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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**SEMANTIC SHIFTS IN THE TRANSLATION OF CULTURAL REALIA: EVIDENCE
FROM ENGLISH - UZBEK LITERARY TRANSLATION****Mushtariy Akhmedova***PhD Researcher, Jizzakh State Pedagogical University*mushtariy.axmedova@jdpu.uz*Jizzakh, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: cultural realia; semantic shift; semantic transformation; literary translation; English-Uzbek translation; cultural-specific items; cultural meaning; translation equivalence; Mehrobdan Chayon.

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Abstract: The translation of cultural realia represents one of the most complex areas of literary translation because culture-bound lexical units encode not only denotative information but also historical, social, institutional, material, and symbolic meanings. Although previous research has extensively examined the strategies used to render realia, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the semantic consequences produced by those strategies in English-Uzbek literary translation. The present study investigates semantic shifts occurring in the translation of cultural realia through a comparative analysis of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Abdulla Qodiriy's *Mehrobdan Chayon* (The Scorpion from the Altar), with particular attention to the English translation by I. M. Tuxtasinov. The study employs comparative textual analysis, contextual-semantic analysis, classification, and descriptive quantitative procedures. Cultural realia are examined according to the relationship between their source-text semantic structure and their translated representation. The analysis distinguishes semantic preservation, specification, generalization, cultural substitution, semantic modification, reduction, explicitation, and cultural-semantic loss. The findings demonstrate that translation

procedures cannot be evaluated solely by their formal correspondence to source-language units: the same procedure may preserve one semantic component while weakening another. Particularly significant are cases involving historically marked social titles and institutional vocabulary, where a target-language equivalent may communicate the general referent while reducing its historical or sociocultural specificity. The study argues that semantic-shift analysis provides a more precise account of cultural transfer than a strategy-based classification alone. The research contributes to English–Uzbek translation studies by connecting the established study of realia with semantic transformation and by emphasizing the preservation of multidimensional cultural meaning.

Introduction. Literary translation is not limited to the transfer of linguistic forms from one language into another. It also involves the reconstruction of culturally embedded meanings for readers whose historical experience, social institutions, material culture, and background knowledge may differ substantially from those of the source-text community. This problem becomes especially visible in the translation of cultural realia—lexical units referring to objects, institutions, practices, social positions, traditions, historical phenomena, and other culture-bound elements.

The significance of cultural realia lies in their multidimensional semantic structure. A culture-specific lexical unit may possess a denotative meaning that can be represented relatively easily in another language while simultaneously carrying historical, social, evaluative, or symbolic associations that do not have a direct target-language equivalent. Consequently, translation may preserve the referent while altering the semantic configuration surrounding it. The translated unit can therefore be formally acceptable while culturally or semantically incomplete.

Traditional translation studies have approached this problem through such concepts as equivalence, compensation, adaptation, domestication, foreignization, explicitation, and cultural substitution. Aixelá's influential framework, for example, distinguishes procedures involving the conservation and substitution of culture-specific items, while Venuti's work places such choices within the broader opposition between domestication and foreignization. These approaches remain valuable because they explain what translators do with culture-

bound units. However, the identification of a translation procedure does not necessarily reveal what happens to the meaning of the original cultural item.

This distinction has become increasingly relevant in recent English–Uzbek translation research. Turakulova (2023) emphasizes that realia create particular difficulties because they reflect culture-specific objects, customs, and social realities. Mirzaeva (2025), examining English realia in Uzbek translation, specifically identifies their national-cultural, lexical-semantic, and stylistic characteristics. Abdullajonova (2026) similarly argues that English–Uzbek translation requires lexical transformations because of structural, semantic, and cultural differences between the languages and discusses concretization, generalization, omission, and compensation as important mechanisms of semantic adaptation.

Recent international scholarship also demonstrates the continuing importance of culture-specific items in literary translation. A 2025 systematic review of research on culture-specific items in Chinese–English literary translation shows that strategies, errors, and challenges remain central concerns in contemporary research. Zeynalova (2025) likewise considers retention, adaptation, explicitation, and hybrid procedures in relation to the preservation of semantic accuracy and cultural authenticity.

More recent Uzbek scholarship has begun to move toward a broader conception of cultural transfer. Musabekova (2026), for instance, explicitly connects equivalence, semantic transformation, and preservation of cultural code in Uzbek–English literary translation. This development is important because it suggests that the study of realia should not stop with identifying translation strategies; it should also examine the semantic consequences of those strategies.

The present article therefore proposes a shift in analytical emphasis. Rather than asking only which procedure has been employed to translate realia, it asks which semantic components of the source realia have been preserved, transformed, expanded, generalized, reduced, or lost in the target text.

