

The concept of cultural elements and translation strategies

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Abstract: This paper investigates the notion of cultural elements in language and their importance in translation. It examines various translation strategies for handling culturally specific terms, considering different scholarly viewpoints. The study categorizes cultural elements into proper nouns, culturally specific terms, socially specific terms, and idiomatic expressions, offering systematic approaches for their translation. The findings contribute to amplifying sociocultural competence in translation and language education, particularly in Korean-to-Uzbek translation. By integrating these strategies into language education, learners can enhance their translation skills and deepen their understanding of cultural nuances.

Keywords: Cultural elements, translation strategies, sociocultural competence, Korean language education, cross-cultural communication, cultural adaptation.

Introduction: Language is more than just a means of communication; it also reflects culture, history, and societal norms. Each language contains remarkable expressions, idioms, and terminologies that are deeply rooted in its culture, making translation an intricate process that goes beyond mere word-for-word conversion. In particular, cultural elements embedded in language pose considerable difficulties for translators, as they often carry meanings that cannot be simply conveyed in another language. Understanding and effectively translating these cultural elements is crucial for accurate cross-cultural communication.

This research explores the concept of cultural components, their classifications, and translation strategies, aiming to improve sociocultural proficiency among language learners and translators. By analyzing various translation techniques and classifying cultural elements, this study provides a comprehensive framework for effectively translating culturally specific expressions.

Literature Review

This study aims to utilize the 'theory of cultural elements' to enhance sociocultural competence.

According to Kim Hyo-jung (2004), a translator's competence is divided into linguistic competence and cultural competence. In this context, cultural competence, synonymous with sociocultural competence, refers to the ability to recognize 'cultural elements' and is a core aspect of translation ability.

So, what exactly are cultural elements? Lee Geun-hee (2005) defines cultural elements as vocabulary derived from unique cultural aspects surrounding the history, society, economy, politics, and linguistic customs of a speech community using the source language. Kwon In-kyung (2013) expands this definition, stating that cultural elements include not only culturally specific vocabulary but also linguistic customs and expressions used in a society's social and cultural background. Based on these definitions, this paper defines cultural elements as 'expressions reflecting the unique sociocultural characteristics of the source language's culture.'

Translating such cultural elements is challenging, leading to discussions on 'strategies for translating cultural elements.' Aixelá (1996) classifies cultural element translation strategies into preservation, substitution, and deletion, discussing each in detail. Pedersen (2011) proposes six strategies: preservation,

specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, and omission. Harvey (2000) presents four strategies: functional equivalence, formal equivalence, phonetic equivalence, and explanatory translation. Lee Geun-hee (2005) categorizes cultural elements into proper nouns, culture-specific vocabulary, vocabulary related to specific events or figures, idiomatic expressions, and measurement units, proposing translation methods for each category.

This paper consolidates the above discussions, removing redundant content, and organizes the strategies as follows:

1. Cultural Element Translation Strategies

a. Transliteration without additional information.

Transliteration without additional information is a method of representing words from one writing system in another while preserving their original phonetic structure. This approach is commonly used in linguistic studies, translation, and localization, ensuring that proper nouns, technical terms, and culturally specific words retain their original pronunciation across languages. However, it may pose challenges in comprehension when the target audience lacks cultural or linguistic context. While transliteration facilitates phonetic consistency, it may not always convey meaning accurately, making it necessary to consider supplementary explanations in some cases, especially in cross-cultural communication and translation studies.

- (1a) Translating '대구' as 'Degu' (simple transliteration)

어제 대구에서 사는 친구가 서울로 왔다는 소식을 듣고 만나러 갔습니다.

Kecha Deguda yashovchi do'stim Seulga kelgani xabarini eshitib, uchrashgani bordim.

b. Transliteration with naturally embedded additional information.

