

Principles of Translating Realia in the novel “Scorpion from the Altar” by Abdulla Kadiri

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Abstract: This article examines the translation of culture-specific items, or realia, in the novel “Scorpion from the Altar” by Abdulla Kadiri, with particular attention to their rendering in the English translation *The Scorpion from the Altar*. The study is based on a comparative textual analysis of selected Uzbek realia denoting domestic life, religion, clothing, social institutions, titles, and historical place names. The analysis shows that the translator uses several strategies, including transcription, transliteration, approximate translation, and omission; however, these strategies are not always applied consistently or adequately. The study concludes that the translation of realia in historical fiction should prioritize semantic precision, cultural specificity, and contextual adequacy, since the loss or distortion of such units weakens the historical and national texture of the original text.

Keywords: Realia, translation strategies, national color, cultural specificity, transliteration, transcription, functional equivalent, Abdulla Kadiri, *Scorpion from the Altar*, literary translation.

Introduction: The translation of realia remains one of the most challenging areas of literary translation because it requires the translator to recreate not only lexical meaning but also the national, historical, and cultural texture embedded in the source text. In works rich in ethnographic and historical detail, realia function as carriers of collective memory, worldview, and social identity. Their translation therefore directly affects the adequacy of the target text and the reader's access to the original cultural environment. The uploaded material emphasizes that translating realia involves preserving national color, preventing information loss, and bringing the target reader as close as possible to the author's original cultural horizon. It also stresses that this process is inherently complex and does not admit rigid universal rules.

“Scorpion from the Altar” by Abdulla Kadiri is a particularly important object of such analysis because it is portrayed in the source material as a major historical-literary work of Uzbek prose depicting late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Turkestan, including its social hierarchy, domestic culture, religious life, and political institutions. The novel contains numerous linguocultural units whose

meanings are inseparable from Uzbek historical experience. As a result, its English translation presents a productive case for examining how realia are transferred, adapted, omitted, or semantically reshaped in cross-cultural translation.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of the study is rooted in classical translation scholarship cited in the uploaded material. A. Andres argues that translation, like other forms of art, cannot be governed by fixed and final rules, especially when a text is separated from the modern reader by historical distance. This view is particularly relevant to historical fiction, where the translator must decide how much temporal and cultural distance should remain visible in the translated text.

A. Fedorov's well-known claim that there is no word that cannot be translated, even if only descriptively, provides another important basis for this study. His perspective supports the view that even apparently untranslatable realia can be conveyed through appropriate strategies such as explanation, contextual adaptation, or descriptive reformulation. G. Salomov defines translation as a creative process of re-creation

through the means of another language, which reinforces the idea that realia translation cannot be purely mechanical. It must combine semantic fidelity with artistic sensitivity.

The most central theoretical framework in the uploaded text comes from S.Vlakhov and S.Florin, who treat the translation of realia as one of the core problems of conveying national and historical specificity. According to them, the two principal difficulties are, first, the absence of a direct equivalent in the target language and, second, the need to preserve the item's connotative coloring, including its national and historical associations. They classify the main translation methods for realia as transcription, translation through substitution, neologism, approximate translation, and contextual translation. This classification serves as the main analytical lens of the present article.

The source text also draws on A.Reformatskiy, who contrasts translation and transcription, and on V.Komissarov, who discusses generalization as a lexical-semantic shift from narrower to broader meaning. P.Newmark is invoked to support the principle that in translating cultural items, contextual and functional meaning should take precedence over etymological similarity. Together, these scholars provide a coherent framework for judging whether a translation preserves meaning, function, and cultural resonance.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative method based on close reading of selected examples from the Uzbek original "Mehrobdan chayon" and its English translation "The Scorpion from the Altar". The material analyzed in this article was taken from the uploaded chapter section on translation principles of realia in the novel. The method consists of four stages. First, culture-specific lexical items in the novel are identified as realia. Second, their English renderings are compared with the Uzbek source forms. Third, each example is interpreted through the translation categories presented by Vlakhov and Florin: transcription/transliteration, neologism, approximate translation, and contextual translation. Fourth, where the existing translation appears inadequate, a more suitable version is proposed on semantic, functional, and cultural grounds.

The analyzed items represent several semantic groups: ethnographic realia such as havli, lagan, and sufa; religious realia such as alhamdulillah; clothing realia such as paranji; socio-political and institutional realia such as qozixona and o'rda; rank and title realia such as yuzbegi; and toponymic realia such as O'rtepa. This grouping makes it possible to observe how different

categories of realia produce different translation challenges.

Results and Discussion

The analysis shows that the English translation of "Scorpion from the Altar" relies on a mixed set of strategies, but their effectiveness varies considerably.

The first major pattern is omission, which causes the most visible loss of cultural information. In the example containing havli, the English translation omits the word entirely, rendering only the physical action of Ra'no playing with clay. The source text defines havli as an ethnographic realia referring not merely to a yard but to a culturally meaningful domestic space central to Uzbek family life. Its omission removes both spatial precision and cultural atmosphere. The uploaded analysis suggests that havli, traditional Uzbek courtyard, or at least yard would have preserved the reference better than total deletion. This case demonstrates that omission of realia can lead to textual incompleteness and information loss.

