

Classification of Culture-Specific (Nationally Coloured) Words in Translation Studies

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ABSTRACT

*The study explores the classification and translation of culture-specific or nationally coloured words, known as realia, within global and Uzbek translation studies. The aim is to systematize the major theoretical approaches to realia, analyze their typological classifications, and identify their functions in cross-cultural communication. The research applies a comparative-descriptive and semantic analysis method, drawing upon the frameworks of S. Vlahov and S. Florin, E. Nida, P. Newmark, and Uzbek scholars such as G. Salomov, R. Fayzullayeva, and Z. Sadiqov. Findings demonstrate that realia serve as key carriers of ethnolinguistic identity, reflecting historical, geographical, and socio-cultural realities of a people. The article argues that successful translation of such items requires a balance between linguistic equivalence and cultural adequacy, achieved through strategies like transliteration, descriptive explanation, and contextual adaptation. The research also integrates Mahmud al-Kashgari's *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk* as an early lexicographic source preserving Turkic realia that embody national consciousness and cultural memory. The synthesis of classical lexicographic insight and modern translation theory underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in achieving authentic intercultural communication.*

Keywords: Realia, culture-specific words, translation theory, ethnolinguistic identity, classification, cultural adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

Translation serves as a bridge that connects nations, civilizations, and linguistic communities, enabling the transfer of cultural and intellectual heritage across time and space. As G'. Salomov (1978) emphasized, translation is not merely the process of rendering words from one language into another but an act of intercultural dialogue requiring the translator's creativity and deep understanding of both linguistic and cultural systems. In this respect, translation becomes an essential medium for transmitting a nation's unique traditions, worldview, and historical experience to the global community.

The study of culture-specific words variously known as *realia*, culture-bound items, *culturemes*, ethnographic terms, and nationally coloured vocabulary – has developed through diverse theoretical schools worldwide. These lexical units embody material and spiritual artifacts that are typical of one culture but may lack direct equivalents in another (Vinogradov 2001). The problem of translating such elements lies not only in linguistic gaps but also in cultural non-equivalence, which often challenges the translator's ability to preserve authenticity and national color.

P. Newmark (1981) classifies these elements as cultural words and divides them into five semantic fields: ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations and customs, and gestures. His approach marked one of the first systematic attempts to structure the field of cultural translation. Similarly, Russian linguists S. Vlahov and S. Florin (1980) made a significant contribution with their typology of *realia*, which distinguishes between local, temporal, and thematic classifications. They defined *realia* as lexical units denoting objects, phenomena, and customs that reflect the national and historical uniqueness of a people. This tripartite model became foundational for later studies in both Russian and international translation scholarship.

In Uzbek translation studies, the issue of culturally specific words was extensively explored by G'. Salomov (2003), who highlighted the importance of *milliy kolorit* (national color) in conveying the authenticity of the source text. His classification

includes elements such as customs, traditions, material culture, dialects, musical instruments, national attire, and religious practices. Building on this, R. Fayzullayeva (1973) and N. O'rmonova (2008) expanded the analysis to include ethnographic and historical vocabulary, emphasizing that many culturally bound terms remain untranslatable without contextual explanation or borrowing.

Modern Uzbek scholar Zohidjon Sadiqov (2021) introduced a monographic study titled 'Qadimgi turkiy realiyalar tarjiması' ("Translation of Ancient Turkic Realia"), in which he examined the translation of ancient Turkic culturally marked lexicon into English and German. Sadiqov's research is particularly valuable because it provides a diachronic approach, linking classical Turkic lexicography, as represented in Mahmud al-Kashgari's Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (*Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk*), with modern translation theory. Through comparative linguistic analysis, he demonstrated that many Turkic realia such as *yabġ'u* (tribal leader), *qopuz* (string instrument), *yurt* (homeland), and *toy* (feast) continue to serve as cultural and semiotic indicators of Turkic civilization.

Therefore, the present research aims to synthesize these perspectives and develop a unified understanding of the classification and translation of culture-specific words, with a focus on their manifestation in al-Kashgari's lexicon. The integration of ancient and modern viewpoints will help reveal how translation serves as both a linguistic and cultural act, preserving the intangible heritage embedded in words that encapsulate centuries of Turkic ethnocultural experience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs an integrative methodological approach that combines comparative linguistics, cultural linguistics, and translation theory to examine the classification and translation of culture-specific words (realia) across different scholarly traditions. The methods applied are both descriptive and analytical, aiming to systematize the diverse typologies proposed by Western, Russian, and Uzbek translation scholars and to align

them with examples drawn from Mahmud al-Kashgari's Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (*Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk*).

