
The role of equivalence in translating cultural-specific items

Yusupova Nilufar Azamatjon qizi
yusupovanilufar3012@gmail.com

Teacher

Uzbekistan state world languages university

Annotation *This article deeply analyzes the role and practical significance of the concept of equivalence in the translation of culturally specific works. In translation theory, equivalence is considered an important tool that ensures the most complete transfer of the meaning and style of the original text to the target language. Especially in cases where there are intercultural differences, the translator faces many semantic, pragmatic and stylistic problems. These problems can lead to misinterpretations in translation, loss of cultural meaning or misunderstandings in communication. Therefore, translators should deeply analyze not only the grammatical and lexical structure of the language, but also the cultural context that reflects the historical, religious, traditional and mental characteristics of the people. The article separately considers the types of equivalence used in translation – formal, dynamic, functional and stylistic equivalences – and explains their role in practice with specific examples. The article also discusses the role of equivalence in effective intercultural communication and its impact on translation quality from a scientific perspective.*

Keywords *Translation, equivalence, culture, intercultural communication, semantic compatibility, translation theory, cultural components.*

Роль эквивалентности в переводе культурно-специфических элементов

Юсупова Нилуфар Азаматжон кизи
yusupovanilufar3012@gmail.com

Преподаватель

Узбекский государственный
университет мировых языков

Аннотация *В статье дается глубокий анализ роли и практического значения концепции эквивалентности при переводе культурно-специфических произведений. В теории перевода эквивалентность считается важным инструментом, обеспечивающим максимально полную передачу смысла и стиля исходного текста на целевой язык. Особенно в случаях, когда существуют межкультурные различия, переводчик сталкивается со многими семантическими, прагматическими и стилистическими проблемами. Эти проблемы могут привести к неправильному толкованию при переводе, потере культурного смысла или недопониманию в общении. Поэтому переводчикам необходимо глубоко анализировать не только грамматическую и лексическую структуру языка, но и культурный контекст, отражающий исторические,*

религиозные, традиционные и ментальные особенности народа. В статье отдельно рассматриваются виды эквивалентности, используемые при переводе: формальная, динамическая, функциональная и стилистическая, а также на конкретных примерах поясняется их роль на практике. В статье также обсуждается роль эквивалентности в эффективной межкультурной коммуникации и ее влияние на качество перевода с научной точки зрения.

Ключевые слова *Перевод, эквивалентность, культура, межкультурная коммуникация, семантическая совместимость, теория перевода, культурные компоненты.*

Madaniyatga oid asarlarni tarjima qilishda ekvivalentlikning roli

Yusupova Nilufar Azamatjon qizi

yusupovanilufar3012@gmail.com

O'qituvchi

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqolada madaniy o'ziga xos asarlarni tarjima qilishda ekvivalentlik tushunchasining roli va amaliy ahamiyati chuqur tahlil qilinadi. Tarjima nazariyasida ekvivalentlik – asl matndagi ma'no va uslubning iloji boricha to'laqonli tarzda tarjima tiliga ko'chirilishini ta'minlovchi muhim vosita sifatida qaraladi. Ayniqsa, madaniyatlararo tafovutlar mavjud bo'lgan holatlarda tarjimon ko'plab semantik, pragmatik va stilistik muammolarga duch keladi. Bu muammolar tarjimada noto'g'ri talqinlar, madaniy ma'nodagi yo'qotishlar yoki muloqotda tushunmovchiliklarga olib kelishi mumkin. Shu boisdan tarjimonlar tilning nafaqat grammatik va leksik qurilmasini, balki xalqning tarixiy, diniy, urf-odat va mental xususiyatlarini o'zida aks ettiruvchi madaniy kontekstni ham chuqur tahlil qilishlari lozim. Maqolada tarjimada qo'llaniladigan ekvivalentlik turlari – formal, dinamik, funksional va stilistik ekvivalentliklar – alohida ko'rib chiqilib, ularning amaliyotdagi o'rne aniq misollar bilan izohlangan. Shuningdek, maqolada ekvivalentlikning madaniyatlararo muloqotni samarali yo'lga qo'yishdagi o'rne va tarjima sifatiga ta'siri ilmiy nuqtai nazardan yoritilgan.*

Kalit so'zlar *Tarjima, ekvivalentlik, madaniyat, madaniyatlararo muloqot, semantik moslik, tarjima nazariyasi, madaniy komponentlar.*

The most important factor of culture that connects different nations is translation studies. Translation is the most important form of interethnic communication, through which the works of scholars, philosophers, and poets have been translated into different languages, and the ties between nations have been

strengthened. The most difficult type of translation for any language is to find and translate an equivalent version.

