

THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL REFERENCES IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION: PROBLEMS AND APPROACHES

Rajabova Sevara

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17526565>

Abstract: *This paper examines the main difficulties and techniques involved in translating cultural references found in modern fiction. Expressions related to customs, history, idioms, or social life often create challenges for translators because they hold meanings that are specific to the source culture. The study emphasizes that achieving equivalence between the original and translated texts requires not only linguistic skill but also deep cultural understanding. Referring to theories such as domestication and foreignization, it discusses how translators decide between keeping the original cultural flavor and making the text accessible for readers in another culture. The research argues that translating culture-bound elements successfully depends on flexible, context-based choices rather than rigid use of one single method. In conclusion, it suggests that effective cultural translation allows readers from different backgrounds to experience the same emotions and artistic value intended by the author, preserving both the spirit and the integrity of the original work.*

Keywords: *cultural translation, domestication, foreignization, equivalence, literary translation, cultural adaptation.*

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of culture, history, and the worldview of its speakers. When translating contemporary fiction, translators face the complex task of conveying not just words, but the entire cultural atmosphere surrounding them. Culture-specific elements—like idioms, food names, festivals, or references to historical and social phenomena—often lack direct counterparts in another language, which makes their translation especially demanding. The overall success of a literary translation often depends on how effectively such elements are conveyed while keeping the tone and intention of the author intact.

The main problem arises from the difficulty of achieving equivalence. Cultural references rarely match perfectly across languages or societies. For example, a mention of a local holiday or a famous television program may instantly resonate with native readers but mean nothing to those unfamiliar with that culture. Literal translation in such cases may lead to misunderstanding, while excessive adaptation can strip the text of its original flavor and identity.

Another challenge involves maintaining the balance between accuracy and readability. Translators must remain loyal to the original text while ensuring that the translation reads naturally. This becomes even more complicated when the two cultures involved differ greatly. Genre and authorial style must also be considered, as many modern authors use cultural references to add humor, irony, or character development. A mistranslation can easily alter the intended tone or weaken the text's artistic quality.

Cultural awareness is therefore vital. A translator who lacks sufficient knowledge of both cultures may easily misinterpret certain references or choose unsuitable equivalents. Items connected to politics, religion, or gender roles often require special sensitivity and an understanding of current social values in both cultures.

Scholars have proposed various methods to handle such difficulties. Vinay and Darbelnet's well-known distinction between foreignization and domestication remains a useful guide. Foreignization keeps the foreign nature of the text, exposing readers to a new cultural world and preserving authenticity. Domestication, in contrast, modifies the reference to make it more familiar and comprehensible for the target audience.

In real translation practice, a combination of both methods is often the most effective. When a reference represents an essential part of the cultural or national identity—such as a proverb, a festival, or a geographical name—it may be retained with some clarification or a brief note.

References:

1. Aliboyeva, N. (2022). SELECTION OF SPECIAL TRANSLATION METHODS FOR ADEQUATE INTERPRETATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE. Scientific Collection «InterConf», (120), 121-124.
2. <https://journals.openedition.org/palimpsestes/2447?lang=en#>
TOMASELLO, Michael, 2006, "Acquiring Linguistic Constructions", in D. Kuhn &
3. R. Siegler (eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology. 6th Edition. Vol. 2: Cognition, Perception and Language*, Hoboken, Wiley, p. 255-298.
4. Aliboyeva, N. A. Q. (2023). LITERARY TRANSLATION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE. CURRENT RESEARCH JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES, 4(07), 21-25.
5. <https://locatheart.com/mistakes-in-film-translations/>