Transliteration with naturally embedded additional information is a strategy used in translation and linguistic adaptation to preserve phonetic accuracy while enhancing comprehension. This method involves incorporating subtle explanatory elements within the transliterated text, ensuring that culturally specific terms, proper nouns, and technical words are more accessible to the target audience. By seamlessly integrating contextual hints, such as descriptive adjectives or functional equivalents, this approach bridges linguistic and cultural gaps, improving clarity in cross-cultural communication. It is particularly beneficial in literary translation, language education, and localization, where retaining both pronunciation

and meaning is crucial.

- (1b) Translating '백두산' as 'Pektusan tog'i' or '한라봉' as 'Hallabong, (Jeju orolida o'suvchi citrus meva)

제주에 여행 가시면 꼭 한라봉을 먹어 보세요.

Jejuga sayohatga borsangiz albatta hallabong yeb ko'ring.

c. Transliteration with additional information provided in parentheses or footnotes.

Transliteration with additional information provided in parentheses or footnotes is a method used in translation and linguistic studies to enhance reader comprehension while preserving phonetic accuracy. This approach involves presenting the transliterated term in its original phonetic form, accompanied by an explanation, definition, or cultural context in parentheses or footnotes. It is particularly useful for translating proper nouns, culturally specific terms, and technical vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to the target audience. By offering supplementary details separately, this method maintains the readability of the main text while ensuring clarity and accuracy in cross-cultural communication.

- (1c) Translating '부산' as 'Busan' (Seuldan keyin ikkinchi o'rinda turuvchi katta shahar)

민수 씨가 부산에 있는 대학교에 취직했다고 해서 무척 기뻐합니다.

Minsu xonim Busan (Seuldan keyin ikkinchi o'rinda turuvchi katta shahar)dagi universitetga ishga kirgdim deganiga juda ham xursand bo'ldim.

d. Translation using a hypernym (a more general term).

Translation using a hypernym involves replacing a specific term with a more general word that belongs to the same semantic category. This strategy is often used when an exact equivalent does not exist in the target language or when the original term may be unfamiliar to the audience. By employing a broader term, translators can ensure comprehensibility while maintaining the overall meaning of the text. However, this approach may result in a loss of cultural or contextual specificity, making it essential to balance generalization with accuracy, especially in literary translation, localization, and cross-cultural communication.

- (1d) Translating '김치찌개' as 'kimchili sho'rva'

외국 사람들이 김치찌개를 매워서 잘 못 먹어요.

Chet elliklar kimchili sho'rvani achchiqligi sababli

unchalik ichishmaydi.

e. Translation using an equivalent term familiar to the target language's culture.

This translation strategy involves replacing a culturally specific term from the source language with a functionally or conceptually similar term that is familiar to the target language's audience. By using an equivalent term that aligns with the cultural context of the target language, translators enhance comprehension and relatability while maintaining the intended meaning. This method is particularly effective in literary translation, localization, and cross-cultural communication, where preserving cultural relevance is crucial. However, it may lead to slight shifts in nuance or connotation, requiring careful consideration to ensure accuracy and appropriateness.

- (1e) Translating football player '송홍민' as 'Sonny'

송홍민은 내가 가장 좋아하는 축구 선수입니다.

f. Paraphrasing to fit the target language's cultural context.

Paraphrasing to fit the target language's cultural context involves rewording a phrase or concept from the source language in a way that aligns with the cultural and linguistic norms of the target audience. This strategy ensures that the intended meaning is preserved while making the translation more natural and relatable. It is particularly useful for idioms, proverbs, culturally specific references, and figurative language that may not have direct equivalents. While this approach enhances readability and engagement, it requires a deep understanding of both cultures to maintain accuracy and avoid unintended shifts in meaning.

This study incorporates these cultural element translation strategies into Korean language education to enhance learners' sociocultural competence and linguistic skills. Using Korean as the source language and English as the target language, examples include:

Sunny men eng yaxshi ko'radigan futbolchi hisoblanadi.

- (1f) Translating '삼계탕' as 'a Koreys milliy taomi'

어제 한국에서 오신 손님들과 한국 식당에서 삼계탕을 먹었어요.

Kecha Koreyadan kelgan mehmonlar bilan koreys oshxonasida koreys milliy ovqatini yedik.

