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## THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PECULIARITIES OF TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC TERMS

### Abstract

The term “culture-specific vocabulary” appeared in the 1980s. Problems of translating culture-specific terms from one language to another have always been a serious issue for translators. It causes even more problems if the languages being compared belong to different language groups and represent different cultures. Nevertheless, the study of culture-specific vocabulary helps to achieve the adequacy of translation, which in turn helps speakers of different languages and cultures to achieve mutual understanding. The above emphasizes the relevance and timeliness of the study of translation from the point of view of cultural linguistics. This paper will examine the peculiarities of translating culture-specific terms from Kazakh into English. It provides different methods of translating cultural connotations, taking into account the ways of living and thinking, as well the historical and cultural backgrounds embedded in the source language (hereafter SL) and target language (hereafter TL). These methods will be analyzed using specific examples, originals and translations of such works as “The Path of Abai” by Mukhtar Auezov and “Nomads” by Ilyas Yessenberlin. Therefore, the main aim of the paper is to try to explain main approaches and theories needed for adequate understanding of different cultures through translation.

**Keywords:** target language, source language, connotations, culture-specific terms, adequacy of translation

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## МӘДЕНИ РЕҢККЕ ИЕ СӨЗДЕРДІ АУДАРУДЫҢ ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ ПРАКТИКАЛЫҚ ЕРЕКШЕЛІКТЕРІ

### Аңдатпа

“Мәдени реңкке ие лексика” термині 1980 жылдары пайда болды. Мәдени реңкке ие сөздерді бір тілден екінші тілге аудару мәселесі аудармашылар үшін қиындық туғызып келгені жасырын емес. Мұндай мәселе, әсіресе, салыстырылып отырған бұл тілдер бір-біріне ұқсамайтын екі тіл тобына жатса және олар түрлі мәдениетке тиесілі болса тіптен арта түспек. Соған қарамастан Мәдени реңкке ие сөздерді зерттеу аударма бара барлығына қол жеткізуге көмектеседі, ал бұл өз кезегінде әртүрлі тілде сөйлеушілер мен түрлі мәдениеттердің өзара түсіністікке жетуіне көмектеседі. Жоғарыда айтылғаны аударманы лингвомәдени тұрғыдан зерттеудің өзектілігі мен уақтылығына баса назар аударады. Осындай мәселелерді шешуге көмектесер деген мақсатпен, бұл мақалада мәдени реңкке ие сөздерді қазақ тілінен ағылшын тіліне аудару ерекшеліктері жайлы сөз болады. Онда түпнұсқа тіл (ТТ) мен аударма тілдеріне (АТ) тән өмір сүру және ойлау жолдарын, сондай-ақ, олардың тарихи және мәдени ерекшеліктерін ескере отырып, мәдени коннотацияларды аудару тәсілдері қарастырылады. Бұл әдістер Мұхтар Әуезовтің “Абай жолы” және Ілияс Есенберлиннің “Көшпенділер” шығармаларындағы нақты мысалдар, түпнұсқалар және аудармалары бойынша талданады. Олай болса, бұл мақаланың негізгі мақсаты – аударманың көмегімен түрлі мәдениетті түсінуге қажетті тәсілдер мен теорияларды талқылау.

**Кілтсөздер:** аударма тіл, түпнұсқа тіл, коннотациялар, мәдени реңкке ие сөздер, аударма барабарлығы

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## ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИЕ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ПЕРЕВОДА КУЛЬТУРНО-МАРКИРОВАННОЙ ЛЕКСИКИ

### *Аннотация*

Термин “культурно-маркированная лексика” появился в 1980-е годы. Проблемы перевода культурно-маркированных терминов с одного языка на другой всегда создавали серьезную проблему для переводчиков. Еще больше проблем возникает, если сравниваемые языки принадлежат к разным языковым группам и представляют разные культуры. Тем не менее изучение культурно-маркированной лексики помогает достичь адекватности перевода, что в свою очередь помогает носителям разных языков и культур достичь взаимопонимания. Сказанное выше подчеркивает актуальность и своевременность исследования перевода с точки зрения лингвокультурологии. В данной статье будут рассмотрены особенности перевода культурно-маркированных терминов с казахского на английский язык. В статье рассмотрены различные методы перевода культурных коннотаций, принимая во внимание образ жизни и мышления, а также исторические и культурные особенности, заложенные в исходном языке (ИЯ) и в языке перевода (ЯП). Эти методы будут проанализированы на конкретных примерах, оригиналах и переводах таких произведений как “Путь Абая” Мухтара Ауэзова и “Кочевники” Ильеса Есенберлина. Таким образом, основная цель статьи – попытаться объяснить основные подходы и теории, необходимые для достижения адекватности и понимания различных культур посредством перевода.