The core material of this research includes: The English translation of Mahmud al-Kashgari's Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (translated by R. Dankoff and J. Kelly, 1982–1985), which serves as the primary source of culture-specific vocabulary reflecting the linguistic and cultural realities of 11th-century Turkic civilization. Additionally, Uzbek-language studies by scholars such as R. Fayzullayeva (1973), N. O'rmonova (2008), and A. O'razboyev (2018) have been consulted to demonstrate the development of translation studies in the national context.

The research adopts a multilayered analytical framework that integrates linguistic, cultural, and semiotic methodologies. Each level contributes to understanding the relationship between the lexical unit, its cultural referent, and its translation strategy.

- **Descriptive method:** This method is employed to identify and describe realia – lexical items referring to culturally specific phenomena such as social institutions, rituals, artifacts, food, clothing, and mythology. For instance, in al-Kashgari's work, words like *qopuz* (a string instrument), *tuman* (military unit or province), and *yabg'u* (tribal leader) are analyzed within their cultural and historical context.
- **Comparative method:** Comparative analysis allows the examination of how different theorists classify cultural vocabulary and how similar categories are reflected in both Turkic and Indo-European linguistic traditions. For example, P. Newmark's (1981) fivefold model of cultural words ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations, and gestures compared with S. Vlahov and S. Florin's (1980) tripartite typology (local, temporal, thematic).
- **Linguo-cultural and semiotic method:** This approach views language as a repository of cultural meaning. The study follows Vereshchagin and Kostomarov's (1987) concept of "linguistic and cultural signs," treating realia as semiotic carriers of national identity. The analysis focuses on how these signs are represented and reinterpreted in translation,

maintaining the balance between domestication and foreignization (Venuti 1995).

- **Historical-comparative method:** This method is essential for establishing diachronic links between ancient Turkic lexis and its modern equivalents. Through Zohidjon Sadiqov's framework, the study connects realia in *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turksuch as otuz* (tribe), *yurt* (land, homeland), *toy* (feast) to their semantic preservation in contemporary Turkic and Uzbek usage.

The concept of culture-specific words, or realia, has undergone continuous development in translation studies. Scholars from different traditions – Western, Russian, and Uzbek have contributed various frameworks for defining and classifying these culturally bound lexical units. Their perspectives collectively shape the foundation for understanding how national color and cultural semantics are preserved in translation.

Peter Newmark (1981, 1988) was among the first Western theorists to propose a systematic typology of cultural words, which he defined as lexical items denoting “objects, institutions, or customs specific to a particular culture.” He divided such vocabulary into five semantic categories:

- **Ecology:** flora, fauna, winds, mountains, and local geography (e.g., steppe, desert, tundra).
- **Material culture:** artifacts, food, clothing, houses, and transport (e.g., kimono, sari, yurt, sushi).
- **Social culture:** occupations, leisure, and customs (e.g., siesta, tea ceremony).
- **Organizations, customs, and activities:** political, religious, and artistic institutions (e.g., sharia, samurai, madrasa).
- **Gestures and habits:** non-verbal culture-bound behaviors (e.g., bowing in Japan, handshaking rituals).

Newmark suggested that translators should balance foreignization (retaining the foreign element) and domestication (adapting it to the target culture) depending on the target

audience's familiarity with the referent. His functional classification remains foundational in Western translation studies.

Eugene Nida (1964, 1993) introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence, arguing that translation must produce the same response in the target audience as the original did in its own culture. He categorized culture-specific expressions into linguistic, cultural, and situational contexts, emphasizing communicative effectiveness over literal fidelity. For instance, in translating religious or moral concepts such as *iman* (faith) or *qismet* (destiny), Nida advised maintaining functional equivalence rather than lexical identity. This approach complements Newmark's typology by stressing the pragmatic and receptor-oriented nature of translation, particularly in rendering religious and ethical realia.