2. Classification of Cultural Elements

Classifying cultural elements is challenging due to overlapping categories. For example, '홍길동' can be classified as both a proper noun and a traditional

literary figure. Similarly, '삼천포' in the phrase 'falling into Samcheonpo' could be categorized as a place name or as part of an idiomatic expression. Recent research by Jo Jae-beom (2015) categorizes cultural elements into four groups: proper nouns, culturally specific terms, socially specific terms, and idiomatic expressions.

2. Classification of Cultural Elements

Classifying cultural elements presents a significant challenge due to the fluid and overlapping nature of cultural categories. Many terms and expressions possess multiple layers of meaning, making their classification complex. For example, the name 홍길동 (Hong Gil-dong) can be categorized both as a proper noun and as a traditional literary figure with deep historical and cultural significance in Korean folklore.

Similarly, the phrase 삼천포로 빠지다 ("falling into Samcheonpo") can be viewed both as a geographical reference and as an idiomatic expression used to describe a conversation that has gone off-topic.

Scholarly research has attempted to systematize the classification of cultural elements to facilitate their analysis and translation. One such framework is proposed by Jo Jae-beom (2015), who classifies cultural elements into four broad categories:

1. Proper Nouns – These include names of people, places, organizations, and historical figures, which often carry cultural and historical connotations beyond their literal meaning.

2. Culturally Specific Terms – Words and phrases deeply embedded in a particular culture, such as traditional customs, food, clothing, or belief systems that may lack direct equivalents in other languages.

In addition to these categories, some researchers suggest further subcategories to account for hybrid cases where cultural elements cross multiple classifications. For instance, historical and mythological references may blend proper nouns with culturally specific elements, while metaphorical place names, as seen in idiomatic expressions, may serve both as linguistic markers and cultural symbols.

Accurately classifying cultural elements is crucial in translation studies, as it influences the choice of appropriate translation strategies. Misclassification may lead to misunderstandings or loss of meaning in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, translators and scholars must adopt a flexible yet systematic approach, considering both linguistic and cultural contexts when handling such elements.

Cultural Element Categories and Examples

- Proper Nouns:

Historical figures (e.g., 이순신, 박혁거세, 성춘향);

Ex: 박혁거세는 신라를 세운 시조로 우리에게 널리 알려져 있다.

Park Xyeok Go Seu bizga Silla asoschisi sifatida keng tanilgan.

Place names (e.g., 경주/함경북도/한강/설악산);

Ex: 설악산은 1970년 우리나라에서 다섯 번째 국립공원으로 지정되었다.

Soraksan tog'i yurtimizda beshinchi davlat milliy bog'i sifatida belgilangan.

Historical country names (e.g., 고구려, 백제, 신라);

Ex: 삼국 초기에는 고구려와 백제의 5부나 신라의 6부가 중앙의 지배 집단이 되었다.

Uch Qirollikning dastlabki boshlarida Goguryeo va Baekjening beshta bo'linmasi va Sillaning olti bo'limi markaziy boshqaruvchi guruhga aylangan.

Historical events (e.g., 임진왜란/6.25/갑오경장);

Ex: 임진왜란은 1592년(선조 25)부터 1598년까지 2차에 걸쳐서 우리나라에 침입한 일본과의 싸움이다.

Imjin urushi 1592 yildan (qirol Seonjo hukmronligining 25-yilidan) 1598 yilgacha ikki bosqichda Koreyani bosib olgan Yaponiyaga qarshi urushidir.

Cultural buildings (e.g., 창덕궁/집현전/불국사/미륵사지).

Ex: 미륵사지 석탑은 세 개의 탑 중 서쪽에 위치한 탑이다.

Mireuksaji tosh minorasi uchta minora orasida g'arbiy tomonda joylashgan minora hisoblanadi.

- Culturally Specific Terms:

Traditional music and performances (e.g., 판소리, 팽과리);

Ex: 나한테는 국악기 중 팽과리 소리는 가장 아름다운 소리다.

