

BEYOND MEANING: PRAGMATIC AND DISCURSIVE ROLES OF LINGUOCULTURAL REALIA IN TRANSLATION**Akhmedova Mushtariy Farkhod kizi**

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Abstract. This study examines the pragmatic and discursive roles of linguocultural realia in translation, moving beyond their traditional interpretation as purely referential units. These culturally embedded lexical items not only denote specific concepts but also shape discourse, express social identity, and convey cultural norms. The study aims to analyze how these functions are preserved or transformed in English–Uzbek translation. A qualitative comparative approach is applied, based on selected literary examples. The findings show that while referential meaning is often retained, pragmatic and discursive functions frequently change, leading to shifts in tone, characterization, and perspective. These transformations are influenced by strategies such as adaptation, generalization, and substitution.

Keywords: linguacultural realia, pragmatics, discourse, translation, cultural meaning, functional equivalence, English–Uzbek translation, literary discourse.

Introduction. In contemporary translation studies, increasing attention has been paid to the functional and context-dependent nature of meaning, particularly within the frameworks of pragmatics and discourse analysis. While traditional approaches have largely treated linguocultural realia as referential units requiring semantic transfer, more recent scholarship emphasizes that such elements also perform crucial pragmatic and discursive functions within a text (Baker, 2018; House, 2015). Linguocultural realia, defined as culture-specific lexical items embedded in the social and historical experience of a community, are not merely carriers of denotative meaning but also key contributors to narrative structure, interpersonal relations, and cultural representation (Newmark, 1988; Vlachov & Florin, 1980).

Literature review and research methodology. Recent studies highlight that the translation of realia involves not only the transfer of lexical meaning but also the preservation of communicative intent and discourse function. For instance, Katan (2018) argues that cultural elements in translation require a shift from linguistic equivalence to intercultural mediation, where meaning is negotiated within a broader communicative context. Similarly, House (2015) emphasizes that translation quality should be evaluated not only in terms of semantic equivalence but also in relation to pragmatic and functional adequacy.

Within this framework, the concept of pragmatic equivalence has gained particular importance. Pragmatic equivalence refers to the extent to which the translator succeeds in reproducing the communicative effect and intended meaning of the source text in the target language (Baker, 2018). However, achieving such equivalence is especially challenging in the case of linguocultural realia, as these units often encode culturally specific meanings that may not be directly accessible to the target audience. As noted by Pym (2018), translation is inherently a process of risk management, where translators must balance fidelity and readability, often resulting in shifts at different levels of meaning.

Moreover, advances in discourse-oriented translation research have demonstrated that meaning operates beyond the sentence level, involving coherence, narrative voice, and interactional dynamics (Hatim & Munday, 2004; updated discussions in Munday, 2016). In literary translation, linguocultural realia play a particularly important role in constructing fictional worlds, representing social hierarchies, and shaping character identity. As emphasized by Tymoczko (2014), translation is deeply embedded in cultural and ideological contexts, which influence how meaning is recontextualized in the target text.

Despite these developments, the majority of existing research on linguocultural realia continues to focus on classification and translation strategies, with limited attention to their pragmatic and discursive roles. While scholars have explored techniques such as adaptation, explicitation, and retention, less emphasis has been placed on how these strategies affect discourse-level functions and reader interpretation (Chesterman, 2016; Katan, 2018). Furthermore, in the context of English–Uzbek translation, this dimension remains insufficiently explored, despite the significant linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining linguocultural realia as functional elements within discourse rather than as isolated lexical units. Specifically, the study aims to (1) identify the pragmatic and discursive roles of linguocultural realia in literary texts, (2) analyze how these roles are transformed in translation between English and Uzbek, and (3) evaluate the impact of translation strategies on the preservation of discourse functions. The research is guided by the following questions: What pragmatic functions do linguocultural realia perform in literary discourse? How are these functions affected by translation? To what extent can translation strategies preserve or reconstruct discursive meaning?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a more nuanced understanding of translation as a functional and discourse-oriented process. By integrating insights from pragmatics and discourse analysis into the study of linguocultural realia, the research expands existing theoretical frameworks and highlights the importance of considering meaning beyond the lexical level. In practical terms, the study provides translators with a more comprehensive approach to handling culturally embedded elements, emphasizing the need to preserve not only what is said, but also how and why it is said within a given communicative context.

