

**PROBLEM OF RENDERING NON-EQUIVALENT UNITS IN UZBEK–RUSSIAN–
ENGLISH TRANSLATION DISCOURSE (A CASE STUDY OF A. QODIRIY’S “THE
SCORPION FROM THE ALTAR”)**

Bagaeva Daniya Damirovna

*2nd Stage Master’s Student, Gulistan State University, Gulistan, Uzbekistan e-mail:
daniela_080392@gmail.com*

Abstract: *This article explores the complexities of translating non-equivalent lexical units in literary fiction, using the seminal Uzbek novel *The Scorpion from the Altar* by Abdulla Qodiriy as a case study. Particular attention is paid to the rendering of culture-specific realia, forms of address, and etiquette formulas in the Russian and English translations of the work. The author analyzes key translation strategies, including transliteration, functional substitution, descriptive translation, and omission. The comparative analysis demonstrates that while neither translation fully conveys the semantic, cultural, and pragmatic potential of the original non-equivalent units, the Russian version more frequently preserves the national color, whereas the English translation tends toward domestication and semantic simplification. The article concludes that the adequate rendering of non-equivalent vocabulary requires deep cultural interpretation aimed at reconstructing the value system embedded in the source text.*

Keywords: *non-equivalent vocabulary, literary translation, culture-specific realia, translation strategies, Abdulla Qodiriy.*

Аннотация: *В данной статье рассматриваются сложности перевода безэквивалентных лексических единиц в художественной литературе на примере знакового узбекского романа «Скорпион из алтаря» Абдуллы Кадыри. Особое внимание уделяется передаче культурно-специфических реалий, форм обращения и этикетных формул в русских и английских переводах произведения. Автор анализирует ключевые переводческие стратегии, включая транслитерацию, функциональную замену, описательный перевод и опущение. Сравнительный анализ показывает, что хотя ни один из переводов не способен полностью передать семантический, культурный и прагматический потенциал безэквивалентных единиц оригинала, в русской версии чаще сохраняется национальный колорит, тогда как английский перевод тяготеет к доместикации и семантическому упрощению. В статье делается вывод о том, что адекватная передача безэквивалентной лексики требует глубокой культурной интерпретации, направленной на воссоздание ценностной системы, заложенной в исходном тексте.*

Ключевые слова: *безэквивалентная лексика, художественный перевод, культурно-специфические реалии, переводческие стратегии, Абдулла Кадыри.*

The translation of literary fiction inherently involves the persistent risk of losing the “soul” of the text in favor of its clarity and accessibility for a foreign audience. The main difficulty lies in the fact that the reality depicted by the artist is captured in language not only through general concepts but also through specific associations, everyday habits, and etiquette norms that may not exist in the target language. This phenomenon, known as non-equivalence, occurs when a lexical unit serves as a carrier of a unique cultural code.

According to L.S. Barkhudarov’s definition, non-equivalent units are words or stable expressions of one language that have no full or partial equivalents among the lexical elements of another language [1, p. 94]. Rendering non-equivalent units is considered one of the most challenging tasks in translation studies due to the lack of direct correspondences in the target language. Since there is no universal method for translating non-equivalent words, the success of a translation directly depends on the translator’s competence and their ability to flexibly apply various methods for conveying specific concepts.

In modern linguistics, the problem of non-equivalence remains highly debated, especially regarding the translation of literary prose deeply rooted in national life. The novel “The Scorpion from the Altar” by the Uzbek author Abdulla Qadiriyy provides unique material for analyzing translation discourse. The lexical units reflected in the characters’ forms of address, conversations, and household items serve not merely as background elements, but as the foundation of national identity and the psychological portrayal of the characters in the 19th-century Khanate of Kokand.

In this article, we attempt to analyze the rendering of non-equivalent units from Abdulla Qadiriyy’s novel “The Scorpion from the Altar” in its Russian (L. Bat, V. Smirnova) and English (I. M. Tukhtasinov, U. R. Yoldoshev, A. A. Khamidov) translations, and to trace how the balance between textual accessibility for the foreign reader and the preservation of national color is achieved in translation.

In the process of translating the novel into English and Russian, the translators resorted to different methods of conveying non-equivalent lexis. The process of their translation reveals two fundamentally different approaches: the preservation of exoticism through footnotes and the attempt at adaptation, which inevitably leads to semantic losses.

