

Sustainable development and translation process of culturemes

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This article examines the relationship between sustainable development and the translation of culturemes within globalization and intercultural communication. It argues that sustainable development requires cultural sustainability, i.e., the preservation and transmission of intangible cultural heritage across generations. The paper positions culture as a driving force shaping human identity and global dialogue, with translation serving as the key mediating process for cross-cultural transfer of meanings and worldviews. It also addresses major challenges – cultural misrepresentation, tensions between localization and authenticity, and ethical dilemmas around cultural appropriation – while emphasizing culturally responsive translation practices that respect diversity and foster inclusive dialogue. Ultimately, the article advocates for translation approaches that serve both effective communication and sustainable development goals – equity, participation, intercultural understanding, and global solidarity – positioning translators as vital agents in shaping a culturally aware, interconnected world.

Keywords: *translation, cultural sustainability, linguistic adaptation, cultural transfer, cultureme*

1. Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, a tradition was established in translation practice to accompany translation with comments on the legality of the translator's decisions.

The concept of sustainable development is a new theoretical concept in the development model of civilization arising from the need to provide a secular balance between socio-economic problems and environmental protection in modern society. Although sustainable development is mainly a concept dedicated

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to the conservation of the environment and the economical use of nature, this also applies to the humanities in the sense that we must continuously convey our culture, language, and literature to the next generation. The most beautiful and explanatory example of conveying the culture of a nation to another nation is translation, especially, literary translation.

An important group of lexical units reflecting purely national characteristics of Azerbaijani and English ethnography refers to the names of settlements, household tools, clothing, food, and drinks. The emergence of language units with cultureme character related to the mentioned fields is related to the unique lifestyle, life experience, and historical reality of the English and Azerbaijani peoples. In the emergence of culturemes in English, denoting the types of weapons, boats, food, drink, clothing, and other things specific to the way of life of the peoples who spoke it and the aborigines, the natural conditions of the respective countries, as well as contact with the aborigines, who have a unique way of life and experience, played a role. The specific motive and performance characteristics of individual fields of culture and art, ceremonies and holidays, festivals and other public events have been one of the sources of the emergence of culturemes in English, individual elements of culture and art, which are common to other European nations, having acquired unique nuances against the background of the English lifestyle and experience. The clothing, food culture, ethnic outlook, and religious beliefs of the Azerbaijani people exist in the culturemes. If the main source of mythological-religious culturemes in the language of the English people is the ancient Greek and Roman mythology, Christian religion, and the pagan worldview of the native peoples of the English-speaking countries, the religious-mythological worldview of the Azerbaijani people is related to theism and Islam. Culturemes reflecting the cultural values of the English and Azerbaijani peoples living in different geographical areas of the world are transmitted to each other through translation.

2. Culturemes in Azerbaijani and English: a comparative linguocultural analysis

The Azerbaijani culture is part of the all-Turkic culture. By applying the concept of sustainable development to the science of philology, it is possible to talk about the process of continuous transmission of cultures through the process of translation.

After the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991, the field of translation has developed steadily. The number of translations from other languages into Azerbaijani has increased steadily, simultaneous with the number of translations

from Azerbaijani into other languages. Thus, translation is a great tool for introducing other peoples to the customs and traditions of our people, and, at the same time, for introducing the Azerbaijani reader to the culture of other peoples. Moreover, the translations made have an impact on the vocabulary of the Azerbaijani language, enriching it. It allows for new words, idioms, phrases or proverbs to pass into our language. Translators face some difficulties when translating these words into Azerbaijani. One of those difficulties is the issue of language units reflecting cultural values and their translation.

In the language of each nation, there are lexical units that belong to no other nation, demonstrating in this way its national identity. Such lexical units reflect the national characteristics of the speakers of the language to which they belong. Each nation's lexicon has a certain lexical layer that reflects its cultural values and such terms are called "culturemes". This national layer causes certain difficulties in the communication and translation process. The main reason for the difficulties is that words related to culture and linguaculture are difficult to translate from one language into another, and sometimes they are not translatable at all. The culturemes, which are an important part of the English and Azerbaijani national cultures, are a reflection of the history and life experience of the people, and create a wide lexical-semantic field with a national color in the lexicon of the language. The presence of culturemes determines the success rate of translation from English into Azerbaijani or from Azerbaijani into English.

3. The role of translation in the intergenerational and intercultural transmission of values

Differences that reflect culture in various languages cause communication breakdowns. That is why the new generation of translators focus more than before on mutual understanding in the field of cultures and on achieving the effectiveness of cultural dialogue. "Translation is a special form of communication in a narrow sense. This is what makes both dialogue and communication possible in a broad sense" (Avtonomova 2011, 652).