Recent translation scholarship has moved away from viewing meaning as a purely lexical or sentence-level phenomenon and has increasingly emphasized its pragmatic, contextual, and discourse-embedded nature. In this newer line of research, translation is treated not simply as the transfer of referential content, but as a form of re-contextualization in which communicative intent, interpersonal positioning, and textual effects must also be negotiated. House's work on translation quality assessment remains central here because it frames translation adequacy in functional-pragmatic terms rather than in narrowly semantic ones, while Baker's later edition of *In Other Words* explicitly extends analysis from lexical choice to pragmatic meaning and wider textual organization. Together, these works have helped establish a view of translation in which culture-bound items must be assessed not only for what they denote, but also for what they do in discourse (House, 2015; Baker, 2018).

A major development after 2015 has been the renewed integration of pragmatics into translation studies as a distinct research agenda. Cambridge's *Pragmatics in Translation* presents the field as one concerned with relational work, participation structure, and mediality, showing that translated discourse must be examined in terms of interactional meaning and context-sensitive interpretation, not merely semantic correspondence. Likewise, the more recent Benjamins volume *Pragmatics and Translation* explicitly describes itself as addressing the interface between pragmatics and translation, which confirms that the field has matured beyond earlier equivalence-based models. For a study of linguocultural realia, this shift is especially relevant: such items rarely function as neutral labels and more often operate as cues for social alignment, shared background knowledge, and culturally specific inference (Dayter, Locher, & Messerli, 2023).

At the same time, discourse analysis has become increasingly important for translation research. Zhang and Munday's 2018 work on discourse-analytic innovation in translation studies marked a clear methodological turn by foregrounding how translated texts reorganize stance, ideology, and textual relations. This line of work was extended further in Wang and Munday's 2021 volume, which presents discourse analysis as a means of linking micro-level linguistic choices with macro-level socio-cultural interpretation. That perspective is particularly useful for literary translation because discourse-level shifts affect narrative voice, characterization, and the

representation of social worlds. In other words, a culture-bound item may be translated with acceptable denotative accuracy while still altering the discursive architecture of the text in ways that reshape reader response (Zhang & Munday, 2018; Wang & Munday, 2021).

Another influential trend in post-2015 scholarship is the reconceptualization of culture in translation as mediation rather than transfer. Katan and Taibi's 2021 edition of *Translating Cultures* is especially important because it repositions translators and interpreters as intercultural mediators who work across asymmetries in values, norms, and meaning-making practices. Under this framework, linguocultural realia are not treated as isolated lexical obstacles but as nodes of cultural framing. Their translation therefore involves decisions about how much foreignness to preserve, how much explicitation to provide, and how much adaptation to allow. This reconceptualization is directly relevant to English–Uzbek literary translation, where differences in social hierarchy, religious references, food culture, place-based identity, and forms of address can all affect the pragmatic force of a realia item even when its core reference is retained (Katan & Taibi, 2021).

Recent empirical work on culture-specific items also supports the need for a function-oriented approach. A 2024 study of Emirati literature in English translation argues that culture-specific items encode daily life, relationships, and cultural values, and it stresses that accurate representation requires substantial cultural awareness from the translator. Similarly, a 2024 study of Jojo Moyes' novels in Ukrainian translation shows that culture-specific vocabulary contributes directly to atmosphere, setting, and cultural embedding, while the actual translation solutions reflect varying combinations of foreignization and domestication. These studies are important because they demonstrate that culture-specific items are structurally tied to characterization and world-building, not merely to local lexical color. This strengthens the argument that a study of linguocultural realia should examine pragmatic and discursive roles alongside translation procedures (Al Tenaijy et al., 2024; Borysenko et al., 2024).

The literary dimension of this problem has also been sharpened by recent work in pragmatics. *The Cambridge Element Fiction and Pragmatics* argues that fictional texts are complex, multilayered communicative acts and should be studied as cultural artefacts rich in pragmatic effects. This matters for translation because literary realia do not simply point to external objects; they help construct irony, distance, solidarity, prestige, intimacy, and ideological positioning inside the fictional world. When such items are generalized, substituted, or domesticated, the result may be a discursive shift even if the plot remains intact. From this viewpoint, the translation of realia must be evaluated in terms of narrative and interpersonal consequences rather than lexical equivalence alone.