It is worth noting that many non-equivalent units in the novel are presented without direct lexical translation. Particular attention should be paid to the strategy of working with realia, i.e., words or word combinations that denote objects typical for the life (household, culture, social structure, and historical development) of one nation and unfamiliar to another [2, p. 47]. In the context of “The Scorpion from the Altar”, these realia are not just a lexical layer, but the living fabric of everyday life through which the author transmits a national picture of the world to the reader. In both Russian and English adaptations, translators resort to transliteration, placing explanations in footnotes. This strategy allows to preserve the national and cultural

specificity of the original while simultaneously facilitating comprehension for the foreign reader. For instance, the Russian translation features unique cultural markers such as *ayvan*, *sandal*, *adras*, *ichkari* and *tashkari*, while the English translation includes *mahalla*, *atlas*, *makhsi*, *manti*, and others. By leaving these lexemes in their original phonetic form, the translators created an “effect of presence”, enabling readers to encounter authentic objects of everyday life and architecture that lack direct analogues in Western culture.

Despite its advantages, the method of transliteration cannot be regarded as a universal solution. Leaving a word in its original form does not guarantee the transmission of its inner meaning.

For example, the word “*sandal*” in the footnote of the Russian translation is explained as “a low square wooden table placed over a brazier or a covered pit in a stone or earthen floor, filled with hot coals and covered with a blanket under which people keep warm” [4, p. 169]. However, this technical description fails to convey the deeper metaphysical subtext. In Qodiriy’s narrative, the *sandal* functions not merely as a piece of furniture, but as a sacred center of family unity. It symbolizes winter warmth, intimate conversations, and collective emotional bonding, shaping the spiritual atmosphere of the Uzbek household.

Another lexical unit, “*atlas*”, in translation is given as “Uzbek national silk smooth shiny fabric” [5, p. 7], which constitutes a significant semantic simplification. In the Uzbek language, *atlas* is not just a fabric; it is a specific ornament and a marker of status. The loss of this nuance in translation deprives the image of the heroine Rano of her visual national identity.

It is noteworthy that some lexemes, such as “*manti*” or “*chaykhana*”, have long crossed the boundaries of non-equivalence in Russian, becoming recognizable loanwords. However, in English translation, they remain exoticisms and are given either as translations or with explanatory footnotes.

Not all *realia* yield to simple transliteration. Difficulties arise when the translator attempts to find a functional analogue that ultimately proves to be a simplified replica of the original concept.

A prime example is the lexeme “*mahalla*”, which remains untranslated in the English version, is rendered as “*kvartal*” (“district” or “block”) in Russian. This substitution completely destroys the meaning of “*mahalla*” as a self-governing institution and an ethical regulator of community life. In Uzbek society, “*mahalla*” is not merely a place of residence, but a fundamental sociocultural category. As a result, the reader fails to understand why a character values their reputation so deeply in the eyes of their neighbors.

A similar case is observed in the English version regarding the rendering of the terms “*ichkari*” and “*tashqari*”, which are translated as “inside” and “outside”. These equivalents, however, convey only spatial meaning and fail to capture the deeper socio-cultural significance of the terms. In 19th-century Uzbek tradition, “*ichkari*”

denotes the private, family-oriented, often female sphere of the household, while “tashqari” refers to the public, predominantly male domain associated with social life and authority. Their opposition represents a culturally significant division of space that encodes gender roles and social hierarchy. As a result of this simplification, the scene in which the hero crosses the threshold of “ichkari” loses its weight as a violation of a taboo or an act of utmost trust, turning into a routine movement from one room to another and undermining the social and legal subtext of the novel. Reduced to a mere physical contrast, this symbolic dimension becomes largely invisible to the English reader.

The above examples demonstrate that although transliteration and functional analogues may ensure surface-level comprehensibility, they often fail to transmit the conceptual and axiological load embedded in culture-specific terms. And though these two strategies are the primary methods for dealing with such units, we can see that the full semantic depth frequently remains inaccessible to the foreign reader.

A central place in the system of non-equivalent units in the novel is also occupied by forms of address. Lexemes such as “aka”, “opa”, and “oyi” mark respect toward elders, and “qizim”, “o’g’lim”, used by older characters when addressing younger ones, express paternal care and emotional warmth. In the Russian translation, these units tend to be preserved through transliteration (e.g., Anvar-aka, Nigor-aim), avoiding semantic losses. In the English translation discourse, however, these units are often subjected to deculturalization.