The comparative selection of Dickens’s *Great Expectations* and Qodiriy’s *Mehrobdan Chayon* is particularly appropriate for this purpose. The two novels emerge from substantially different historical and cultural environments. Dickens represents nineteenth-century English society, including its class structure, legal institutions, apprenticeship system, material culture, and urban social life. Qodiriy’s novel reconstructs the socio-political and cultural environment of the Kokand Khanate and contains historically and culturally marked vocabulary associated with titles, religious institutions, court administration, social hierarchy, clothing, customs, and interpersonal relations. The English version of Qodiriy’s novel, translated by I. M. Tuxtasinov

and published by Mashhur-Press in 2019, provides particularly useful material for investigating how Uzbek historical-cultural vocabulary is semantically reconstructed in English.

The study addresses four research questions:

1. What types of semantic shifts occur in the translation of cultural realia in the selected English and Uzbek literary texts?
2. Which semantic transformations are most significant for the preservation of cultural meaning?
3. What linguistic, historical, and cultural factors motivate semantic transformation?
4. How does semantic-shift analysis complement conventional classifications of translation strategies?

The central hypothesis is that cultural realia should be evaluated not merely according to formal equivalence or the translation procedure employed, but according to the extent to which their semantic and cultural components are reconstructed in the target text.

Methodology. Research Design

The study employs a comparative qualitative research design supported by descriptive quantitative analysis. The primary method is contextual-semantic comparison of source-language cultural realia and their translated counterparts. Each realia is examined both as an isolated lexical unit and as a contextual element within the literary text.

The analytical procedure consists of four stages:

1. identification of culture-bound lexical units in the source texts;
2. determination of their contextual and culturally embedded meanings;
3. identification of the corresponding translation units;
4. comparison of the semantic structures of source and target units.

The study deliberately distinguishes translation procedure from semantic outcome. For example, a translator may use a generalization procedure, but the result of that procedure may be semantic reduction. Conversely, explication may produce semantic expansion rather than simple lexical substitution.

Corpus

The corpus comprises:

- Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*;
- the corresponding Uzbek translation of *Great Expectations* used in the dissertation corpus;
- Abdulla Qodiriy's *Mehrobdan Chayon*;

- I. M. Tuxtasinov's English translation, *The Scorpion from the Altar* (2019).

The latter translation is documented as an English-language edition published by Mashhur-Press in 2019.

The corpus was selected because the two novels represent culturally distant literary environments and contain dense concentrations of historically and socially marked vocabulary.

Analytical Categories

For the purposes of this study, semantic transformation is classified into eight categories:

Category	Operational definition
Semantic preservation	The principal denotative and culturally relevant semantic components are retained.
Specification	A relatively broad source meaning is represented by a more specific target expression.
Generalization	A culturally or semantically specific source item is represented by a broader target expression.
Cultural substitution	The source realia is replaced by a target expression associated with a different but functionally comparable cultural concept.
Semantic modification	The translation retains the referent but changes one or more significant semantic or connotative components.
Semantic reduction	One or more source-semantic components are omitted.
Explicitation	Information implicit in the source realia is made explicit in the translation.
Cultural-semantic loss	A culturally significant component cannot be reconstructed in the target text.

This model is intentionally different from a conventional list of translation procedures. It evaluates the resulting semantic relationship between source and target units.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is a lexical item, phrase, title, institutional designation, material-cultural term, or culturally marked expression that refers to a source-culture-specific phenomenon.

The following dimensions are recorded for each item:

source form → contextual meaning → cultural component → translation form → translation procedure → semantic shift → cultural consequence.

This procedure makes it possible to distinguish between successful formal substitution and genuine semantic equivalence.

Results and discussion. Semantic Transformation as a Distinct Analytical Dimension

The corpus demonstrates that the translation of cultural realia cannot be adequately described through strategy labels alone. A strategy such as literal translation, adaptation, or explicitation indicates the translator's operation, but it does not automatically explain whether the cultural meaning has been preserved.

This distinction is particularly clear in the translation of Qodiriy's historically marked vocabulary. Existing analysis of Tuxtasinov's translation records numerous cases where a source expression is rendered through an expression that communicates its general function while altering its culturally specific semantic content.

One illustrative example is the expression:

"Rano egasiga topshirmaguncha"

which occurs in the context of Rano's future marriage. Tuxtasinov renders the expression as:

"until she gets married."

The Uzbek expression literally invokes the idea of "handing Rano over to her owner," where egasi ("owner") has a culturally and historically marked implication referring to the future husband. The English translation does not preserve the ownership metaphor. Instead, it converts the culturally embedded expression into the more neutral event "gets married." The translation therefore maintains the situational meaning while reducing the source expression's patriarchal metaphorical component.