**Ключевые слова:** язык перевода, исходный язык, коннотации, культурно-маркированная лексика, адекватность перевода

**Introduction.** At present much attention is paid to comparative studies of languages that belong to different linguistic groups. [1]. The main aim of such studies is to explore different languages from lexical, semantic, as well as grammatical points of view. In translation, comparative analyses help determine the accuracy and adequacy of the translation. It helps us to discover how human thought is reflected in that particular culture.

Translation is a multifaceted phenomenon. Nowadays, this term is used both in the sense of communication from one language into another without changing the meaning of the text as well as to denote interaction of cultures and intercultural communication. Translation as an art can be interpreted as either a product or as a process. It is “the ability to mediate between cultures, to explain one to another; mixed loyalties; the pushes and pulls of the source and target cultures” [1, 222].

Ignorance of cultural difference opens a cultural gap that negatively affects the translation process. It is not always possible to be faithful to the original and give an adequate translation. [2] While discussing the problems of translation correspondence and cultural as well as linguistic differences between SL and TL, Nida concludes that the “differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure” (2000), because, as mentioned above, each culture has its own specific features.

**Main research questions and methodology.** When two people from two different cultures meet each other for the first time they find out that the way they communicate and think or behave is absolutely different from each other. This difference can be more distinct if these two cultures are distant not only geographically but also linguistically. To understand and explain the reasons for misunderstandings that take place in this connection, in research methods we will involve a constant interaction between theory and practice on the basis of concrete examples and will begin with reviewing and gathering relevant information on different translation theory in general and translation of culture specific terms in particular. Definitions of culture and its interaction with languages as well as the role of translation are of great importance in understanding different translation problems.

Newmark defines culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”; Vermeer states that “language is part of a culture”, therefore, “language and culture are whatever a person must know in order to function in a particular society” [10,21]. Therefore, language and culture are two phenomena that interact and fulfill each other.

In regards to translation ‘it is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions’ [7,200]. Quality of translation, in many ways depends on the cultural differences, which demands a good knowledge about the respective cultures as well as the ability to transfer between cultures. Ignorance of cultural difference opens a cultural gap that negatively affects the translation process.

Nida concludes that “a good translation should fulfill the same communicative purpose in the target language and relate to the culture of the ‘receptor’; be sensitive to the style of the original”. Unfortunately, it is the main challenge Kazakh-English translators are facing today – they cannot always be faithful to the source text, and in many ways, ignore cultural issues. It is the main reason that prompted me to start this research project.

**Research results.** Kazakh and English belong to different language families. Kazakh belongs to a Turkic family which is marked by affixes added to the stem one after another, while English belongs to the Indo-European family known by its verb-subject-object word order. Therefore, these two languages are, in no way, related either linguistically or culturally. The

traditional Kazakh family members speak eloquently; their speech is full of meaningful proverbs, idioms which express their worldview without using many words. Many phrases are metaphorical, and their sense-meaning does not have direct lexical equivalents in English. In this connection, to avoid misunderstanding most of translators use transliteration method, this way conveying only the Kazakh pronunciation to readership.

The current research work will focus on well-known novels 'Abai Zholy' - 'The Path of Abai' by Mukhtar Auezov and 'Koshpendiler' – 'The Nomads' by I.Essenberlin and their English translations. Both of them are full of cultural terms, connotations, idiomatic expressions which were not adequately translated into English or were just omitted.

'Abai Zholy' – 'The Path of Abai' is a historical novel that was published in 1942. It describes the life of the outstanding Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbaev from his childhood to his senior years. While reading the novel one can feel the entire life of the Kazakh people before the XIX century. It is a novel full of sorrow and sadness than happiness. It is the sorrow of the Kazakh land and of the Kazakh society. Abai's dream for a happy and better life is the dream of the people.

