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METHOD SELECTION IN UZBEK–ENGLISH TRANSLATION: TYPOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS, CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS AND A LAYERED DECISION MODEL

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Abstract. In Uzbek translation scholarship and classroom practice the term translation method is often used for three different things at once: the global orientation a translator adopts for a whole text, the strategy chosen for a class of problems, and the technique applied to a single word or phrase. This conflation hides the point at which the translator actually makes a choice. The present study separates the obligatory shifts imposed by the typological distance between agglutinative, verb-final Uzbek and analytic, verb-medial English from the optional decisions that concern culture-specific items (CSIs). A purposive sample of 40 Uzbek CSIs, grouped into eight thematic domains of five items each, was analysed with a procedure inventory adapted from Vinay and Darbelnet, Newmark, Aixelá and Molina and Hurtado Albir. Each item was assigned the procedure that best satisfied three criteria: the status of the item in English, its cultural load in context and the function of the target text. Source-oriented procedures (borrowing, borrowing with a gloss, calque) were preferred for 15 items (37.5%), target-oriented procedures (cultural substitution, generalisation) for 12 items (30.0%) and explicitating or neutral procedures (established equivalent, description, omission with compensation) for 13 items (32.5%). The distribution differed sharply by domain: food and clothing favoured borrowing, whereas measures and value terms favoured substitution or description. The results indicate that no single global method suits Uzbek–English translation, and a layered decision model is proposed for training and translation criticism.

Keywords: Uzbek–English translation; translation method; translation technique; culture-specific items; foreignisation; domestication; typological asymmetry; decision model.

1. Introduction

Every translation rests on a sequence of decisions, and the quality of the result depends less on any single decision than on the coherence of the whole sequence. When a translator works between closely related languages, many of these decisions are invisible because the target language offers ready-made correspondences. Between Uzbek and English the situation is different. The two languages belong to different families, have different morphological types and grew within different cultural traditions, so that almost every sentence requires restructuring and many words have no counterpart at all. Under such conditions the question of method stops being a matter of taste and becomes a practical problem: the translator has to know which shifts are forced by the languages themselves and which are matters of genuine choice.

Translation theory offers several ways of describing this choice. Nida opposed formal to dynamic equivalence and argued that the second, which aims at an equivalent effect on the receptor, should govern most translations (Nida, 1964). Vinay and Darbelnet distinguished direct procedures (borrowing, calque, literal translation) from oblique ones (transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation), arranging them on a scale of increasing departure from the source form (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995). Newmark described eight methods ranging from word-for-word to communicative

translation and placed his own semantic and communicative methods at the centre of this range (Newmark, 1988). Venuti reframed the discussion in cultural and ethical terms, contrasting a domesticating method that assimilates the foreign text to target norms with a foreignising method that registers its difference (Venuti, 2017).

These frameworks are not interchangeable, and one reason for persistent confusion is that they operate at different levels. Molina and Hurtado Albir drew the necessary distinction: a method is a global option that affects the whole text, a strategy is a procedure used to solve a particular problem, and a technique is the visible result of a choice in a concrete segment (Molina & Hurtado Albir, 2002). Chesterman similarly separated global strategies from local ones (Chesterman, 2016). Work on culture-specific items followed the same logic. Aixelá arranged procedures for CSIs on a continuum from conservation to substitution (Aixelá, 1996); Davies showed that the translators of a single book series combined preservation, addition, omission, globalisation, localisation, transformation and creation rather than following one policy (Davies, 2003); and Pedersen built a detailed model for extralinguistic cultural references in subtitling (Pedersen, 2011).

The Uzbek school of translation studies developed in close contact with Russian theory. Salomov laid the foundations of the discipline in Uzbekistan (Salomov, 1983), and Musayev produced a comprehensive textbook that covers equivalence, the translation of realia and phraseology, and the grammatical problems of translation (Musayev, 2005). Russian linguistic theory supplied the concept of translation transformations, which Barkhudarov reduced to four elementary types (permutation, substitution, addition and omission) (Barkhudarov, 1975), and Komissarov's levels-of-equivalence model (Komissarov, 1990). Most of this tradition, however, dealt with translation from Russian into Uzbek and from Uzbek into Russian. Translation between Uzbek and English has become a mass activity only in the last three decades, in education, media, tourism, law and literature. Literary landmarks of this period include Mark Reese's English version of Abdulla Qodiriy's novel O'tkan kunlar (Bygone Days) (Qodiriy, 2018) and Christopher Fort's translation of Cho'lpon's Kecha va kunduz (Night and Day) (Cho'lpon, 2019).