Men uchun milliy cholg'u asboblari orasida gvengari ovozi eng chiroyli ovozdur.

Traditional games (e.g., 씨름, 놀뛰기, 살바);

Ex: 씨름은 한국을 대표하는 민속놀이이다.

Sierum Koreyaning vakiliy milliy xalq o'yini hisoblanadi.

Traditional literature (e.g., 심청가, 용비어천가);

Ex: 심청가는 판소리 다섯 마당 중 가장 비극적인 내용을 담고 있다.

Simcheong qo'shig'i beshta pansori qo'shig'ining eng fojiali mazmunini o'z ichiga oladi.

Traditional houses (e.g., 아궁이, 기와);

Ex: 아궁이는 방과 솔에 불을 때기 위하여 만든 구멍이다.

Agungi - xonada yoki qozonda olov yoqish uchun qilingan teshik.

Traditional clothing (e.g., 저고리, 속저고리, 한복);

Ex: 저고리는 남녀노소 누구나 하의 위에 입는 가장 기본이 되는 짧은 상의이다.

Jeogori - har qanday yoshdagi odamlarning pastki kiyim ustidan kiyiladigan eng oddiy kalta ustki kiyim hisoblanadi.

Traditional crafts (e.g., 수묵화, 한지);

Ex: 이 수묵화는 가장 인기있는 수묵화다.

Ushbu Sumukhva eng mashhir siyohda yozilgan rasm hisoblanadi.

Traditional lifestyle (e.g., 가마솥, 절구, 숯대);

Ex: 어머니의 가마솥에 만든 음식들 먹고 싶다.

Onamning kamasotda pishirilgan ovqatlarini yegim keladi.

Traditional cultural heritage (e.g., 팔만대장경, 거북선);

Ex: 이순신은 거북선을 만들고 일본을 이겨낸 인물이다.

Isunshin kobuksonni yasab Yaponiyaning ustidan g'alaba qozongan shahs hisoblanadi.

Traditional dance/martial arts (e.g., 태권, 부채춤);

Ex: 이번 학기는 부채춤 동아리에 가입해서 한국 전통 춤을 배워 보려고 합니다.

Bu semestrda pujechum to'garagiga a'zo bo'lib koreys milliy raqsini o'rganib ko'rmoqchiman.

Traditional holidays and related customs (e.g., 설날,

세뱃돈, 추석빔, 부럼);

Ex: 한국에서는 설날 때 어른들이 젊은이들한테 세뱃돈을 준다.

Koreyada Sollal bayramida kattalar yoshlarga sebetton berishadi.

Government titles and social status terms (e.g., 양반, 암행어사, 영의정, 사또);

Ex: 암행어사의 주요 임무는 지방관의 비리 감찰과 민폐를 파악하는 것이었다.

Amhengosa (maxfiy qirollik inspektorlari)ning asosiy vazifasi mahalliy hukumat amaldorlari orasidagi korrupsiyani tekshirish va noqulayliklarni aniqlash edi.

Measurement units and counting units (e.g., 되, 말, 리);

Ex: 어제 시장에서 쌀 두 되와 배추 한 포 사 왔습니다.

Kecha bozordan 2 tui guruch va 1ta karam sotib olib keldim.

Korean cuisine and native ingredients (e.g., 국, 김치, 된장, 두부찌개, 식혜);

Ex: 가을이 오면 한국 사람들이 김치를 만들기 시작한다.

Kuz kelsa koreyslar kimchi tayyorlashni boshlaydilar.

By educating learners on these categories before engaging in translation exercises, their understanding of Korean culture can be enhanced, thereby strengthening their sociocultural competence and translation skills.

CONCLUSION

Translating cultural elements needs a nuanced approach that balances authenticity to the source language with clarity in the target language. By applying appropriate translation methods and understanding cultural classifications, translators can enhance cross-cultural communication more efficiently. This research advocates for integrating these methods into Korean language education to assist learners in gaining a deeper appreciation of Korean culture while refining their translation skills. Following studies could investigate the practical implementation of these strategies in real-world translation set-ups and educational programs.

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