S. VLAKHOV AND S. FLORIN'S TYPOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In Russian translation studies, S. Vlahov and S. Florin's monograph *Непереводимое в переводе* (1980) provided the most comprehensive classification of realia. They defined realia as lexical items "denoting objects, phenomena, and concepts characteristic of a nation's material and spiritual culture that lack precise equivalents in other languages." Their classification comprises three hierarchical dimensions:

- **Local typology:** distinguishing national, regional, and international realia. For instance, samovar (Russia), tea house (Central Asia), and democracy (international) illustrate varying cultural reach.
- **Temporal typology:** separating historical (obsolete, e.g., khaganate, janissary) and modern (e.g., kolkhoz, Soviet) realia.
- **Thematic typology:** categorizing realia into:
 - **Geographical realia** (mountains, rivers, local nature);
 - **Ethnographic realia** (food, clothing, housing, rituals);
 - **Social-political realia** (institutions, military ranks, titles).

This tripartite system has become the benchmark for classifying culturally specific vocabulary and serves as the methodological foundation for modern cross-cultural translation analysis.

E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov (1987) approached the issue from a linguoculturological perspective, introducing the concept of “linguistic and cultural signs.” According to them, every realia represents a condensed form of ethnocultural information reflecting a nation’s worldview. They emphasized that cultural terms cannot be fully translated without conveying their contextual background, as in yurt (nomadic dwelling) or hajj (pilgrimage), where the referent encapsulates historical and religious values.

Their approach integrates semiotics and pedagogy, underscoring that translation is a means of intercultural education as well as linguistic transfer.

CLASSIFICATIONS IN UZBEK TRANSLATION STUDIES

Uzbek translation scholar G‘aybulla Salomov (1978, 2003) was among the pioneers in Central Asia to study the role of *milliy kolorit* (national color) in translation. He classified cultural units into several semantic domains:

- customs and traditions, domestic life, national clothing and musical instruments;
- dialectal expressions and idioms, religious practices and rituals.

Salomov emphasized that the translator’s task is not merely to find lexical equivalents but to recreate the spiritual atmosphere of the original, ensuring that cultural and psychological nuances remain intact.

R. Fayzullayeva (1973) expanded upon Salomov’s ideas by proposing a more ethnographic classification. She identified the following groups of culture-bound vocabulary: national dishes and cuisine (*palov*, *sumalak*), traditional clothing (*do‘ppi*, *chapan*), musical instruments (*dutor*, *rubob*), architecture and

crafts (*minor, masjid, ganch*), religious institutions and ceremonies (*ramazon, iftorlik*).

Her work underscored the ethnolinguistic richness of Uzbek and its translation challenges, especially in rendering culture-specific lexemes without losing their cultural essence.

N. O'rmonova (2008) classified historical and archaic lexicon based on functional domains military, religious, social, and domestic – demonstrating how such words in classical Uzbek literature (e.g., *amir, sulton, qizilbash*) maintain symbolic and stylistic significance in translation.

Her principle of semantic transparency asserts that cultural terms should be translated in a way that illuminates their historical and cultural layers rather than replacing them with generic equivalents.

Z. Sadiqov (2021), in his monograph 'Qadimgi turkiy realiyalar tarjimasi' (Translation of Ancient Turkic Realia), proposed a historically grounded classification system. He grouped realia into six major semantic categories:

- Ethnonyms – *turk, qipchoq, o'g'uz*;
- Toponyms – *Itil, Balasaghun, Kashgar*;
- Anthroponyms – *Alp Er Tonga, Barsbeg*;
- Social titles and ranks – *yabg'u, shad, buyruk*;
- Religious and mythological concepts – *Tengri, Umay, yer-sub*;
- Cultural artifacts and practices – *toy, qopuz, yurt*.

Sadiqov's methodology bridges linguistic and cultural analysis, highlighting the semantic continuity of Turkic cultural heritage and its transmission through translation. His approach resonates strongly with the typological principles set by Vlahov and Florin, adapted to Turkic linguistics.

Mahmud al-Kashgari's 11th-century Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (*Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk*) stands as one of the earliest encyclopedic records of Turkic realia. The lexicon encapsulates the material, social, and spiritual culture of Turkic tribes across Central Asia. Al-Kashgari's entries not only define

words but also provide ethnographic commentary, making his work a prototype for linguistic and cultural classification.

