

Problems of Recreating National Identity in Literary Translation (Based on Bahodir Ermatov's Translations from French Into Uzbek)

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Received: 31 December 2025; **Accepted:** 23 January 2026; **Published:** 28 February 2026

Abstract: This article examines the problem of recreating national identity in literary translation based on the translations of Bahodir Ermatov from French into Uzbek. The study focuses on the challenges related to rendering cultural realia, phraseological units, national mentality, stylistic layers, and artistic imagery. The research highlights the translator's role as an intercultural mediator and identifies strategies for preserving national spirit while ensuring readability for the target audience.

Keywords: Literary translation, national identity, cultural realia, phraseology, adaptation, French literature.

Introduction: In contemporary translation studies, literary translation occupies a particularly important position because it involves not only linguistic transformation but also cultural transmission. Translation is widely recognized as a complex process of recreating artistic meaning, emotional nuance, historical memory, and cultural specificity within a new linguistic environment. Scholars emphasize that literary translation is "a negotiation between cultures," where the translator acts simultaneously as a linguist, critic, and cultural mediator (Bassnett, 2014). Therefore, the problem of recreating national identity in translation has become one of the central topics in modern translation theory.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries witnessed a growing interest in intercultural communication and global literary exchange. Translation scholars increasingly focused on cultural equivalence rather than purely lexical accuracy. Eugene Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence emphasized the importance of producing the same communicative effect in the target audience (Nida, 1964). Peter Newmark later distinguished semantic and communicative translation as tools for preserving both content and cultural meaning (Newmark, 1988). These theoretical approaches highlight the need to balance fidelity to the source text with accessibility for target

readers.

The translation of French literature into Uzbek presents particular challenges due to differences in linguistic structure, historical experience, and cultural worldview. French literature reflects European intellectual traditions, Christian cultural heritage, and philosophical rationalism. Uzbek literature reflects Central Asian traditions, Islamic cultural influence, and oral epic heritage. Translators must therefore bridge differences in cultural memory, aesthetic norms, and historical consciousness (Venuti, 1995).

Bahodir Ermatov is among the translators who significantly contributed to introducing French historical and literary sources to Uzbek readers. His translations of works such as Lucien Keren's *Amir Temur Saltanati* (2011), Marcel Brion's writings on Amir Temur, and other historical-biographical texts made important Western European sources accessible to Uzbek audiences. Through these translations, Ermatov helped Uzbek readers engage with European historiography about Amir Temur and Central Asian history.

Ermatov's work demonstrates that literary translation requires deep knowledge of both source and target cultures. His translations reveal strategies for recreating national identity without distorting historical truth or artistic integrity. This article

therefore analyzes the problems of recreating national identity in literary translation using Ermatov's translations as a case study.

The Concept of National Identity in Literary Translation (Extended Version)

National identity in literary translation refers to the combination of cultural, historical, linguistic, and psychological characteristics that define a nation's worldview and literary expression. Literary texts often carry national identity through cultural references, idioms, narrative structures, symbolism, and character behavior. Translation must therefore reproduce not only the meaning of words but also the cultural context behind them. As Bassnett notes, translation is fundamentally "a transfer of cultures" rather than merely a transfer of words (Bassnett, 2014).

Cultural realia are among the most visible carriers of national identity. These include references to traditional food, clothing, architecture, institutions, and historical events. For example, French texts may refer to institutions like *lycée*, titles such as *seigneur*, or culinary items like *baguette*. These terms lack exact Uzbek equivalents. Translators must decide whether to use transliteration, descriptive translation, or cultural substitution. Each decision shapes how national identity is perceived in the translated text (Newmark, 1988).

Phraseological units also express national identity. Idioms, proverbs, and metaphors reflect a nation's collective memory. Literal translation often distorts meaning. Nida emphasized functional equivalence as the key principle for translating idioms so that cultural meaning is preserved (Nida, 1964). Uzbek translators frequently substitute French idioms with Uzbek proverbs conveying similar meaning, thus maintaining emotional resonance.

National identity is further reflected in stylistic features such as tone, narrative rhythm, and dialogue patterns. French literature often employs irony and philosophical reflection, whereas Uzbek literature emphasizes moral clarity and respect. Translators must preserve stylistic nuance without altering authorial voice. Venuti's concept of domestication versus foreignization is especially relevant here (Venuti, 1995).

Bahodir Ermatov's translations illustrate how national identity can be recreated through careful lexical choices, explanatory notes, and stylistic adaptation. For example, in his translation of Lucien Keren's *Amir Temur Saltanati*, Ermatov preserved European historical terminology while adapting syntax and narrative flow to Uzbek literary norms. This approach allowed Uzbek readers to access Western historiography about Amir Temur while retaining

historical authenticity (Keren, 2011). Thus, national identity in translation is multidimensional, involving linguistic, cultural, historical, and aesthetic elements. Translators must balance fidelity and readability, authenticity and adaptation, foreignness and familiarity.