This is best classified as semantic modification with semantic reduction. The communicative situation is preserved, but the culturally specific conceptualization of marriage is weakened. The example demonstrates why a simple statement such as "the translator used an equivalent expression" is insufficient. The target reader receives the event but not the entire cultural conceptualization encoded by the original.

A second example concerns the chapter title:

"Amir Umarkhonning kanizi"

translated as:

"Amir Umarkhon's Housemaid."

The term *kaniz* historically denotes a woman in a dependent or concubine-like position within a hierarchical household context. “Housemaid,” by contrast, conventionally denotes a paid female domestic worker in English. Consequently, although the target expression provides a recognizable occupational/social referent, its historical and sexual-status implications differ substantially from those of the source term.

The translation therefore represents a case of semantic modification accompanied by cultural reduction. The target expression makes the situation accessible to the English reader but changes the social status encoded in the source *realia*. The documented critique of this translation similarly notes that “housemaid” does not fully correspond to the historical meaning of *kaniz* and proposes “concubine” as a semantically closer alternative.

This example is particularly important for the present study because it demonstrates that lexical accessibility may coexist with semantic inaccuracy. A target-language expression can be linguistically natural while still failing to reproduce a historically essential semantic component.

Specification and Generalization

Another important transformation concerns the movement between specific and general semantic categories.

Historical and administrative *realia* are especially vulnerable to generalization because English may lack a single lexical item corresponding to the institutional structure represented by the Uzbek term. In the translation of Mehrobdan Chayon, for example, the expression:

“Xon janobning munshiylar munshiysi”

is translated as:

“the head of all clerks of his majesty of the khan.”

Here, the translator expands the expression into a descriptive construction. The target text communicates the general institutional function, but the lexical specificity of *munshiylar munshiysi* is reorganized into the explanatory phrase “head of all clerks.”

This represents explicitation combined with semantic adaptation. The translation is communicatively accessible because it explains the institutional hierarchy rather than merely transferring the unfamiliar term. At the same time, the historical lexical identity of *munshiy* is weakened.

The example reveals a recurring tension: the more explicit a translation becomes, the more accessible the referent may be, but the less visible the source culture’s original lexical categorization may become.

Semantic Preservation Through Contextual Reformulation

Not all transformations result in semantic loss. In some cases, the translator reformulates the source expression while preserving its contextual meaning.

For instance, the expression:

“Amringizga mahjubi inqiyod etishga kanizingiz hozir.”

is rendered as:

“Your servant is ready to execute your command!”

The English version restructures the sentence considerably. Nevertheless, the central semantic relationship—subordination and readiness to obey—is maintained. The source expression contains elaborate honorific and self-lowering forms characteristic of the social register represented in Qodiriy’s historical setting. The English translation preserves the functional meaning of submission but reduces the intensity and linguistic elaboration of the honorific register.

Accordingly, this case can be classified as semantic preservation with stylistic and cultural reduction.

This distinction is significant. Semantic preservation should not be equated with formal similarity. A translation may be structurally very different from the source but preserve its central semantic relation. Conversely, a formally close translation may fail to preserve an important cultural component.

Historical Titles and Social Realia

The translation of titles provides another major source of semantic transformation. The novel contains expressions such as *bek*, *xon*, *munshi*, *mufti*, *mirza*, *sufi*, *oftobachi*, and other historically marked designations. These units are not merely occupational labels. They encode institutional hierarchy, religious affiliation, social status, political authority, or historical period.

The source expression:

“Siz beklashganingizdan beri...”

is translated in the documented version as:

“Since you became an important *bek*...”

The translator retains *bek* while adding the adjective “important.” This is a form of retention plus explicitation. The source cultural term remains visible, which helps preserve historical specificity, while the additional adjective provides contextual assistance to the target reader. (oefen.uz)

This hybrid procedure is particularly productive for historical realia because complete domestication would remove the cultural marker, while bare retention could leave the reader without sufficient contextual understanding.

The analysis therefore suggests that the most successful treatment of historical realia may sometimes involve partial preservation combined with controlled explicitation.

The Title Mehrobdan Chayon → The Scorpion from the Altar

The title itself represents a particularly significant semantic transformation.

The Uzbek title “Mehrobdan chayon” combines mehrob, a culturally and religiously marked architectural element associated with the sacred space of a mosque, with chayon (“scorpion”). The English title “The Scorpion from the Altar” preserves the symbolic opposition between sacredness and corruption but replaces the Islamic architectural term with the more broadly recognizable English religious term “altar.” The English translation therefore maintains the metaphorical structure while modifying its cultural referential field. The English-language edition is documented as *The Scorpion from the Altar*, published in 2019.