Recent Uzbek scholarship has turned to these problems directly. Studies have classified food realia (Zokirova, 2021), compared English and Uzbek strategies for rendering linguocultural realia in prose (Akhmedova, 2025), proposed a strategy-selection matrix for folklore realia (Azizova, 2026) and analysed the typological differences between the two languages with respect to literary translation (Yuldashova, 2026). Maxmudjanova distinguished four levels of the translator's choice (orientation, method, cultural strategy and technique) and argued that grammatical transformations between Uzbek and English are largely obligatory, while the translator's real strategic choice is revealed in realia, proper names and forms of address (Maxmudjanova, 2026). This last claim is the starting point of the present paper. If it holds, then a description of method in Uzbek–English translation has to begin by separating the obligatory from the optional, and only then can it say anything useful about the translator's orientation.

The aim of the study is to make this separation operational and to test how method choice for culture-specific items distributes across thematic domains. Three research questions were formulated. RQ1: Which shifts in Uzbek–English translation are imposed by the grammatical systems of the two languages and therefore lie outside the translator's methodological choice? RQ2: Which procedures are preferable for Uzbek culture-specific items of different thematic domains, and how are source-oriented and target-oriented procedures distributed among them? RQ3: Can these preferences be summarised as a decision model that is usable in translator training and translation criticism?

2. Materials and methods

The study follows the descriptive-explanatory design of descriptive translation studies, in which translational phenomena are first described and then related to the norms and constraints that make them likely (Toury, 2012). Two kinds of material were used.

The first set consists of illustrative Uzbek sentences constructed to isolate single grammatical categories: plural and possessive marking, case, converb chains, evidentiality, causative derivation, personal reference and honorific address. Constructed examples were preferred to corpus examples at this stage because they allow one grammatical variable to be observed at a time. Each sentence is given with an interlinear morpheme gloss and an adequate English rendering, and the shifts between them are classified with Barkhudarov's four elementary transformations (Barkhudarov, 1975).

The second set is a purposive sample of 40 Uzbek culture-specific items. The items were grouped into eight thematic domains of five items each: (1) food and drink, (2) clothing, (3) social institutions and communal practices, (4) kinship terms and forms of address, (5) rituals and festivals, (6) traditional measures and time markers, (7) ethical and evaluative concepts, and (8) phraseology and proverbs. The domains broadly follow Newmark's categories of cultural words (Newmark, 1988) with two additions that are particularly productive in Uzbek: forms of address and value concepts. Items were selected if they occur regularly in modern Uzbek prose and public discourse, if their translation into English is not self-evident, and if together they covered both denotative realia (objects, institutions) and connotative units (values, images).

Eight procedures were distinguished on the basis of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Aixelá (1996), Davies (2003) and Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002): borrowing (B), borrowing with an intratextual gloss at first mention (BG), calque (C), established equivalent (EE), cultural substitution (CS), generalisation (G), description or paraphrase (D), and omission with compensation (OC). For analysis the procedures were grouped by orientation. B, BG and C were treated as source-oriented because they keep the form or the image of the Uzbek item; CS and G as target-oriented because they replace the item with a familiar or more general English concept; EE, D and OC as explicitating or neutral because they transfer the meaning without either importing the foreign form or substituting a domestic one.

For each item the analyst selected one preferred procedure for a reference context: a narrative literary text addressed to a general English-speaking readership. Three criteria guided the choice. Criterion C1 concerned the status of the item in English: whether an equivalent or a borrowing is already attested in English usage (for example plov, Nowruz, teahouse). Criterion C2 concerned the cultural load of the item in context: whether it chiefly names an object or institution or chiefly carries evaluation and relational meaning. Criterion C3 concerned the function of the target text and the cost of an explanation for the reader. Alternative procedures that would be justified in other contexts were recorded and are discussed in Section 4. Uzbek words are cited in the current Uzbek Latin orthography. Frequencies were counted from the item-by-item assignment in Table 1, so every figure reported below can be checked directly against that table.

3. Results

3.1. Obligatory shifts imposed by the language systems

The constructed examples show that a whole group of shifts is not optional at all. Example (1) illustrates the combined effect of agglutination, verb-final order and subject omission.