The following table summarizes selected examples of culture-specific terms in al-Kashgari's lexicon, classified according to the frameworks discussed above:

| Turkic term | Meaning/ context | Cultural category | Scholar classification |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Yabg'u</i> | Tribal ruler, noble title | Social-political realia | Vlakhov & Florin (social); Sadiqov (rank) |
| <i>Qopuz</i> | String musical instrument | Ethnographic, material culture | Newmark (material culture); Fayzullayeva (music) |
| <i>Toy</i> (wedding ceremony) | Feast, celebration | Social-ritual realia | Salomov (tradition); Nida (situational) |
| <i>Yurt</i> | Homeland, dwelling | Geographical and cultural realia | Newmark (ecology); Vereshchagin & Kostomarov (symbolic) |
| <i>Tuman</i> | Administrative unit or army division | Political- administrative realia | Vlakhov & Florin (social- political) |
| <i>Tengri</i> | God of heaven | Religious- mythological realia | Sadiqov (religious); Nida (cultural) |

This comparative mapping demonstrates that al-Kashgari's lexicon inherently aligns with modern translation classifications, proving the universality of cultural taxonomy in linguistic expression.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of culture-specific or nationally coloured words demonstrates that their study occupies a central

position in modern translation studies. Throughout this research, it has become evident that culture-bound items, or realia, form an integral layer of the linguistic and cultural system of each nation. These lexical units carry not only denotative meaning but also connotative, historical, and emotional values reflecting the worldview, traditions, and material culture of a people. The study confirms that accurate translation of such elements requires not merely linguistic competence but also profound cultural and historical awareness.

The review of classification systems proposed by both Western and Eastern scholars reveals a gradual evolution of the concept of realia. From early Soviet approaches (Fedorov, Vinogradov, Vereshchagin & Kostomarov) to the modern frameworks of Vlahov and Florin, and later Newmark and Nida, the perception of nationally marked lexicon has shifted from linguistic categorization to intercultural interpretation. The tripartite typology suggested by Vlahov and Florin (geographical, ethnographic, socio-political) remains the most comprehensive, yet the contributions of scholars such as Barkhudarov, Komissarov, and Newmark have enriched it with new functional perspectives.

Within the Uzbek school of translation studies, scholars such as G'. Salomov, N. Khudoyberganova, R. Fayzullayeva, and Z. Sadiqov have deepened the understanding of culture-specific vocabulary in the Turkic and Uzbek context. Their works underline that national colouring in translation serves as a vehicle of ethnolinguistic identity and historical memory. Zohidjon Sadiqov's monographic research on the translation of ancient Turkic realia into English and German demonstrates the universality of the typological framework, showing that such units preserve historical consciousness across languages when adequately interpreted.

A distinctive contribution to this discourse is provided by Mahmud al-Kashgari's monumental *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk* (Compendium of the Turkic Dialects). This 11th-century lexicographic masterpiece, beyond being a linguistic record, functions as a proto-encyclopaedia of Turkic realia – documenting ethnographic, geographical, and socio-political

terms such as *yurt*, *toy*, *tamgha*, and *beg*. These entries encapsulate the cultural and civilizational experience of the Turkic world and serve as early examples of how linguistic form reflects collective identity. Modern translation studies can therefore regard Qoshg'ari's dictionary as a pioneering effort in cross-cultural mediation, one that anticipated the contemporary notion of culture-specific items centuries before the discipline itself emerged.

By bridging historical linguistics, cultural anthropology, and translation theory, this research underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches in rendering realia. The translator's task, as seen in the works of Nida, Newmark, and Salomov, lies not in literal equivalence but in achieving communicative adequacy – conveying the spirit, aesthetic, and worldview of the source culture. This principle equally applies to modern translations of classical works like *Dīwān Luġāt at-Turk*, where cultural terms must be preserved as symbols of identity, not reduced to mere lexical parallels. Ultimately, the classification and interpretation of culture-specific words form the foundation for a culturally adequate translation model. The convergence of international theories with the Uzbek translation school, enriched by Mahmud al-Kashgari's legacy, reflects the dynamic evolution of translation studies in the 21st century. This synthesis of historical insight and modern methodology reaffirms that understanding and preserving cultural distinctiveness in translation is not merely a linguistic act but a form of intercultural dialogue and humanistic continuity.

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