As an example, let us consider the form of address “aka”, which literally means brother. In the original text, Rano’s use of “Anvar-aka” is a marker of tender affection combined with deep respect, without implying blood relations or family bonds. The Russian transliteration “Anvar-aka” is highly successful, as the Russian equivalent for brother – “brat”, used as an address would have a different, more familiar stylistic coloring. In the English translation, this address is omitted. This can be explained by the fact that using the word “brother” constitutes a semantic error, as it is perceived by Western readers primarily as a marker of biological kinship. Consequently, replacing “aka” with “brother” or omitting it altogether distorts the pragmatic meaning of the text. As a result, the crucial nuance of “respectful address to an older man,” essential for understanding the characters’ relationships, is lost.

Original: “— Bu kungi mehmondorchilig’imizdan rozi bo’lg’an o’xshaysiz, Anvar aka, - dedi qayrilib Ra’no” [3, p.60].

Russian Translation: «—Ну, Анвар-ака, довольны вы сегодняшним угощением? — спросила она» [4, p.69].

English Translation: “— Anvar, I think you are satisfied with our meal today, aren’t you? — asked Rano turning to him” [5, p.59].

To this, we can add the problem of conveying respectful distance in dialogues, realized in Uzbek through the pronoun “Siz” (formal “You”). In scenes between Anvar

and Rano, this “Siz” emphasizes the purity and sacredness of their feelings. Russian translation discourse copes with this task easily due to the identical category of politeness (“Vy”). In English, however, the universal pronoun “you” neutralizes this distance, transforming the dialogue from elevated and etiquette-oriented into modern and egalitarian.

One more significant challenge is posed by the greeting formula “Hormang” (with the obligatory response “Salomat bo’ling”), which is absolutely non-equivalent in European languages. In Russian, this lacuna theoretically finds a functional counterpart in the expression “Bog v pomoshch” (“God help you”), which successfully conveys the speaker’s intention to encourage someone engaged in work, although it shifts the cultural connotation from ethical to religious. However, in the Russian version, the translators resort to replacing this formula with the standard secular greeting “Good evening!” and the response “Thank you!”, which completely deprives the dialogue of its ethnographic specificity. The English translation encounters a similar lexical lacuna: the calque “Do not you get tired!” does not carry the required etiquette function in English-speaking culture and is perceived merely as a literal description of a physical state.

Original: “...Ra’no ham o’rnidan turib, sufanning zinasi tomon yaqinlashdi va tabassum aralash: “Hormang”, dedi.
— Sog’ bo’ling” [3, p.31].

Russian Translation: «Рано поднялась ему навстречу и приветствовала его улыбкой.
—Добрый вечер!
—Спасибо!» [4, p.40]

English Translation: “Rano greeted him with smile.
—Hormang! (How do you do) Do not you get tired!
—Thank you” [5, p.29].

The analysis of the translation of non-equivalent units in Abdulla Qodiriy’s novel “The Scorpion from the Altar” into Russian and English demonstrates that the problem of non-equivalence goes far beyond the lexical level and affects the cultural and pragmatic dimensions of a literary text. Non-equivalent units perform a meaning-generating function, shaping the national and cultural background of the work.

A comparative analysis of the translations reveals differences in translational strategies: in the Russian version, due to the geographical and historical proximity of the cultures, the preservation of the original’s cultural specificity is more frequently observed, whereas in the English translation a tendency toward domestication prevails, where complex national concepts and etiquette norms are adapted to Western standards of communication, which often leads to semantic simplification.

This observation confirms the hypothesis that the translation of non-equivalent units requires not merely linguistic substitution, but deep cultural interpretation

capable of reconstructing in the foreign reader's consciousness the same system of values and associations embedded by the author.

Thus, the translation of non-equivalent vocabulary is not a search for dictionary correspondences, but an attempt to recreate the atmosphere and ethical coordinate system of the author. Full equivalence in this case remains an unattainable ideal; however, the translator's mastery lies in the ability to find a balance between ethnographic accuracy and artistic naturalness, minimizing the loss of the "soul" of the text in its transition from one linguistic and cultural sphere to another.

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