(1) Kitoblarimizdan birini olib keldim.

kitob-lar-imiz-dan bir-i-ni ol-ib kel-di-m

book-PL-POSS.1PL-ABL one-POSS.3-ACC take-CVB come-PST-1SG

'I have brought one of our books.'

Four transformations occur together. The verb moves from final position to second position (permutation); the subject pronoun I, expressed in Uzbek only by the ending -m, has to be added; the

ablative and possessive suffixes are replaced by the analytic phrase one of our (substitution); and the converb chain olib keldim 'having taken, I came' is compressed into the single verb brought (omission). None of these shifts reflects a methodological decision. A translator who refused them would produce ungrammatical English, so even the most literal translation of this sentence is literal only at the level of lexical meaning.

The second group concerns categories that Uzbek expresses grammatically and English does not. Evidentiality is the clearest case. Turkic languages mark whether the speaker witnessed an event or knows it indirectly (Johanson, 2003). In (2) the past form in -ibdi signals that the speaker infers or has heard of the event.

(2) Ustoz kelibdi. kel-ib-di (come-PRF-3SG.INDIR) 'The teacher has come, it seems.'

English has no grammatical equivalent, and the information is either lost or rendered lexically by apparently, it seems, it turned out or I found that. The translator must add something, but the choice of the means is optional. The same holds for the third person pronoun u, which carries no gender: in (3) English forces a choice between he and she, and the causative suffix -dir- requires an analytic construction.

(3) U menga xat yozdirdi. yoz-dir-di (write-CAUS-PST.3SG) 'She had me write a letter.'

The opposition between respectful siz and familiar sen belongs to the same group. English you neutralises it, so the relationship between characters has to be reconstructed through forms of address, modal politeness (would you, please) or the register of the whole utterance. Taken together, these examples answer RQ1. Word order, subject expression, analytic marking of case and possession and the compression or expansion of verb chains are obligatory shifts. Evidentiality, gender of the third person, honorific distinctions and aspectual auxiliaries create obligatory losses, but the way these losses are compensated is a matter of choice. It is at this second point, together with culture-specific vocabulary, that method in the proper sense begins.

3.2. Procedures preferred for culture-specific items

Table 1 lists the 40 items with the rendering and the procedure preferred for the reference context. The last column gives the number of source-oriented (S), target-oriented (T) and explicitating or neutral (E) procedures in each domain.

Table 1. Preferred procedures for 40 Uzbek culture-specific items (reference context: literary narrative for a general English readership)

Domain	Item → preferred rendering (procedure)	S / T / E
1. Food and drink	osh → plov (B); non → non, round flatbread (BG); sumalak → sumalak, sweet paste of sprouted wheat cooked for Nowruz (BG); somsa → samsa (B); ko'k choy → green tea (EE)	4 / 0 / 1
2. Clothing	do'ppi → doppi, embroidered skullcap (BG); chopon → chapan, quilted robe (BG); atlas → ikat silk (EE); paranji → paranja, full-length veiling robe (BG); mahsi → soft leather boots (D)	3 / 0 / 2
3. Social institutions and practices	mahalla → mahalla, self-governing neighbourhood community (BG); hashar → hashar, communal voluntary work (BG); choyxona → teahouse (EE); gap → regular rotating gathering of friends (D); to'y → feast, celebration (G)	2 / 1 / 2
4. Kinship and address	aka → aka (B); opa → opa (B); domla → teacher (G); -jon → omitted, warmth carried by intonation or dear (OC); xola → auntie (CS)	2 / 2 / 1
5. Rituals and festivals	Navro'z → Nowruz (EE); beshik to'yi → feast held when a baby is first laid in the cradle (D); sunnat to'yi → circumcision	2 / 0 / 3

Domain	Item → preferred rendering (procedure)	S / T / E
	celebration (D); kelin salom → the bride's greeting (C); fotiha → fatiha, blessing that seals an engagement (BG)	
6. Measures and time	chaqirim → mile (CS); tosh → old road measure of several kilometres (D); botmon → a great weight (G); quloch → fathom (CS); peshin → midday (G)	0 / 4 / 1
7. Ethical and evaluative concepts	or-nomus → honour (G); andisha → scruple about what others will think (D); mehr-oqibat → kindness and loyalty among kin and neighbours (D); insof → conscience (CS); savob → a good deed that earns divine reward (D)	0 / 2 / 3
8. Phraseology and proverbs	tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda → when pigs fly (CS); qo'li ochiq → open-handed (C); boshi osmonga yetdi → over the moon (CS); bir kun tuz ichgan joyg'a qirq kun salom ber → greet for forty days the house where you tasted salt for one (C); tomchi-tomchi ko'l bo'lur → many a little makes a mickle (CS)	2 / 3 / 0
Total	40 items	15 / 12 / 13