A similar problem appears with lagan. In the English sentence, the item is omitted, despite the fact that lagan denotes a large traditional serving platter associated with Uzbek communal dining. Since it has no exact English equivalent, the source analysis recommends transliteration (lagan), descriptive rendering (a large traditional Uzbek serving platter), or a neutral approximation such as dish. The omission weakens the domestic and ethnographic coloring of the scene and reduces the density of cultural detail.

By contrast, sufais translated as supa, which represents a transliteration/transcription strategy. This choice is judged positively in the source material because sufa is a culturally marked household structure with no exact English equivalent. Retaining it in transliterated form preserves national color and reflects the traditional material culture of Uzbek life. The example supports Q.Musayev's argument, cited in the uploaded text, that certain nationally specific items should be transferred in their original form to preserve the source text's cultural identity.

The treatment of alhamdulillah reveals inconsistency. In one example it is translated as Thanks God, which the source material interprets as a literal or approximate rendering that weakens the item's religious-cultural resonance. Elsewhere in the translation, however, the expression is reportedly preserved as Alhamdulillah, which better maintains the Islamic linguistic environment of the novel. This inconsistency suggests that religious realia require a stable strategy: either transliteration plus optional explanation, or a highly careful contextual rendering that preserves the expression's devotional function.

The case of paranji shows another important problem: mediation through Russian. The English translation uses parandja, which reflects the Russian form паранджа rather than a direct transfer from Uzbek. The uploaded analysis criticizes this choice because it distances the item from its Uzbek phonetic and cultural source. Since the novel is rooted in Uzbek historical reality, the more appropriate form would be paranji, which would better preserve source-language authenticity. This example demonstrates how relay translation through an intermediary language can distort national specificity.

Another cluster of losses occurs in descriptive passages where multiple realia are removed together. In the example containing jilovxona, to'n, bo'zyaxtak, and husni Yusuf, the English translation reduces the passage to a generic description of two men. According to the uploaded analysis, this eliminates the setting, clothing markers, ironic characterization, and physiognomic detail that help the reader visualize the historical-cultural scene. Such reduction not only weakens national color but also impoverishes the novel's stylistic texture and characterization.

A more successful example is qozixona, rendered as kazikhanas. The source material sees this as a relatively effective application of transcription because it preserves the foreign institutional name and thus the historical setting of the novel. However, it also argues that the translation would be stronger if accompanied by explanation, for example: kazikhana - a historical Islamic court located near mosques or the qazi's residence. This suggests that transliteration alone is often not enough for institutional realia; explanatory support may be necessary to secure comprehension without sacrificing cultural identity.

The translation of o'rda as horde is identified as one of the clearest semantic distortions. Although the two words are etymologically related, the source text points out that modern English horde usually means a noisy or disorderly crowd, whereas o'rda in the novel refers to the ruler's palace or political center. Therefore, etymological resemblance does not guarantee functional equivalence. On Newmark's principle that contextual and functional meaning must come first, the uploaded analysis recommends alternatives such as royal court, palace, or transliterated orda. This example shows that historically related words can still be false friends in literary translation.

The translation of yuzbegi as civil servant is also judged inadequate. In the source analysis, yuzbegi denotes a historical military-administrative title, specifically a commander of one hundred men. Translating it as civil servant erases its military dimension and misrepresents

the social hierarchy of the novel. The source therefore suggests military officer, commander, or the more precise descriptive form commander of a hundred men. This case confirms that approximate translation is only acceptable when the functional core is preserved; otherwise it produces serious semantic drift.

Finally, the place name O'ratepa appears in the English translation as Uratyupe, again reflecting Russian mediation. The uploaded text argues that the more appropriate form would be Uratepa, since geographical realia generally require transcription or transliteration rather than semantic replacement. The Russianized form obscures the Uzbek component tepa and thereby dilutes local identity. The findings indicate that the most adequate strategies for this novel are transliteration or transcription for highly culture-bound items, transliteration plus explanation for institutional and religious realia, and carefully chosen functional equivalents for titles and socio-political terms. The least successful strategies are omission and semantically misleading approximation.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that realia in Mehrobdanchayon are central to the novel's historical authenticity, national color, and linguocultural richness. Their translation into English is therefore not a peripheral lexical issue but a decisive factor in preserving the artistic and cultural value of the work. The uploaded material shows that the English translation contains both successful and problematic solutions. Items such as sufa and qozixona indicate the usefulness of transcription or transliteration, while cases such as havli, lagan, o'rda, and yuzbegi reveal the risks of omission, semantic generalization, or misleading equivalence.

The analysis supports the conclusion that realia in historical fiction should be translated through strategies that maintain three priorities: semantic precision, contextual functionality, and cultural specificity. In many instances, the most effective solution is not full domestication but a balanced approach combining source-oriented transfer with brief explanation. Such a strategy allows the target reader to understand the text while still perceiving the distinct historical and national world of the original. For "Scorpion from the Altar", this is especially important because the novel's identity is inseparable from the social, religious, and material culture of Turkistan that its realia encode.

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