The translated text should be equal to the original text and evoke the idea of unity with it. Accordingly, one of the tasks of translation is that the translated text should take the full

communicative place of the original and provide a harmonious balance of artistic pleasure, content and structure equal to the capabilities of the reader of the original. Such a balance should cover all aspects of translation.

Translation is a field that has been serving the development of writings, languages, dictionaries, literature, science for many centuries, as well as the development of knowledge of the peoples of the world in various fields and a more complete understanding of representatives of different cultures. The social and international significance of this activity is very important, it serves to make representatives of other nations aware of the cultural heritage of different peoples. Translation is, by its very nature, a transformation process. Theoretically, a perfectly translated work or text should convey to the reader the content that he or she receives from the original. As the famous American linguist Eugene Nida noted, "The definition of a good translation depends on the recipient's reaction to the translated message, and this information should be compared with how the recipients responded to the message when presented in the original." According to the Russian scholar Jacobson, translation is not just a change of forms into another language, but an exchange of information, and the task of the translator is to change the received information into forms in the target language. The Scottish linguist Catford emphasizes that "there is no equivalence of meaning in the translation process, explaining that there is only equivalence in form." Due to the differences between the original language and the target language, there are limitations related to equivalence in translation. (Baker, M. 2011) This limitation is manifested not only in the meaning of words, grammatical features, but also in cultural differences. From the above definitions, it can be said that a translator may face many

problems during the translation process, because the languages being translated differ from each other in various aspects. Therefore, the translator must take all aspects into account in this process.

The purpose and characteristics of translation are to develop mutual understanding between different countries and peoples, and it acts as a bridge connecting cultures. The famous American translation theorist Eugene Nida defined translation as follows: "Translation consists of reproducing, firstly, in meaning, and secondly, in style, the recipient language as a pure equivalent of the source language. However, cultural differences affect the emergence of the closest similar equivalent in the target language to varying degrees". Due to differences in history, geographical location, local customs, religious beliefs, etc., there are some problems in translation that prevent people from understanding each other correctly. (Bassnett, S. 2014) Thus, translation implies not only the linguistic competence of the translator, but also his awareness of the relevant cultures. In this sense, translation means not only the translation of words, sentences or articles from the source language into the target language, but also the movement between cultures. We know that every nation has its own culture, and it manifests itself in different forms in different nations. First of all, if we define the word culture, this concept can be described as a reflection of the customs, traditions, norms of behavior, belief systems and values of a particular people or nation. Culture is important in defining a particular community or a specific group of people. Cultural identity is used to show how people of a certain origin lead their lives. Culture is an integral part of human communication, has a significant impact on the behavior and actions of each individual as a member of a particular group, and is closely

related to language. Since it is one of the main concepts of anthropology, cultural studies, sociology and the humanities, there are various definitions and approaches to its study. Summarizing all of them, "The concept of culture can be defined as the sum of all material and spiritual wealth created and being created by humanity throughout the entire process of historical development" (Hatim, & Mason, 1997). Culture also affects how people communicate with each other. It also plays an important role in intercultural communication.

The terms language and culture are inextricably linked. In the 90s of the 20th centuries, a new field of linguistics, linguoculturology, emerged in linguistics, which studies phenomena such as the interaction, connection, formation and reflection of these concepts as a whole system in language and beyond. The main subjects of this field are language and culture. If cultural studies study the characteristics of a person in the historical, life, nature and social spheres, linguistics studies the worldview of a person in language. On the one hand, linguoculturology studies the place of humanity in the cultural language factor, and on the other hand, the place of man in the language factor. The study of language, culture and translation, and the relationship between them, is a very relevant issue, since communication with people in the world is of great importance. The diversity of languages of different cultures and the need for communication in human life have made translation a very effective factor in communication, exchange of culture and knowledge. Translators can face many difficulties in the process of translation. One of the main factors for this is the cultural differences between different peoples. Thus, language and culture are closely related to each other, and both must be taken into account in the translation process. All translators try to

convey the original meaning based on the cultural and religious norms of their society. In the current era of globalization, translation is of great importance, as it helps people of other nationalities to understand works written in one language. Cultures, especially popular culture, lead to the expansion of ethnic customs and traditions or religious values, which has further increased the need for translation. Since languages and cultures complement each other and the cultural characteristics of each region are different, translators should not only focus on how to convey the same meaning, but also try to show the differences between the two cultures. Translations serve to disseminate information, knowledge and ideas. (Kurbanov, 2012)

Translation plays an important role in creating a universal culture. It acts as a bridge for communication in all languages, especially those that are similar in terms of linguistic characteristics and cultural values in all parts of the world. Thus, it acts as a link between all countries of the world in a global network. In addition, translation assumes that there are boundaries between different cultures, and the translator can understand these boundaries and know that they must be crossed. Without cultural similarity and universality, representatives of different cultures cannot communicate with each other, and there can be no translation. When translating two languages of equal importance, translators must convey the original meaning, pragmatic and interrelated meanings of the original text. However, due to the differences between the two cultures, semantic equivalence may be limited.

