefully evaluated and reinterpreted in accordance with the communicative goals of the target text. Accordingly, the translator's task involves a comprehensive analysis of both micro-level linguistic features and macro-level cultural functions in order to ensure that the selected translation strategy corresponds to the intended pragmatic effect. Thus, translation should be viewed not merely as a linguistic operation but as a complex intercultural activity requiring both linguistic competence and cultural mediation.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Foundations of Translation Strategies and Culture-Specific Lexical Units

In contemporary scholarship, the concept of "translation strategy" has been explored by numerous theorists and practitioners, including V.V. Sdobnikov (2007), I.S. Alekseeva (2004), V.H. Komissarov (2000) and K.A. Jafarova (2021). Nevertheless, the theoretical foundations of this concept have not always been defined with sufficient precision. A considerable body of research in translation studies treats the term "translation strategy" as polysemous in nature. Conversely, some scholars argue that the notion itself lacks strict terminological specificity and should therefore be regarded less as a scientific term and more as a general conceptual category (A.G. Vitrenko).

Despite these differing perspectives, the concept of translation strategy remains one of the fundamental categories of translation theory and practice. Its significance becomes particularly evident in translation pedagogy, where strategic awareness contributes to the systematization of theoretical knowledge, the integration of theory with practical skills, and the purposeful organization of translational activity.

From a practical standpoint, the translation of culture-specific elements generally involves the application of various established procedures, including borrowing, calque, modulation, adaptation, and descriptive translation. Culture-bound expressions associated with traditions, holidays, social institutions, and everyday life frequently require adaptive transformation in order to remain comprehensible for the target audience. In certain cases, the direct borrowing of a source-language term may be preserved to maintain cultural authenticity, whereas in other instances explicitation or substitution with a culturally equivalent concept may prove more appropriate. Idiomatic expressions particularly illustrate the complexity of such translational decisions, as their semantic and connotative meanings are often deeply rooted in the cultural consciousness of the source-language community.

The selected translation strategy directly influences the overall quality and communicative effectiveness of the target text. Consequently, the determination of an adequate strategy begins during the preliminary analysis of the source text and continues throughout the planning of the translation process. In order to clarify the essence of the concept "translation strategy," it is necessary to examine the etymological and semantic characteristics of the term "strategy" itself as represented in explanatory and encyclopedic sources.

The term "strategy" originates from the Ancient Greek word *strategia*, meaning "the art of the general" or "the conduct of a military commander." Initially functioning as a military concept, the term gradually underwent semantic expansion and came to be employed across numerous scientific disciplines. Encyclopedic dictionaries interpret strategy as a planned course of action aimed at achieving a specific objective. Within disciplines such as management, economics, psychology, pedagogy, and linguistics, the concept is

associated with purposeful planning and organized decision-making.

Within translation studies, these semantic dimensions contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of translation strategy as the translator's deliberate planning of translational activity, the preliminary structuring of the translation process, and the implementation of translation procedures in accordance with a selected communicative objective. Similar views are reflected in the works of V. N. Komissarov (1990), I. S. Alekseeva (2004), and V. V. Sdobnikov (2015), all of whom emphasize the goal-oriented nature of translational activity.

In addition to theoretical classification, translation strategies are closely connected with communicative and functional outcomes. The effectiveness of a selected strategy is ultimately determined by the extent to which the target text fulfills its communicative purpose while preserving the intended pragmatic impact of the original. Translation should therefore be regarded as a dynamic decision-making process in which the translator continuously evaluates linguistic, contextual, and cultural factors.

Within translation practice, two principal strategies are widely recognized: domestication and foreignization.

The domestication strategy has been employed since antiquity and is based on adapting the source text to the cultural, moral, and ethical values of the target-language community. Translation practice demonstrates that culture-specific elements may be localized, modified, or omitted in order to increase accessibility for the target readership. In certain historical cases, even authors' names were replaced with culturally familiar equivalents to facilitate reception within the target culture.