Despite these advances, a gap remains in the literature. Much recent research still concentrates on identifying culture-specific items and classifying the procedures used to translate them, whereas fewer studies ask how these items function pragmatically in discourse and what happens to those functions in translation. This imbalance is visible even in strong recent case studies, which often provide rich inventories of strategies but devote less sustained attention to discursive reconfiguration, reader positioning, or pragmatic effects. The gap is even more evident in work involving the English–Uzbek language pair, where the pragmatic and discursive behavior of linguocultural realia has not yet been sufficiently theorized in a systematic way.

For this reason, the present study builds on post-2015 scholarship in pragmatics, discourse analysis, and cultural mediation, but shifts the analytical focus from “how realia are translated” to “what realia do in literary discourse and how those functions change in translation.” This approach allows linguocultural realia to be treated as discourse-active elements that participate in social indexing, narrative voice, cultural framing, and interpersonal meaning. Such a perspective is better suited to literary translation, where the loss or transformation of pragmatic function may be as significant as semantic loss itself.

This study employs a qualitative, discourse-oriented research design to investigate the pragmatic and discursive roles of linguocultural realia in translation between English and Uzbek.

The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for examining culturally embedded lexical items, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of meaning beyond the lexical level, including contextual, pragmatic, and narrative dimensions (Baker, 2018; House, 2015). The research is grounded in a functional-pragmatic and discourse-analytic framework, which views meaning as context-dependent and shaped by communicative intent, social relations, and textual structure (Dayter et al., 2023; Wang & Munday, 2021). Within this framework, linguocultural realia are treated not as isolated units but as elements that contribute to discourse construction, character representation, and the expression of cultural norms.

The study adopts a comparative analytical approach, examining selected examples of linguocultural realia extracted from English and Uzbek literary texts and their corresponding translations. The selection of data is guided by specific criteria, including the presence of culturally marked lexical items, their relevance to social identity, cultural practices, or interpersonal relations, and their potential to perform identifiable pragmatic or discursive functions within the text. The dataset includes examples that reflect different functional roles, such as marking social hierarchy, expressing politeness or familiarity, contributing to narrative voice, and shaping cultural context.

The analytical procedure consists of several stages. First, linguocultural realia are identified in the source texts based on their cultural specificity and contextual significance. Second, their pragmatic and discursive functions are analyzed within the source context, focusing on their role in conveying interpersonal meaning, cultural norms, and narrative perspective. Third, the corresponding translations are examined to determine how these functions are preserved, transformed, or reinterpreted. Particular attention is given to translation strategies such as adaptation, generalization, substitution, and omission, and to how these strategies affect discourse-level meaning. Finally, the degree of functional shift is evaluated by comparing the communicative impact of the source and target units, with emphasis on changes in tone, characterization, and cultural framing.

The study utilizes a combination of comparative, contextual, and interpretive analytical methods. Comparative analysis is used to identify differences between source and target texts, while contextual analysis enables the interpretation of meaning within its cultural and narrative environment. Interpretive analysis is applied to assess the implications of functional transformation and to understand how translation reshapes discourse and reader perception. To ensure analytical consistency, all examples are examined using the same criteria for identifying realia, determining their functions, and evaluating their transformation in translation. Although the study is limited by its qualitative nature and selective dataset, the chosen examples provide sufficient depth to reveal recurring patterns and to support meaningful conclusions regarding the pragmatic and discursive behavior of linguocultural realia in English–Uzbek translation.

Results and Discussion. The analysis demonstrates that linguocultural realia function as discourse-structuring elements that shape cultural framing, social identity, and narrative perspective. Unlike neutral lexical units, realia activate culturally specific knowledge and therefore influence how readers interpret characters, settings, and relationships. In English–Uzbek translation, these functions are frequently transformed due to cultural asymmetry and differences in social organization.

One of the primary functions of realia is the representation of historically and culturally specific social environments.

Example 1:

ST: The Christmas pudding was brought in with great ceremony.

TT: Shirinlik tantanali tarzda olib kirildi.

The term Christmas pudding refers to a culturally specific British dessert associated with religious celebration and family tradition. In the Uzbek translation, it is generalized to shirinlik (dessert), which removes the cultural and religious connotations. As a result, the discursive

function of marking a festive, culturally embedded moment is lost. The scene becomes culturally neutral rather than culturally specific, weakening the narrative's cultural atmosphere.

Realia also function as markers of institutional and legal culture.

Example 2:

ST: He was trained as a solicitor in London.

TT: U Londonda yurist sifatida tayyorlandi.

The term solicitor refers to a specific legal profession within the British legal system, distinct from other roles such as barristers. The Uzbek translation *yurist* generalizes this distinction, removing the institutional specificity. While the referential meaning is preserved at a basic level, the discursive function of situating the character within a particular legal hierarchy is lost, resulting in a flattening of social context.