The semantic consequence is complex. On the one hand, “altar” allows the English reader to recognize the contrast between a sacred place and a poisonous creature. On the other hand, mehrob specifically evokes the architectural and ritual organization of a mosque, whereas “altar” is associated primarily with Christian religious contexts. Thus, the translation preserves symbolic opposition while modifying religio-cultural specificity.

This should therefore be classified as cultural substitution with semantic modification.

The example is particularly revealing because it demonstrates that semantic transformation can occur even when the translated phrase appears highly successful at the literary level. The English title is concise, memorable, and metaphorically powerful, but the cultural image is not identical to that of the Uzbek original.

Realia and the Problem of Multidimensional Meaning

The examples demonstrate that realia rarely contains a single semantic component. Its meaning may be represented as a combination of:

denotative meaning + historical meaning + social meaning + cultural association + pragmatic/connotative meaning.

A translation may preserve one component while transforming another.

For example:

- kaniz → “housemaid” preserves a general domestic/social relation but reduces historical status;
- egasi in the marriage context → “gets married” preserves the event but removes the ownership metaphor;
- munshiy-lar munshiysi → “head of all clerks” preserves institutional hierarchy but reduces lexical-historical specificity;

- bek → “important bek” preserves the historical designation and adds explanatory information;
- mehrob → “altar” preserves sacred symbolism but modifies the religious-cultural frame.

These examples support the central argument of the study: semantic transformation should be measured componentially rather than treated as a binary distinction between equivalent and non-equivalent translation.

Comparison with Recent Uzbek Scholarship

The results correspond with the direction of recent Uzbek research while extending it analytically. Mirzaeva (2025) emphasizes the lexical-semantic and national-cultural characteristics of English realia in Uzbek translation. Turakulova (2023) similarly identifies the cultural and semantic difficulties associated with English–Uzbek realia. Abdullajonova (2026) demonstrates that concretization, generalization, omission, and compensation are necessary mechanisms in English–Uzbek translation because of semantic and cultural differences between the languages.

The present study extends these observations by making the semantic result rather than the procedure the primary analytical unit. Thus, instead of classifying generalization as an end in itself, the analysis asks whether generalization results in semantic neutralization, cultural reduction, or merely greater target-reader accessibility.

This distinction also complements Musabekova’s recent argument that semantic transformation and preservation of cultural code should be considered in Uzbek–English literary translation. (The *Lingua Spectrum*)

Implications for Translation Quality

The findings suggest that translation quality in the treatment of realia should not be assessed solely through lexical equivalence. A culturally adequate translation should be evaluated according to at least three dimensions:

1. referential adequacy — whether the target reader can identify what the realia denotes;
2. semantic adequacy — whether its principal semantic components are preserved;
3. cultural adequacy — whether historically and culturally significant associations remain accessible.

A translation may achieve the first dimension without achieving the second or third. The kaniz → “housemaid” example illustrates this clearly: the target reader understands that a woman occupies a domestic position, but the historical status represented by the source term

is altered. Similarly, mehrob → “altar” retains sacred symbolism while shifting the cultural-religious frame.

Consequently, semantic-shift analysis can serve as a useful complement to traditional strategy-based evaluation.

Conclusion. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the translation of cultural realia between English and Uzbek involves a complex process of semantic reconstruction. Cultural realia cannot be treated as ordinary lexical items because their semantic structure frequently incorporates historical, social, institutional, material, and symbolic information.

The analysis of Mehrobdan Chayon and its English translation demonstrates several recurring transformations, including semantic modification, reduction, explicitation, cultural substitution, and partial preservation. Examples such as egasi → “gets married,” kaniz → “housemaid,” munshiylar munshiysi → “head of all clerks,” bek → “important bek,” and mehrob → “altar” demonstrate that the translator may preserve the general referent while modifying one or more culturally significant components.

The major theoretical implication is that translation strategy and semantic outcome should be analytically distinguished. A procedure describes what the translator does; semantic-shift analysis describes what happens to the meaning of the source realia as a consequence. This distinction provides a more precise basis for evaluating cultural transfer.

The study also confirms the value of recent Uzbek scholarship on realia, lexical-semantic transformation, and cultural representation while extending these approaches toward a componential analysis of semantic change. The findings suggest that future research on English–Uzbek literary translation should pay greater attention to the interaction of semantic preservation, cultural specificity, historical markedness, and target-reader accessibility.

Ultimately, successful translation of cultural realia does not necessarily require formal replication of the source expression. Rather, it requires an informed balance between referential clarity, semantic completeness, and cultural recognizability. The semantic-shift framework proposed in this study provides a basis for evaluating that balance and may be applied to a wider range of literary and translation corpora.

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