Many foreign linguists call translators "cultural mediators" (Bochner 1981, 12), "biculture" (Vermeer 1978, 28), "cross-cultural specialists" (Snell-Hornby 1992, 101), or "cultural operators" (Hewson 1991, 160-161; Hall 1991, 190). These terms exclude the linguistic aspect of the translation activity. However, this does

not mean that we intend to minimize the importance of the “culture” factor for translation.

Translation is a linguacultural rendering, defined first by language and then by culture. Elements of national culture and cultural experience can be seen at the visible level in the text - as specific language and speech patterns (grammatical structures, vocabulary, situational rules of language use). However, the difficulty in translation is not caused by linguistic differences, but by cultural elements above the level of elementary linguistic communication. They represent a reality beyond language that is related to the internal (thoughts, beliefs, values) rather than the external manifestations of culture (language, gestures, behavior, old traditions, customs, artifacts). These internal manifestations of culture represent the “invisible” layer in the text and are meant at the level of culturally or socially determined values, common thinking, behavior, superior judgment and evaluations.

In this regard, translators’ attention shifts from what is seen, heard, read or felt to what means the text is transmitted by, what is meant and how it is perceived.

How and by what means the text is transmitted is culturally determined and creates serious problems in translation. There are certain cultural stereotypes about how to speak. If the entire expression of the original is preserved in the translation, a speaker of the target language who is accustomed to more “sparse” speaking traditions may get an unfavorable impression of the orator.

The issue of the means by which content is conveyed is directly related to the issue of the author’s style. The elements of form (method of content delivery) used consciously or subconsciously by the author give the text a specific aesthetic effect and uniqueness.

Basically, when translating Azerbaijani classical works full of historical and literary associations into English, a significant part of the elements of linguistic form on which the content is based is balanced. So, on the one hand, English analogues become part of the language with their “own” national terms, and on the other hand, it is impossible to fully convey the cultural meaning and associations in the text. As a result, the original loses its national-cultural authenticity.

A serious “anti-communicative” factor that complicates mutual understanding and translation is the different reception of texts in different language cultures. The regularity in cultural development is explained, first of all, by the asymmetry in the perception of the environment (characteristics of nature, climate, food, clothing, smells, etc.).

In the Azerbaijani and English languages very colorful semantic groups of culturemes are accompanied. This fact shows how rich both languages are with culturemes, which are non-equivalent lexicon.

Just looking at the translation of Kurban Said's book "Ali and Nino" (2012) into English, it can be noticed how diverse the exotic layer is. Exotic words (or exoticisms) - in linguistics, words taken from the language of another nation, country or culture, reflecting the specific, national-cultural characteristics of that nation or country and usually protected as they are without translation. Exotic words are lexical units that express concepts that in reality belong to everyday life, ethnic-cultural life, geography, history or social system of another people. These words are interpreted in the cultural-spatial context of the language from which they are taken, i.e. their semantics are closely related to the socio-cultural conditions of that nation. Exoticisms, as a rule, do not have equivalents in other languages, or they are found with great difficulty, since they express local and specific realities. The diverse culturemes are more evident in the work translated into English. Let us get acquainted with some of them:

1) *Onun qalın saqqalı və dirnaqları xınalı idi.*

"His broad beard and his nails were tinted with ***henna***".

(Said 2012, 11)

Xına "henna" has been used as a decoration tool for a long time and is still used today. However, henna was not only popular in Azerbaijan as a plant. It also has a role in the lives of young people who are getting married. Since henna is also a symbol of clarity, purity and goodwill, applying henna to a bride is celebrated with enthusiasm. This holiday is called *henna night*, the name of the grand ceremony held before the bride and groom enter the marriage ceremony. The most notable element of this night is applying henna along with *hakishta*. It is traditional to carry henna on a tray with lit candles accompanied by the bride's friends. It is important that the person applying henna is married, happy and has given birth to their first child safely. Exotic lexical examples such as "*khina, khinayakhdi, ginagoydu*" in the Azerbaijani language are transferred from one culture to another as a result of sustainable development.

2) *Allah, Allah* deyərək qayğıkeşliklə dodaqlarını sıxdı.

"Allah, Allah, he said, and pursed his lips in a worried frown".

(Said 2012, 12)

Here, the word of **Allah** (God) is a cultureme and has not undergone any change.