Thus, translation is a complex process consisting of language and culture. It is necessary for the dissemination of information, knowledge and ideas. This is absolutely essential for effective and communicative communication

between different cultures, and translation serves to ensure social harmony and peace. It is better not to divide the specific features of culture into positive or negative aspects, since customary behaviors are found in all nations. The relationship between culture and translation is interrelated and goes hand in hand. This helps to eliminate the differences that may arise in different languages. (Venuti, 2012)

The questions arise whether it is possible to translate culture or whether it is possible to translate a text in isolation from its culture. Every scholar recognizes that language and culture are closely related, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate them from each other. From the above information, it can be concluded that a translator is a cultural mediator who, in order to serve the translation process, can change from the source language culture to the target language culture. It translates the content, style of the source text and introduces them into the target language text. The main goal of translators is to deliver the translation to people as if it expressed the content in the original language. Translation is closely related to the cultural factor of the language, and it is difficult to correctly translate the original into a certain language without knowing the culture. Therefore, the translator must study cultural differences in order to avoid problems in the translation process.

The concept of equivalence plays a fundamental role in the successful translation of cultural-specific items, which are deeply rooted in the unique traditions, values, beliefs, and worldviews of a given culture. Translating such elements is not merely a linguistic activity, but a complex cognitive and cultural negotiation that requires the translator to act as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural bridge. The diversity of cultural expressions embedded in language makes the task of achieving equivalence both a challenge and an art. This study has

demonstrated that equivalence, as a theoretical and practical construct, is essential for ensuring that the meaning, effect, and function of CSIs are adequately conveyed in the target language. Various types of equivalence – including formal, dynamic, functional, stylistic, and pragmatic – provide translators with frameworks through which to approach cultural items with sensitivity and accuracy. The choice of equivalence strategy largely depends on the nature of the text, its purpose, the cultural background of the target audience, and the translator's own judgment. The translation of cultural-specific items often demands a balance between fidelity to the source culture and intelligibility for the target audience. If the translator adheres too closely to the source text, the result may be obscure or confusing; if the translator over-adapts the material, there is a risk of cultural dilution or misrepresentation. Therefore, the translator must make informed decisions that take into account both linguistic structure and cultural significance.

Culture-specific items pose a unique challenge because they are often deeply rooted in the life, history, and worldview of a particular community. For example, terms like "navruz," "mahalla," or "yurt" in Uzbek represent social institutions or traditional values that may not have clear equivalents in English. In such cases, achieving full equivalence may be impossible, and the translator must decide between domestication (adapting the concept to a culturally familiar one) and foreignization (retaining the original and providing explanation). Venuti advocates for foreignization in literary translation to preserve the source culture's identity, while others, like Newmark, suggest that in certain contexts, functional or descriptive equivalence might be more effective for reader comprehension.

Examples of equivalence in translating culture-specific items

1. Uzbek: “Do’ppi” → English: “Traditional embroidered skullcap”

The word *do’ppi* refers to a specific cultural item of traditional Uzbek headwear. Since there is no exact equivalent in English, a **descriptive equivalence** is used to explain the object while retaining its cultural flavor.

This method helps non-Uzbek readers visualize and understand the item without removing its cultural specificity.

2. English: “Prom” → Uzbek: “Bitiruv kechasi”

Prom is a formal dance associated with American high school culture. When translating into Uzbek, a **functional equivalence** is applied by using “bitiruv kechasi,” which refers to a graduation event. Although not culturally identical, the function and setting are similar enough to preserve meaning in context.

3. Uzbek: “Navro’z” → English: “Navruz (Persian New Year celebrated on March 21)”

When translating the holiday *Navro’z*, a **foreignization strategy** is used by retaining the original term, accompanied by a brief explanatory note. This ensures both cultural authenticity and reader understanding.

It avoids using “New Year” alone, which might be misleading due to different calendars and symbolism.

4. English: “Thanksgiving” → Uzbek: “Minnatdorchilik kuni (AQSH bayrami)”

Thanksgiving is a holiday specific to American history and culture. In Uzbek, a **descriptive and cultural substitution** may be used, translating the term with clarification in brackets.

This helps maintain semantic equivalence without imposing unfamiliar practices on the target culture.

5. Russian: “Samovar” → English: “Samovar (a traditional Russian tea kettle)”

Here, **loan with explanation** works best. Rather than replacing the word, which has no

natural English counterpart, the translator retains it and adds an informative phrase to establish referential clarity. This allows readers to engage with the cultural image while understanding its function.