Across the whole sample the three orientations are almost evenly balanced: 15 items (37.5%) received a source-oriented procedure, 12 (30.0%) a target-oriented one and 13 (32.5%) an explicitating or neutral one. At the level of single procedures (Figure 1) borrowing with a gloss and description were the most frequent (8 items each, 20.0%), followed by cultural substitution (7; 17.5%), generalisation (5; 12.5%), plain borrowing and established equivalents (4 each; 10.0%), calque (3; 7.5%) and omission with compensation (1; 2.5%).

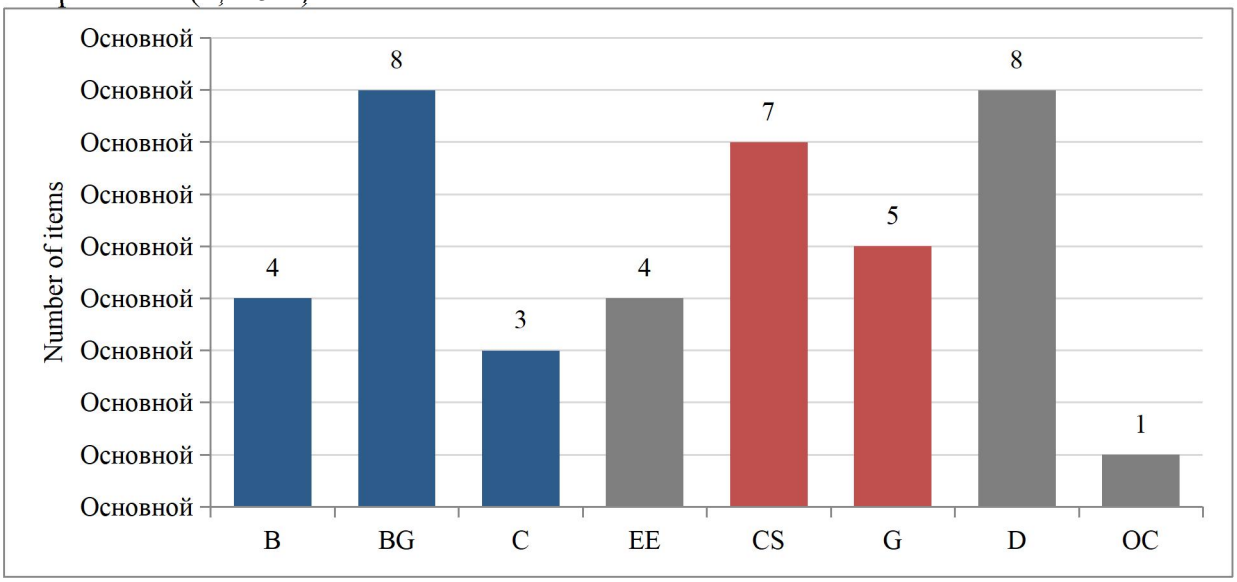


Figure 1. Frequency of preferred procedures in the sample (n = 40). Blue: source-oriented; red: target-oriented; grey: explicitating or neutral (based on Table 1)

The global balance conceals a strong dependence on domain (Figure 2). Material culture, that is food and clothing, received source-oriented procedures in seven of ten cases, because these items name concrete objects that can be explained once and then used as they are; plov and samsa need no gloss at all for many English readers. Measures and time markers showed the opposite tendency: four of five items received a target-oriented procedure, since the reader needs a sense of distance or time rather than the exotic name of a unit. Ethical concepts were dominated by description (three of five), because

words such as andisha and mehr-oqibat condense a whole pattern of behaviour that no English word reproduces. Phraseology split between cultural substitution and calque, depending on whether the image could survive literal transfer: qo‘li ochiq yields the transparent open-handed, whereas tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda (literally ‘when the camel’s tail touches the ground’) is functionally rendered by when pigs fly.

