

ETHNOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS INTO ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF *THE MISCHIEVOUS BOY*

Madina MUSABEKOVA

Specialist of International Relationships,
the Branch Center for Retraining and In-Service Training of Academic Staff under
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
m.musabekova3103@gmail.com

Abstract. *Ethnolinguistic factors play a crucial role in the translation of literary texts, particularly when the source and target languages belong to different cultural and cognitive systems. Uzbek literary works are deeply embedded in national traditions, everyday realities, and culturally specific worldviews, which pose significant challenges for translators working into English. This article examines key ethnolinguistic issues arising in the translation of the Uzbek novel *The Mischievous Boy* by Gafur Gulom into English. The study focuses on culture-bound lexical units, idiomatic expressions, social realia, and pragmatic meanings that reflect Uzbek cultural identity. Through qualitative analysis of selected examples, the article identifies major translation difficulties and evaluates the strategies employed to convey ethnocultural meanings in the target language. The findings demonstrate that successful literary translation requires not only linguistic competence but also deep ethnolinguistic awareness and cultural mediation.*

Keywords: *ethnolinguistics, literary translation, Uzbek–English translation, cultural realia, *The Mischievous Boy*, culture-bound terms.*

Literary translation represents a complex form of intercultural communication in which language functions as a carrier of cultural memory, national identity, and social values. When translating from Uzbek into English, translators face the challenge of transferring not only semantic content but also ethnolinguistic elements that are deeply rooted in Uzbek culture. These elements include traditional customs, social relations, everyday practices, and culturally marked linguistic expressions.

The novel *The Mischievous Boy* by Gafur Gulom is a vivid example of a literary text saturated with ethnocultural meanings. The work reflects the social realities of early twentieth-century Uzbek society, portraying daily life, humor, moral values, and the worldview of the Uzbek people through the perspective of a young protagonist. As such, *The Mischievous Boy* provides rich material for examining ethnolinguistic issues in translation.

This article aims to analyze the main ethnolinguistic challenges encountered in translating *The Mischievous Boy* from Uzbek into English and to explore effective translation strategies for preserving cultural meaning while ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience.

Building on this objective, the study adopts a qualitative, text-oriented approach that focuses on the analysis of selected culture-bound units extracted from the source text. These units include ethnographic realia, idiomatic expressions, forms of address, and references to social and cultural practices that are characteristic of Uzbek everyday life.



Particular attention is paid to how these elements encode culturally specific meanings that may not have direct equivalents in English.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, many lexical items and expressions in *The Mischievous Boy* function as markers of national identity and collective cultural experience. Terms related to kinship, community relations, traditional food, clothing, and social hierarchy carry implicit cultural connotations that are readily understood by Uzbek readers but may remain opaque to a foreign audience. The translation of such elements therefore requires careful mediation between the source and target cultures.

The analysis further demonstrates that literal translation often proves insufficient for conveying the pragmatic and cultural meanings embedded in the text. Instead, translators must employ a range of strategies, including transliteration accompanied by explanatory additions, descriptive translation, functional substitution, and contextual adaptation. Each strategy involves a degree of interpretive decision-making, as the translator must balance fidelity to the source text with the expectations and cultural knowledge of the target readership.

Moreover, the novel's extensive use of humor and irony presents additional challenges. Much of the humor in *The Mischievous Boy* is grounded in culturally specific situations, wordplay, and social norms. Preserving this humorous effect in English requires not only linguistic creativity but also a deep understanding of the underlying cultural context. Failure to account for these ethnolinguistic nuances may result in semantic loss or cultural misrepresentation.

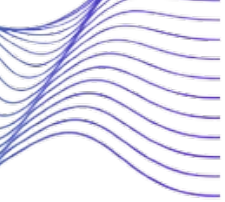
Overall, the examination of *The Mischievous Boy* highlights the central role of ethnolinguistic competence in literary translation. The findings suggest that successful translation of Uzbek literary texts into English depends on the translator's ability to interpret and recontextualize culturally embedded meanings, thereby facilitating meaningful intercultural communication while maintaining the artistic and cultural integrity of the original work.

Ethnolinguistics and Literary Translation

Ethnolinguistics studies the relationship between language and culture, emphasizing how linguistic structures encode cultural knowledge and social practices. In literary translation, ethnolinguistic elements often manifest as culture-specific vocabulary, phraseological units, forms of address, and implicit cultural references. According to Nida (1964), translation must account for cultural context in order to achieve functional equivalence between the source and target texts.

In Uzbek literary discourse, ethnolinguistic features are frequently expressed through national realia, proverbs, idioms, and stylistically marked colloquial speech. These elements pose difficulties for English translation due to the absence of direct equivalents and differences in cultural conceptualization. Consequently, translators must balance fidelity to the source culture with the readability and acceptability of the target text.