In comparison with 'The Path of Abai', the Russian and English versions of 'The Nomads,' which forms a trilogy, were severely criticized. The criticism focused primarily on the misinterpretation of culture-specific terms. This failure to make the TL closer to the original was the result of a lack of knowledge of Kazakh culture and of the failure to find appropriate translation strategies to make the novel more readable.

'The Nomads' is a novel full of onomastic terms. In its English translation almost all of the proper names are transliterated, in a few cases they are transcribed. These two terms, transliteration and transcription might be confusing for non-specialists. In the transcription method the phoneme is marked within the framework of the receptor language (e.g. the transcription of William would be 'УИЛЬЯМ' or 'ВИЛЬЯМ?'), and therefore, some non-correspondence may occur.

As regards the transliteration, if necessary, the translator might not fully follow the orthography of the target language, thus, having different variants of a word. A word can have two or three transliterated variants, but not more than three.

Therefore, the main aim of this research project is to analyze cultural aspects of literary translations; conduct critical literary analyses of the two novels mentioned above and their English translations, and define the influence of culture-specific terms/expressions which are considered problematic on the quality of the translation. The following research questions serve as the summary of these aims:

1. How are language and culture interrelated with each other?
2. How culture influences translation?
3. What translation shifts occur between languages that are both linguistically and geographically distant from each other?
4. To what extent are the culture-specific terms translatable?
5. What translation strategies can help better translate these terms?

**Discussion.** Many researches in the field of translation show that it is extremely difficult to translate between cultures as "theoretical foundation in this field is poorly understood. It lacks a unified model and has lots of shortcomings as terminological flux." [4,2]. It is absolutely true about Kazakh language. Those translation models that are being used in different translation schools cannot be fitted into the Kazakh language fully and cause more problems than solutions. Even when they are applied, they cannot have the same communicative value in the target language, which makes me conclude that Kazakh translation theory is an issue in dire need of solution; it is the one which lacks definitions, models.

In connection with that, in my research paper I tried to incorporate both theory and practice. For this purpose, Gideon Toury's model of Descriptive Translation Studies (1995) will be used as one of the main methodologies alongside with the literature based one. This model suggested in the book *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* describes a variety of approaches and methods which will help translators and researchers get an in-depth knowledge about translation methodologies.

Toury's model consists of four stages:

First stage of the model relies on research works that compare source text with the target text. According to this stage source text is compared with the target text 1) synchronically; 2) diachronically; 3) the same source text is compared with different target texts performed by one and the same translator in different times; 4) the same source text is compared with different target texts in different languages.

Second stage includes comparison of a source text with its target text translation in parallel; In the third stage translation is shown as a process than a product. The last stage describes socio-cultural issues of translation.

All of these stages except for the third one will be used as the main research methodology. Synchronic analyses based on a rich source of concrete examples chosen from the novels mentioned above and their English translations will compare two languages (Kazakh and English) and describe what similarities and discrepancies these languages that belong to different language groups might have (descriptive analysis). From this perspective, it coincides with the second stage where all examples of culture-specific terms in both languages will be compared in parallel. I hope that the critical comparative analyses that I am going to apply throughout the research project will provide an interesting parallel features that in their turn might explain different translation shifts and translator's decisions. It will help us see to what extent the Kazakh culture specific terms are translatable.

Culture-specific terms are shaped in the community and created naturally. It reflects the worldview of people, their historical and cultural backgrounds. It is one of the main components of the intercultural communication. In order to correctly render the term, a translator needs to have a good knowledge about the respective cultures and be able to transfer between

cultures. That is where the stage-four-methodology will be used. It will also help us analyze the implications behind the translation strategies used.

**Conclusion.** Concluding my short paper, I would like to point out that at the heart of this research lies a simple interest to enhance our knowledge about translation of small languages like Kazakh, how translation with such critical languages can be taught in universities and how the language can be implemented as ‘fit for translation’.

It’s of great importance to highlight that translation is a notion that bears several meanings and definitions. It is an integral part of the culture it is representing. It is the translation that makes different nations closer or results in severe misunderstandings. Therefore, interpretation of an alien culture depends on how the translator translates the source text, and how he or she interprets the cultural peculiarities of a specific nation.

The translator must tackle the source language text in such a way that the target version will correspond to the source language version.” [1,23]. It is therefore, of great importance in translation to consider the strategies cultural aspects are translated and its impact on the target readership.

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