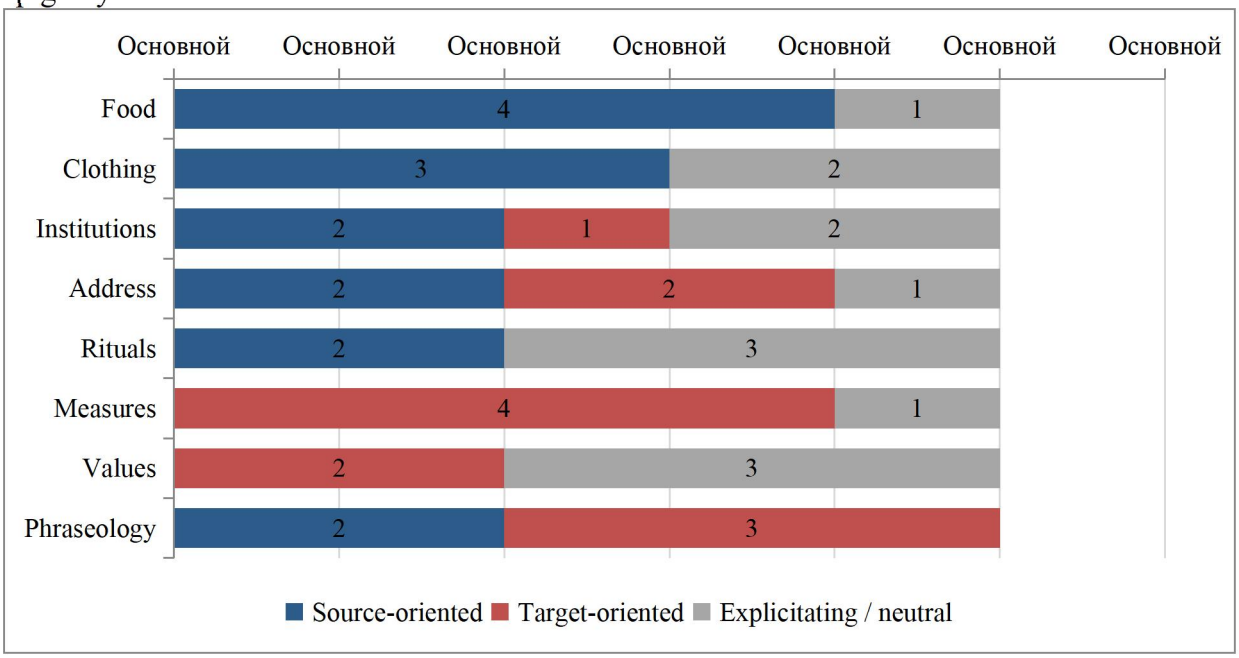


Figure 2. Orientation of preferred procedures by thematic domain, number of items (based on Table 1)

Forms of address deserve separate comment because they are the domain in which the reference context matters most. Aka and opa were borrowed, as recent English translations of Uzbek prose increasingly do, since they carry age and respect relations that brother and sister would distort. The diminutive suffix -jon, by contrast, cannot be borrowed without making the English text awkward, and its affective value is better compensated elsewhere in the sentence. The domain therefore contains three different orientations among five items, which illustrates the main finding of this section: the procedure is chosen for the item, not for the text.

3.3. A layered decision model

The assignments in Table 1 can be summarised as an ordered sequence of questions. The sequence is shown in Table 2. Its first layer is global and fixed for the whole text; the following layers are local and are asked for each item at its first occurrence.

Table 2. Layered decision model for culture-specific items in Uzbek–English translation

Layer	Question asked by the translator	If yes	If no
0. Global	What is the function of the target text (literary, informative, legal-administrative, promotional) and who is the reader?	Sets the tolerance for foreign words and glosses for the whole text	—
1. Status	Does English already have an established equivalent or borrowing (plov, Nowruz, teahouse)?	Use it (EE or B)	Go to layer 2
2.	Is the item ethnographically	Borrow, gloss at first	Go to layer 3

Layer	Question asked by the translator	If yes	If no
Centrality	central: repeated, plot-bearing or a marker of identity (mahalla, do‘ppi, hashar)?	mention, then use without gloss (BG → B)	
3. Meaning type	Is the meaning mainly evaluative or relational (andisha, mehr-oqibat, -jon)?	Describe or compensate (D, OC)	Go to layer 4
4. Function	Does the reader need the function rather than the referent (chaqirim, peshin, idioms)?	Substitute or generalise (CS, G); for transparent images use calque (C)	Describe (D)

The order of the layers is not arbitrary. Layer 1 comes first because an existing equivalent is the cheapest solution for the reader and the most consistent across texts. Layer 2 comes before the semantic questions because an item that recurs throughout a novel or a legal document must be named consistently; a description repeated twenty times becomes a burden, while a glossed borrowing is learned once. Layers 3 and 4 then decide between explicitation and substitution. The model also explains why the same item may receive different treatment in different texts. The word mahalla is borrowed with a gloss in a novel, but in a legal or administrative text the borrowing, introduced with a definition, is the only acceptable option, because the institution has a legal status that no English approximation such as neighbourhood conveys.

4. Discussion

The results support the view that the grammatical transformations of Uzbek–English translation are largely obligatory and that the translator’s methodological choice is concentrated in culture-bound vocabulary and in the compensation of grammatical losses (Maxmudjanova, 2026). They also make this view more precise. The obligatory zone includes not only word order and analytic marking but also the expression of the subject and the compression of converb chains. The optional zone includes, besides realia and forms of address, the lexical rendering of evidentiality, the gender of u and the honorific siz, where English imposes a loss but leaves the means of compensation open. A description of a translator’s method that counts obligatory transformations as evidence of a free or domesticating approach would therefore be misleading. This is a practical point for translation criticism in Uzbekistan, where reviews often treat any departure from the source structure as a sign of free translation.

The near-even balance of orientations agrees with what Davies found in a very different corpus: translators of culture-rich texts do not follow a single global strategy but combine procedures item by item (Davies, 2003). It also qualifies the use of Venuti’s opposition in Uzbek–English work. Foreignisation and domestication remain useful as descriptions of tendencies (Venuti, 2017), yet in the sample the tendency depended more on the domain than on any decision taken for the text as a whole. A literary translator who borrows do‘ppi and substitutes mile for chaqirim is not being inconsistent; the two items make different demands. Aixelá’s continuum from conservation to substitution (Aixelá, 1996) describes such combinations better than a binary choice.

For the Uzbek tradition the findings have a further implication. Salomov and Musayev framed the central requirement of translation as adequacy, that is, the faithful re-creation of the content and artistic effect of the original (Salomov, 1983; Musayev, 2005). The present analysis suggests that, in translation from Uzbek into English, adequacy can be achieved by quite different routes for different classes of items, and that the decision between them can be made explicit. Recent matrices for realia (Azizova, 2026) and typological comparisons (Yuldashova, 2026) point in the same direction. The

layered model in Table 2 adds two things: the priority of established usage and the role of recurrence, which together explain many choices that would otherwise look arbitrary.

The model also has value in teaching. Students tend either to borrow everything, producing an English text full of unexplained Uzbek words, or to replace everything with English approximations, producing a text from which the culture has disappeared. A fixed order of questions gives them a way to justify each decision and gives the teacher a way to assess it. A related hypothesis, which the present data cannot test, concerns machine translation: systems trained on limited Uzbek–English data are likely to over-use literal transfer and omission for CSIs, and the model could serve as a checklist for post-editing.

The study has limitations that define the next steps. The assignment of procedures was made by one analyst for one reference context, and other analysts or other text types might shift individual items between categories; the counts should therefore be read as a structured description of the sample rather than as frequencies in published translations. The sample of 40 items is sufficient to show the dependence on domain but not to estimate its size precisely. The natural continuation is a parallel corpus of published English translations of Uzbek prose, including the translations of Qodiriy and Cho‘lpon (Qodiriy, 2018; Cho‘lpon, 2019), in which the observed procedures can be compared with those predicted by the model and inter-rater agreement can be measured.

5. Conclusion

The study leads to three conclusions.

1. In Uzbek–English translation the term method should be reserved for the translator’s global orientation and the choices that follow from it. Permutation of word order, explicit subject expression, analytic rendering of case and possession and the compression of converb chains are obligatory shifts and do not, by themselves, indicate a literal or a free approach.

2. Method choice in the proper sense is concentrated in two zones: culture-specific items and the compensation of grammatical categories that English lacks (evidentiality, gender-neutral u, the siz/sen distinction). In a sample of 40 culture-specific items source-oriented, target-oriented and explicitating procedures were almost evenly balanced (37.5%, 30.0% and 32.5%), but their distribution depended strongly on the thematic domain: material culture favoured borrowing, while measures and value concepts favoured substitution and description.

3. These preferences can be expressed as a layered decision model in which text function is fixed globally and each item is tested for established equivalence, centrality in the text, type of meaning and function. The model gives translators, teachers and critics a transparent basis for justifying decisions and can be verified on parallel corpora of published Uzbek–English translations.

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