Lexical units related to the ethnographic lexicon are also translated into English in the form of culturemes. The ethnographic lexicon includes the names of material and intangible cultural examples. Culturemes related to national music belong to the intangible ethnographic lexicon:

3) *Qara daşlarına*

qara günçün çəkilmiş rəsmlər

bir el aşığının sazında

əriyib dil açır

daşa dönmüş simlər.

"On your black stone

Will speak and sing song

On the **Ashig's saz**."

(Fakri 2018, 37)

The word **saz** in the example: **Saz** is a stringed instrument played with a mizrab. It is an integral part of the art of ashig and saz-soz, which is the successor of the art of the great ozan. **Saz** is also one of the symbols of the Turkish world and Turkish spirituality.

Since there are no concepts of **aşıq və saz** in English, the name of these national musical terms should be translated into English as culturemes. The most difficult thing in translation is the correct interpretation of the deep cultural meanings included in the text and perceived by the foreign language speaker at an unconscious level. **Ashig** is "saz player". Ashig music is one of the oldest branches of Azerbaijani musical culture with an oral tradition. The elements of music, poetry, narrativeness, dance, pantomime, and theatrical art are organically combined in the art of *ashig*. The word "aşiq", the master of this ancient folk art, passes from Azerbaijani culture to another culture through translation.

- 4) *Xəyyamın mey camı yansı.*
Füzulinin kədər şamı yandı...
Bir aşığın sazı, ilhamı yandı!
“Khayyam`s bowl of wine burnt
And Fizulil`s sorrow candle switched on?
Ashig`s saz and inspiration got fire!”

(Fakri 2018, 57)

- 5) *Səhər ayrılığı yoxsa bəxti qoxlayır?*
Səhər ‘Dilqəm’ yoxsa ‘Ruhani’ oxuyur?
“Does the dawn smell parting or fortunate?
Does the dawn sing “**Dilqəm**” or “**Ruhani**”?”

(Fakri 2018, 203)

Dilgam is an ashig melody. The word **Dilqəm** refers to the idealized image of a lover in Azerbaijani poetry and folk music. Dilgam melody is a lyrical and poetic instrumental piece of music that usually expresses feelings of love, longing, and affection. This melody is characterized by the delicate and melancholic playing style of the ashig`s saz. The melody is dominated by subtlety, elegance, and sometimes sad, longing tones, which convey the emotional depth of the love theme. Ashig melody called **Ruhani** carries a spiritual, divine, and sacred meaning. This is more often perceived as a religious-spiritual, meditative, and deeply moral melody that expresses feelings. This melody reflects the themes of a person`s inner world, spiritual journey, and divine love.

What is considered positive in one culture may be interpreted negatively in another culture. Khuduyev writes about exoticisms:

In linguistics, when we say “words of a national character”, we mean words that express the names of purely national things etc. that live in the people`s lives and traditions. In the language, such words are included in the exotic lexicon. Therefore, when we say exoticism, we mean only specific words included in the vocabulary of the language and understood and used by the people to whom that language belongs.

(Khudiyev 1991, 33)

Anthroponyms used in Azerbaijani epics and examples of national folklore function as culturemes when translated into other languages, including English. These proper names are not merely identifiers of individuals, but they carry with them a complex set of cultural, historical, and emotional associations rooted in the collective memory and worldview of the Azerbaijani people. In translation studies, such anthroponyms are classified as culturally specific lexical units that often resist direct translation due to their embeddedness in local tradition and oral heritage.

In Azerbaijani folklore, many anthroponyms are closely linked to myths, legends, and oral narratives, each of which encapsulates elements of national identity, historical experience, and cultural values. For instance, the folk epic “*Apardı sellər Saranı*” presents the anthroponym **Sara**, a name deeply interwoven with the emotional and symbolic structure of the narrative. The recurrence of this name within poetic lamentation reflects not just a personal story but a broader communal grief and existential motif often found in Turkic oral traditions. The epic, which has been preserved and transmitted over generations, exemplifies how intangible cultural heritage endures through cultural sustainability, even in the face of modernization and linguistic shifts. The act of translation here plays a dual role: it both enables access to this cultural product by non-Azerbaijani audiences and simultaneously raises challenges of cultural transfer. When the verse:

6) *Sel də yox, Saranı gəlib aparsın,*

Bu dərdi, bəlanı bölüb aparsın.

“There is no flood to take Sara with it,

To divide and take the trouble and pain with it.”