This balancing act places the translator in the role of a cultural mediator rather than a mere linguistic converter. In the context of Uzbek–English literary translation, mediation involves interpreting culturally embedded meanings and rearticulating them in a way that is intelligible to the target audience without erasing their cultural specificity. As Newmark (1988) notes, culture-bound elements often require adaptive strategies that go beyond



word-for-word correspondence, especially when the source text reflects social norms and values unfamiliar to the target readership.

Ethnolinguistic units such as national realia and proverbs are particularly resistant to direct translation, as they are shaped by collective historical experience and cultural symbolism. Uzbek proverbs, for instance, frequently rely on imagery drawn from traditional lifestyles, agriculture, or communal relations, which may not resonate with English-speaking readers. In such cases, translators may resort to descriptive paraphrasing or functional equivalents to convey the intended meaning while preserving the pragmatic effect of the original expression.

Similarly, stylistically marked colloquial speech plays an important role in character construction and narrative authenticity in Uzbek prose. Colloquialisms and vernacular expressions often signal social background, age, or group identity. Rendering these features into English requires careful stylistic calibration, as excessive neutralization can flatten character voices, while overly domesticating choices may distort the cultural setting of the text.

Thus, the translation of ethnolinguistic elements demands a strategic and context-sensitive approach. By integrating linguistic analysis with cultural interpretation, translators can minimize semantic loss and maintain the ethnocultural richness of the source text. This approach reinforces the view that ethnolinguistic awareness is an essential component of professional competence in literary translation, particularly in translations between typologically and culturally distant languages such as Uzbek and English.

Ethnolinguistic Features of *The Mischievous Boy*

The novel *The Mischievous Boy* is characterized by a high density of ethnolinguistic units that reflect Uzbek everyday life and social structure. These include:

- Culture-bound lexical items, such as names of traditional food, clothing, and household objects;
- Social realia, including forms of address, kinship terms, and references to community life;
- Idiomatic expressions and proverbs rooted in Uzbek folk wisdom;
- Humor and irony, often based on culturally specific situations and linguistic play.

For example, Uzbek kinship terms convey nuanced social relationships that are not always explicitly marked in English. Similarly, idiomatic expressions frequently rely on metaphorical images drawn from local traditions, which may lose their expressive power if translated literally.

Translation Strategies for Ethnolinguistic Elements

The analysis of selected excerpts from *The Mischievous Boy* demonstrates that translators employ a range of strategies to address ethnolinguistic challenges. These include:

1. Transliteration with explanation, used for culture-specific terms to preserve local color while ensuring comprehension;
2. Functional substitution, whereby a culturally similar concept in English replaces the Uzbek term;
3. Descriptive translation, which explicates the meaning of ethnolinguistic units;



4. Selective omission or neutralization, applied when cultural references are deemed inaccessible to the target reader.

While each strategy has advantages and limitations, the study suggests that a combined approach is most effective. Maintaining a degree of cultural foreignness allows the target reader to engage with the source culture, while explanatory techniques help bridge cultural gaps.

Conclusion

The translation of *The Mischievous Boy* from Uzbek into English illustrates the central role of ethnolinguistics in literary translation. Ethnocultural elements embedded in the text present significant challenges that cannot be resolved through purely linguistic means. Instead, successful translation requires cultural sensitivity, interpretive flexibility, and informed decision-making on the part of the translator.

This study highlights the importance of ethnolinguistic awareness as a key component of translator competence. By carefully selecting appropriate translation strategies, translators can preserve the cultural richness of Uzbek literary works while making them accessible to English-speaking audiences. Further research may expand this analysis by comparing multiple translations or exploring reader reception of ethnolinguistically marked texts.

REFERENCES

1. G'ulom, G. (1990). *The Mischievous Boy (Shum Bola)*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: G'afur G'ulom Publishing House, pp. 1–224.
2. Qodirov, A. (2004). *Literary translation and national identity*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Fan Publishing House, pp. 1–192.
3. Abdullayeva, M. A. (2017). *Linguocultural aspects of literary text translation*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: University Press, pp. 1–168.
4. Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation studies* (4th ed.). London, UK: Routledge, pp. 1–208.
5. Nida, E. A. (1964). *Toward a science of translating*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, pp. 1–331.
6. Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. London, UK: Prentice Hall, pp. 1–292.
7. Katan, D. (2014). *Translating cultures: An introduction for translators, interpreters and mediators* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge, pp. 1–344.
8. Baker, M. (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Routledge, pp. 1–344.
9. Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins, pp. 1–312.