World translation practice further demonstrates that the application of domestication has contributed to the broader dissemination of numerous literary works within target-language cultures. In contrast, the foreignization strategy represents the

opposite approach. These strategies were explicitly formulated in 1813 by the German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher in his lecture on translation methods. According to his conception, the translator either brings the reader closer to the author or brings the author closer to the reader. Foreignization is characterized by the direct transfer of source-language and source-culture elements into the target text, thereby preserving linguistic and cultural otherness. However, in literary translation, excessive reliance on this strategy may reduce comprehensibility and require extensive explanatory commentary (Shlepnev, 2018).

V. V. Sdobnikov (2015) classifies translation strategies according to communicative situation parameters into three principal types: the communicatively equivalent translation strategy, the tertiary translation strategy, and the re-addressing strategy.

The communicatively equivalent strategy seeks to produce in the target text an effect on the recipient that is as close as possible to that produced by the source text while preserving the author's original communicative intention.

The tertiary translation strategy is understood as a general framework of translational activity aimed primarily at satisfying the communicative needs of the target-language recipient. In this case, the communicative role of the target recipient differs from that of the participants in the source text, and the intended communicative purpose may not fully coincide with the original authorial intention.

The re-addressing strategy is applied when the recipient of the target text differs from the original addressee not only culturally and nationally but also socially. This strategy functions as a mechanism of purposeful adaptation within translation practice.

In implementing translation strategies, translators employ various forms of translation transformation. Y. I. Retsker (2007) defines transformation as "the

replacement of a lexical unit in the process of translation with a word or phrase of a different internal form in order to actualize the contextual component of meaning to be conveyed.”

Translation Procedures and Cultural Transfer in Practice

In the process of translation, intercultural differences frequently generate more complex and demanding challenges than structural differences between languages. This issue occupies a central position in translation theory. V. N. Komissarov (2000) emphasizes that “differences between cultures may pose more serious difficulties for the translator than differences in language structure.” This perspective demonstrates that translation cannot be reduced merely to the achievement of linguistic equivalence; rather, it constitutes a multifaceted process involving the adequate transfer of cultural, semantic, and symbolic dimensions.

In contexts characterized by substantial intercultural divergence, the achievement of a fully adequate translation may become highly complex and, in some cases, practically unattainable. Such difficulties may arise even when the translator possesses advanced competence in both the source and target languages. Minor deviations in the rendering of culturally marked elements may alter the perception of the original message and influence the representation of the source culture itself. Consequently, translation presupposes not only lexical and grammatical correspondence but also the accurate transmission of cultural codes and culturally embedded meanings.

Literary translation, in particular, is frequently conceptualized as a form of interpretative reconstruction capable of generating alternative representations of reality. According to L. A. Novikov (2003), “the translator of a literary text may be considered a subversive writer.” Within this context, literary translation extends beyond the establishment of formal linguistic

equivalence and becomes a process of intercultural communication involving the reinterpretation and transformation of cultural meanings.

The translator therefore functions not only as a linguistic specialist but also as an intercultural mediator responsible for the interpretation, adaptation, and transmission of cultural contexts. Numerous scholars recognize language as both an expression of culture and an indicator of the worldview of its speakers. Consequently, culture-specific lexical units and the problems associated with their translation have become a significant focus of scholarly investigation, particularly in situations where direct equivalence between languages and cultures is absent. Such issues are extensively addressed in the works of Kade, Kutz, Nord, Rabadán, and Venuti.

Among the first scholars to examine culture-specific elements specifically within the framework of realia were S. Vlahov (1980) and K.A. Jafarova (2025). Their classification remains one of the most influential approaches in the study of culture-bound lexical units.

According to the classification proposed by S. Vlahov (1980) and K.A. Jafarova (2025), realia may be divided into several principal categories. The first group consists of geographical realia, which include geographical objects as well as endemic flora and fauna specific to a particular territory. The second group comprises ethnographic realia, subdivided into categories related to everyday life, including food, beverages, clothing, housing, and transportation; names of ethnic communities; and lexical units associated with labour, crafts, and culture. The third group encompasses socio-political realia, also referred to as administrative and public-life realia, which include governmental institutions, administrative divisions, political structures, and military terminology.

The translation of culture-related lexical units inevitably presents certain difficulties. Nevertheless, these difficulties do not imply

the impossibility of translation. By taking intercultural differences into consideration, the translator may employ various procedures and strategies in order to bridge the cultural gap between the source and target texts. In this process, the translator not only identifies and interprets cultural distinctions but also applies specific translation methods aimed at preserving both meaning and communicative function.

Among the most frequently employed procedures in the translation of culture-specific elements are borrowing, transliteration, calque, descriptive translation, adaptation, modulation, and explicitation. The selection of a particular procedure depends on several factors, including the communicative purpose of the translation, the background knowledge of the target audience, the genre of the text, and the degree of cultural specificity embedded within the lexical unit itself.

Borrowing is commonly used when the preservation of national or cultural colouring is considered essential. In such cases, the source-language lexical unit is transferred directly into the target language, thereby maintaining its cultural authenticity. Adaptation, by contrast, seeks to replace the source-culture element with a functionally similar concept more familiar to the target audience. Descriptive translation and explicitation are often employed when no direct equivalent exists and additional clarification becomes necessary for adequate comprehension.

The translation of idiomatic and metaphorical expressions presents a particularly complex challenge because their meanings are frequently rooted in historically and culturally conditioned associations. Literal translation in such cases may distort the intended pragmatic effect or produce semantic ambiguity. Consequently, the translator must balance semantic accuracy with communicative effectiveness while remaining attentive to the stylistic and cultural characteristics of both texts.

The achievement of an ideal translation of culture-bound texts remains, in practical terms, extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the primary task of the translator is to perform a purposeful and functionally adequate translation while preserving the communicative intention and aesthetic value of the source text. Such an approach has enabled the successful translation of numerous literary and non-literary works into different languages and has facilitated the effective transmission of cultural meanings across linguistic boundaries.

CONCLUSION

The translation of culture-specific lexical units constitutes one of the most complex and significant issues within contemporary translation studies. The growing intensity of intercultural communication and globalization processes has further increased the importance of achieving adequate translation of culturally marked elements in literary, academic, and communicative discourse.

The analysis conducted in this article demonstrates that translation strategies play a decisive role in ensuring the successful transfer of cultural meanings from the source language into the target language. The selection of an appropriate strategy depends not only on linguistic factors but also on cultural, pragmatic, and communicative considerations. Consequently, translation should be understood as a multidimensional process requiring the translator to act simultaneously as a linguistic expert, cultural mediator, and strategic decision-maker.

Particular attention has been devoted to the theoretical foundations of translation strategies, including domestication and foreignization, as well as to the practical procedures employed in the rendering of culture-specific lexical units. The study has shown that no universal strategy can fully resolve all intercultural difficulties. Instead, effective translation requires flexibility, contextual analysis, and a careful balance

between preserving cultural authenticity and ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience.

Furthermore, the article has demonstrated that culture-bound lexical units cannot be examined solely from a linguistic perspective, since they reflect the historical experience, worldview, traditions, and value systems of a particular culture. Their translation therefore represents not only a linguistic operation but also an act of intercultural communication involving the transfer and reinterpretation of cultural knowledge.

In conclusion, the adequate translation of culture-specific lexical units remains a central objective of translation theory and practice. The systematic application of translation strategies and procedures enables translators to minimize intercultural barriers and facilitate more effective communication between representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: No conflicts of interest declared.

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How to cite this article: Gultekin Azim Salmanova. The transfer of culture-specific lexical units within the framework of translation strategies in translation studies. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2026; 13(5): 792-797. DOI: [10.52403/ijrr.20260579](https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260579)