(Fakri 2018, 60)

is rendered in English, a part of its cultural and emotional resonance may be lost if the anthroponym *Sara* is perceived merely as a personal name, without awareness of its folkloric and symbolic connotations in Azerbaijani culture. Therefore, the translation of such anthroponyms should be approached not simply as a linguistic procedure, but as an act of intercultural mediation, where the translator must decide whether to preserve the original form (foreignization), adapt it for target audiences (domestication), or provide contextual explanation. The presence of these names as culturemes in translated texts contributes to the preservation and global dissemination of national folklore, while simultaneously underscoring the complexities of translating culture-bound elements.

In conclusion, the incorporation of anthroponyms from Azerbaijani epics into English translations not only reflects the linguistic transfer of individual lexical items, but also demonstrates the broader role of translation in transmitting cultural identity, emotional memory, and national heritage across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The translator's decision is determined by a pre-selected and justified strategy and depends on the place of the cultural information in the value system presented in the original text. The translator's decision-making process is not arbitrary or spontaneous, but it is typically guided by a pre-selected and theoretically justified translation strategy which takes into account multiple linguistic, cultural, and communicative factors. One of the most significant determinants of this strategy is the position and function of cultural information within the value system encoded in the source text. In other words, the translator evaluates the cultural elements of the original not in isolation, but as part of an integrated semantic and axiological (value-based) structure.

The degree to which a particular cultural reference is central or peripheral in the original text influences how it is treated in the target language. If a cultural unit—such as a custom, belief, institution, or cultureme—carries high functional or symbolic weight within the narrative or discourse, the translator may opt for a strategy that emphasizes preservation and foreignization, thereby maintaining its cultural specificity. Conversely, if the cultural element is of secondary importance or risks impeding comprehension for the target audience are identified, the translator may choose a domestication strategy, adapting or replacing it with a culturally analogous concept more familiar to the target readers.

This strategic choice also reflects the translator's awareness of intercultural dynamics, the expectations of the target audience, and the communicative purpose of the translation. Furthermore, the translator's decisions are shaped by normative frameworks, including genre conventions, institutional guidelines, and socio-political factors that may influence the degree of cultural visibility permitted or preferred in the target text.

Ultimately, the alignment of translation strategy with the cultural content and its place within the source text's value system highlights the cognitive, ethical, and interpretative dimensions of translation. It reinforces the idea that translation is not a purely linguistic operation, but a complex act of cultural negotiation, where every choice made by the translator carries potential implications for meaning, representation, and cross-cultural understanding.

Holidays, especially national holidays, are a part of the traditions that have been preserved for centuries and passed down from generation to generation as a result of sustainable development. The arrival of spring has been celebrated since ancient times. One of the most used cultureme in the English language and English fiction is Novruz. **Novruz** – on March 20th-21st is celebrated in Azerbaijan, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, etc. Today it is considered the beginning of the New Year. In Persian, *nou* means “new”, *ruz* means “day”. This is a holiday of blessing, joy, and love. At the same time, it is an international holiday to some extent. Most of the eastern nations celebrate Novruz with solemnity. It is transliterated into English as Novruz as in the following example: *My husband has been ill since last Novruz holiday and is confined to bed now*. Sometimes the holiday elements themselves act as culturemes. Although the lexical unit *yumurta* “egg” in the phrase **Novruz yumurtaları** “Novruz eggs”, which is the main national ingredient of Novruz holiday, is translated into English, in general, when the phrase **Novruz eggs** is given in English, its explanation must be presented. Let us have a look at an example from a work of fiction:

7) *At this, Omaroghlu turned red as a dyed Novruz egg.*

“Eggs are traditionally dyed red at the Novruz new year holiday, which is held at the spring equinox”.

(Short stories from Azerbaijan 2018, 110)

When the task of the translator is to eliminate the cultural distance between the author of the translated text and the reader, he makes certain corrections in the process of content transmission, taking into account other linguocultural parameters of the addressee, and tries to adapt the culture of native speakers to the culture of the target language as much as possible.

Often, when choosing an explanatory strategy and aiming to convey the reader to a different cultural environment, the translator tries to preserve a certain cultural background of the work at the expense of exoticism. In the process of adaptation, the translator does not cover up the differences between cultures, on the contrary, s/he sometimes emphasizes them, using the methods of transliteration, calque, reference, notes, explanations, and completes the world landscape of the reader of the target language with information from the culture of the source language.

3. Conclusion

The translator's success as a mediator between two cultures depends more on understanding the implicit meanings shared by all members of the linguistic community and based on cultural values. In order to achieve an effect equivalent to that of the original in translation, it depends on the ability to choose the right linguistic means when conveying information.

Thus, as our cultural, material and spiritual national values are transmitted from generation to generation as a result of sustainable development, they are also passing between cultures. It cannot be denied that translation plays a very important role in this process.

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