Another important role of realia is the construction of class identity and visual symbolism.

Example 3:

ST: She arrived in a carriage, dressed in silk.

TT: U chiroyli kiyimda aravada keldi.

The term carriage in this context refers to a historically specific mode of elite transportation associated with wealth and status. The Uzbek *arava* conveys only a general vehicle and may even evoke rural or lower-status imagery. This creates a discursive distortion: instead of reinforcing high social status, the translation potentially weakens or misrepresents it. Thus, the realia's function as a class marker is altered.

Realia also encode culture-specific domestic and social practices.

Example 4:

ST: They sat by the fireplace in the drawing-room.

TT: Ular xonada o'tirishardi.

The term drawing-room refers to a specific type of formal reception space in British homes, associated with social interaction and class norms. In translation, it is reduced to *xona* (room), eliminating the cultural and social implications of the setting. Consequently, the discursive function of establishing social formality and domestic structure is lost.

Importantly, the same phenomenon is observed in Uzbek-to-English translation, where culturally specific realia are simplified.

Example 5 (Uzbek → English):

ST: To'yda karnay-surnay sadolari yangradi.

TT: Music was played at the wedding.

The terms *karnay-surnay* refer to traditional Uzbek musical instruments strongly associated with ceremonial events. The translation *music* removes the cultural specificity and auditory imagery, leading to a loss of ethnocultural identity. The realia here functions as a marker of tradition and celebration, which is not preserved in the target text.

The revised analysis confirms that linguocultural realia operate as key carriers of discursive meaning, contributing to the construction of cultural space, social hierarchy, and narrative authenticity. Their translation involves not only semantic transfer but also the reconfiguration of cultural and pragmatic functions.

The findings indicate that generalization is the most frequent strategy, but it often results in discursive neutralization, where culturally marked scenes become contextually vague. Substitution, while improving accessibility, may lead to cultural recontextualization, altering the ideological and cultural framework of the text. In contrast, omission produces the most significant loss, eliminating both semantic and discursive value.

These results support recent discourse-oriented approaches in translation studies, which argue that meaning is not confined to lexical units but emerges through their interaction within a broader textual and cultural system (Wang & Munday, 2021; Dayter et al., 2023). From this perspective, the translation of realia should be evaluated not only in terms of equivalence but also in terms of its impact on discourse structure and reader interpretation.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that linguocultural realia are essential for maintaining the cultural depth and authenticity of literary texts. Their inadequate translation leads to a flattening of discourse and a reduction of cultural diversity. Therefore, translators must adopt a function-oriented approach, recognizing that preserving discourse-level meaning is as important as conveying referential content.

Conclusion. This study has examined the pragmatic and discursive roles of linguocultural realia in translation, demonstrating that such elements function far beyond their referential meaning. The findings show that realia play a crucial role in shaping narrative discourse, constructing social identity, and embedding cultural context within literary texts. In the process of translation between English and Uzbek, these functions are frequently transformed, even when the basic semantic content is preserved.

The analysis reveals that translation strategies such as generalization, substitution, and omission significantly influence the extent to which pragmatic and discursive functions are maintained. Generalization often leads to the neutralization of culturally specific meanings, while substitution may preserve functional aspects at the cost of cultural authenticity. Omission, in turn, results in the most substantial loss, eliminating both semantic and discourse-level information. At the same time, the study shows that when culturally analogous expressions are available, it is possible to preserve both referential and pragmatic meaning, although such cases are relatively limited.

Importantly, the study confirms that translation should be understood as a process of discursive re-construction rather than mere linguistic transfer. Linguocultural realia contribute to the organization of meaning at multiple levels, including interpersonal relations, narrative voice, and cultural framing. Their transformation in translation therefore affects not only what is communicated but also how it is interpreted by the target audience.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in extending the analysis of linguocultural realia beyond semantic equivalence to include pragmatic and discursive dimensions. This perspective aligns with recent developments in translation studies that emphasize functional and context-sensitive approaches to meaning. From a practical standpoint, the findings highlight the need for translators to adopt a function-oriented strategy, taking into account the role of realia in shaping discourse and reader perception.

Future research may further develop this approach by incorporating larger corpora, examining reader reception, or exploring the role of paratextual strategies such as glosses and footnotes in preserving discursive meaning. Such studies would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of translation as an intercultural and communicative process.

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