There are various strategies for handling culture-specific items through equivalence. These include using a cultural equivalent from the target language, translating descriptively, borrowing the original word with or without explanation, or omitting the item if it does not significantly impact meaning. For instance, in translating the Russian idiom “Делать из мухи слона” into English, one could use the equivalent “Make a mountain out of a molehill.” Although structurally different, the idiomatic equivalence conveys the same meaning. In other cases, such as translating “hammom” (a traditional bathhouse), the translator may retain the word and add a footnote or glossary explanation to preserve cultural authenticity.

The role of equivalence is not only linguistic but also ideological and interpretive. A translator must understand the cultural significance of the source item and assess the expectations, knowledge, and tolerance of the target audience. An equivalent term must convey not just what is said, but how and why it is said in a particular cultural context. Equivalence in translating CSIs is, therefore, a flexible and dynamic process that requires cultural literacy, sensitivity, and creativity.

In conclusion, equivalence is central to the successful translation of culture-specific items. It allows the translator to navigate the delicate balance between preserving cultural uniqueness and facilitating cross-cultural understanding. Whether through dynamic, functional, or formal equivalence, the translator’s choices determine how cultures are represented and received through translation.

Through analysis, it became evident that some cultural items are easily translatable using

direct equivalents, especially when both cultures share common references or experiences. However, in most cases, cultural-specific items require adaptation, substitution, paraphrasing, annotation, or even omission, depending on their translatability and the intended communicative effect. These techniques are chosen based on the translator's ability to interpret not only the surface meaning but also the deeper cultural context of the source text. One key insight revealed in this study is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution in translating cultural-specific items. Equivalence must be flexible and context-sensitive. For instance, food names, religious concepts, idioms, historical references, and humor often carry meanings that go beyond language, demanding creative and informed translation choices. In such cases, functional equivalence – where the target text fulfills the same function for the target audience as the source text does for the source audience – often proves to be the most effective approach. Moreover, the cultural competence of the translator significantly impacts the level of equivalence that can be achieved. A translator who is not only bilingual but also bicultural can better interpret and transfer the nuances of the original text. Cultural awareness helps prevent misunderstandings and enables the translator to preserve the communicative intent of the source text while respecting the norms of the target culture.

Another important aspect is the audience's expectations and cultural literacy. Translators must consider whether the target readers are likely to understand foreign cultural references or whether explanatory strategies are necessary. In literary translation, for example, retaining certain cultural elements might enrich the reading experience and promote intercultural awareness. In contrast, in commercial or instructional texts, clarity and usability might take precedence, necessitating

more adaptive strategies. Equivalence in translation is also closely linked with issues of ideology, power, and representation. Translators are not neutral actors; their decisions about what to translate, how to translate it, and what to omit inevitably shape the way cultures are represented and understood. As such, the role of the translator carries ethical responsibilities, especially when handling culturally sensitive or politically charged materials. This study also highlighted that while achieving complete equivalence may be theoretically impossible due to linguistic and cultural disparities, striving for functional or dynamic equivalence can ensure effective communication. In other words, equivalence should not be seen as a rigid goal, but as a guiding principle that supports meaningful cross-cultural interaction. In practical terms, translators should be equipped with a repertoire of translation techniques and a solid understanding of cultural contexts. Ongoing training in intercultural communication, exposure to authentic texts, and collaboration with native speakers of the target language are essential for improving translation quality. Additionally, advances in translation studies, including corpus-based approaches and digital tools, offer valuable resources for analyzing how CSIs are treated in real-world translations. Ultimately, the successful translation of cultural-specific items relies on the translator's ability to balance accuracy with creativity, and fidelity with adaptation. Equivalence serves as both a goal and a method in this process, allowing translators to mediate meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries. By applying appropriate equivalence strategies, translators can ensure that cultural richness is not lost in translation, but rather, is respectfully and effectively communicated to new audiences.

In summary, the role of equivalence in translating cultural-specific items is

multidimensional and essential for maintaining both linguistic and cultural integrity in translation. It requires not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skill, cultural insight, and ethical consideration. As

globalization continues to bring cultures into closer contact, the importance of thoughtful and effective translation grows – and with it, the centrality of equivalence in the translator's craft.

References:

1. Azizkhodjaeva, N. (2007). *Fundamentals of Translation Theory*. Tashkent: O'qittu Nashriyoti.
2. Baker, M. (2011). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge.
3. Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation Studies*. Routledge.
4. Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1997). *The Translator as Communicator*. Routledge.
5. Jakobson, R. (1959). "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." In *On Translation*, edited by R. A. Brower. Harvard University Press.
6. Kurbonov, S. (2012). *Language and Culture: Intercultural Differences in the Translation Process*. Tashkent: Science and Technology.
7. Lotman, Y. M. (1990). *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Indiana University Press.
8. Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall.
9. Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1982). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill.
10. Venuti, L. (2012). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge.