



SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATION AND PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC UNITS IN GENERATIVE AI-BASED ENGLISH-UZBEK LITERARY TRANSLATION

Mardayev Omon To'liqinovich

PhD researcher, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies

Abstract: The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has significantly transformed contemporary translation practices, particularly in the processing of literary texts. Nevertheless, the translation of culture-specific units remains one of the most challenging areas for AI-based translation systems because such units encode not only lexical meanings but also historical, social, symbolic, and pragmatic information. This study examines semantic transformation and pragmatic adaptation of culture-specific units in generative AI-based English-Uzbek literary translation. Particular attention is paid to cases in which culturally marked expressions undergo semantic narrowing, generalization, explicitation, substitution, or partial loss during AI-mediated translation. The study argues that generative AI demonstrates considerable contextual sensitivity but may still neutralize culturally significant meanings when direct cross-cultural equivalents are unavailable. Therefore, an effective AI-assisted literary translation model should integrate semantic equivalence with pragmatic and linguocultural adaptation.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, literary translation, culture-specific units, semantic transformation, pragmatic adaptation, English, Uzbek, linguocultural competence, AI-assisted translation.

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence technologies into the translation process has created a need to reconsider such traditional concepts in translation studies as equivalence, adequacy, and pragmatic adaptation from a new perspective. In particular, the extent to which culture-specific units in literary texts are accurately interpreted by generative artificial intelligence constitutes a significant scholarly problem. This is because a culture-specific unit in a literary text performs not only a nominative function but also embodies the historical experience, way of life, values, social relations, and distinctive patterns of conceptualizing the world characteristic of a particular people. Therefore, when such units are translated from one language into another, preserving their lexical meaning alone is insufficient; it is equally important to consider the extent to which their cultural connotations and pragmatic functions are reconstructed in translation.

This issue becomes even more complex in the translation of English and Uzbek literary texts. The main reason lies in the fact that the linguocultural communities represented by the two languages categorize and conceptualize certain realities in different ways. Uzbek culture-specific units such as *mahalla*, *dasturxon*, *hashar*, *oqsoqol*, *kelin*, *to'y*, *duo*, *aka* and *opa* do not always have absolute semantic and pragmatic equivalents in English. For example,



rendering the Uzbek unit *mahalla* by means of the English word *neighborhood* may appear relatively accurate at the denotative level; nevertheless, such a translation narrows the semantic scope of the original unit. While *neighborhood* primarily refers to a particular residential area or locality, *mahalla* in the Uzbek linguocultural environment may activate not only the notion of a territorial unit but also such concepts as neighborly relations, community solidarity, mutual assistance, social regulation, traditional ceremonies, and a local social institution. Therefore, if generative artificial intelligence renders *mahalla* as *neighborhood* irrespective of its contextual environment, the resulting translation may be lexically comprehensible but partially reductive from a linguocultural perspective.

Such a phenomenon can be regarded as “semantic shift”. In the process of translation, semantic shift manifests itself when one or more components within the semantic structure of a source-language unit are intensified, weakened, generalized, narrowed, or completely lost. In generative AI translation, this phenomenon is particularly evident in the treatment of realia and lexical gaps. For instance, translating the Uzbek word “*oqsoqol*” as “*old man*” preserves the semantic component associated with age but fails to adequately represent the components related to social status and respect. The variants “*respected elder*” or, depending on the context “*community elder*” are closer to the pragmatic meaning of the original unit. Thus, the difference between the alternatives selected by AI is not merely a matter of lexical choice; rather, it determines the extent to which culture-specific information is preserved in the translated text.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the case of the Uzbek unit “*dasturxon*”.

Translating this unit into English simply as “*tablecloth*” may produce formal lexical correspondence in certain contexts. However, in Uzbek literary discourse, *dasturxon* frequently conveys a meaning that extends beyond the material object itself and activates cultural semantic components associated with serving food, receiving guests, communal dining, generosity, and hospitality. For example, translating the sentence “*Mehmonlar dasturxon atrofida jam bo‘lishdi*” as “The guests gathered around the tablecloth” may be grammatically well formed, yet it does not naturally represent the communicative situation. The alternative “The guests gathered around the table for the meal” conveys the situation expressed in the source text more comprehensibly to an English-speaking reader. Nevertheless, even the second version does not preserve all the ethnocultural semantic components associated with the concept of *dasturxon*. Consequently, a certain degree of semantic loss occurs alongside pragmatic gain in the translation process.

At this point, the phenomenon of pragmatic adaptation in generative AI translation becomes directly connected with semantic shift. Pragmatic adaptation is aimed not at reproducing the formal structure of a source-text unit exactly, but rather at reconstructing its communicative function in a manner appropriate and accessible to the target-language reader. By analyzing the context, generative AI may, in certain cases, abandon a literal equivalent and select a descriptive or functional alternative. For example, rendering the Uzbek word *hashar* simply as *work* or *voluntary work* considerably reduces its cultural specificity. An



explanatory translation such as traditional community-based voluntary work, however, partially reconstructs the semantic components of collectivity and traditionality embedded in the original unit. In this case, the target expression undergoes expansion at the lexical level, resulting in explicitation; nevertheless, it is precisely this expansion that enhances pragmatic adequacy.

Kinship terms and forms of address also constitute a complex semantic-pragmatic layer for generative AI in the translation of culture-specific units. Uzbek units such as *aka*, *opa*, *amaki*, and *xola* are not restricted to the expression of biological kinship. They can also be used to address people who are neither relatives nor personally familiar to the speaker, functioning as markers of age hierarchy, respect, social distance, and communicative proximity. If *aka* in a literary text is automatically translated as *brother*, an English-speaking reader may infer a kinship relationship between the characters that does not actually exist in the source text. In this case, semantic shift may consequently lead to pragmatic misinterpretation. Therefore, an AI system is required to identify not only the lexical meaning of a particular unit but also its socio-pragmatic function within a specific communicative situation.

Similar problems arise in translation from English into Uzbek. The meanings of such culture-bound units found in English literary texts as *privacy*, *gentleman*, *pub*, *Thanksgiving*, *afternoon tea*, *cottage*, *sir* and *ma'am* are closely associated with particular cultural contexts. Replacing these units with their nearest Uzbek lexical equivalents does not necessarily preserve the cultural background of the source text in every case. In such situations, generative AI essentially faces two major strategic possibilities: preserving the source-culture specificity of the unit or adapting it to the communicative norms of the target culture. In the first case, the translation retains the distinctive features of the foreign culture, although additional explanation may be required for the target reader. In the second case, the translated text becomes more accessible and natural for the target audience; however, the national and cultural colouring of the original text may be partially neutralized.

References

- Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. 3rd ed. Routledge.
- Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation Studies*. 4th ed. Routledge.
- House, J. (2015). *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*. Routledge.
- Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. Prentice Hall.
- Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Brill.
- Venuti, L. (2017). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. 3rd ed. Routledge.



Vinay, J.-P., & Darbelnet, J. (1995). *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*. John Benjamins.

Kenny, D. (2022). *Machine Translation for Everyone: Empowering Users in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Language Science Press.