Challenges in Translating French Literature into Uzbek

Translating French literature into Uzbek presents a complex set of linguistic, stylistic, cultural, and historical challenges due to the significant differences between the two languages and literary traditions. French belongs to the Romance language family and reflects centuries of European intellectual history, Catholic religious influence, and Enlightenment philosophy, whereas Uzbek belongs to the Turkic language family and reflects Central Asian oral traditions, Islamic cultural heritage, and collectivist social values. Because literary translation involves transferring not only semantic content but also cultural meaning, translators must deal with culture-bound elements embedded in the source text, which often lack direct equivalents in the target language (Newmark, 1988). In this context, recreating national identity becomes one of the most difficult and intellectually demanding tasks in French-Uzbek translation.

One of the most significant challenges is the translation of cultural realia, which include references to institutions, food, clothing, geography, and social customs that are unique to French culture. Literary texts often contain words such as *baguette*, *bistro*, *lycée*, *seigneur*, or *bourgeois*, each of which carries historical and cultural associations that cannot be conveyed by simple lexical substitution. Translating *baguette* merely as *non* (bread) would erase the cultural specificity of French cuisine, while retaining the original word without explanation may confuse Uzbek readers unfamiliar with French culture. Therefore, translators must carefully choose strategies such as transliteration combined with contextual explanation, descriptive translation, or cultural substitution. Peter Newmark describes this process as "transference with descriptive equivalent," emphasizing that culture-specific items should be preserved whenever possible to maintain authenticity (Newmark, 1988). Bahodir Ermatov applied such strategies in his translation of Lucien Keren's historical work *Amir Temur Saltanati*, where he preserved European place names, historical institutions, and titles while clarifying their meaning for Uzbek readers. This method allowed readers to encounter European historiography about Amir Temur without losing the cultural flavor of the original text (Keren, 2011).

Another major challenge lies in translating phraseological units and idiomatic expressions, which are deeply rooted in national mentality. French idioms often contain metaphorical imagery unfamiliar to Uzbek readers, and literal translation can lead to misunderstanding or awkward phrasing. For example, the French expression *avoir le cœur sur la main* literally means “to have one’s heart on one’s hand,” but culturally it refers to generosity. In Uzbek, an equivalent expression such as *ko’ngli ochiq* or *saxiy odam* conveys the same meaning while sounding natural. Eugene Nida emphasizes that translators should aim for functional equivalence, ensuring that the emotional and communicative effect of an idiom is preserved rather than its literal form (Nida, 1964). Ermatov frequently used Uzbek proverbs and idioms to convey French phraseology, making his translations accessible while preserving their expressive power. However, this approach must be balanced carefully, because excessive adaptation may erase foreign cultural identity. Lawrence Venuti warns that translators must balance domestication and foreignization so that readers remain aware of cultural difference while still understanding the text (Venuti, 1995).

Differences in national mentality also create challenges in literary translation. French literature often emphasizes individual freedom, romantic passion, irony, and philosophical reflection, while Uzbek literature traditionally values collective harmony, respect for elders, modesty, and moral instruction. These differences affect dialogue, character behavior, and narrative tone. For instance, French characters may address elders informally, reflecting egalitarian social relations, whereas Uzbek readers expect respectful forms of address. Translators must adapt such dialogues carefully to avoid cultural misunderstanding without altering character identity. Similarly, French humor often relies on irony or sarcasm, which may not be easily understood in Uzbek cultural context. Susan Bassnett notes that humor is among the most culture-bound elements in translation and requires creative interpretation rather than literal translation (Bassnett, 2014). Ermatov’s translations of historical biographies demonstrate sensitivity to such issues, as he adapted dialogue to Uzbek speech norms while maintaining authenticity.

Stylistic and structural differences between French and Uzbek also pose significant challenges. French literary prose often employs long, syntactically complex sentences with multiple subordinate clauses, reflecting classical rhetorical tradition. Uzbek prose generally favors shorter, clearer sentences and rhythmic narrative flow. Literal translation of French syntax can

result in unnatural Uzbek sentences that are difficult to read. Therefore, translators must restructure sentences while preserving meaning and stylistic tone. Vinogradov describes such transformations as necessary stylistic adaptation in literary translation, emphasizing that translators must recreate artistic form in accordance with target language norms (Vinogradov, 2001). Ermatov’s translations show this approach in practice, as he reorganized complex French sentences into clear Uzbek prose without losing narrative continuity or artistic nuance.

Historical and religious references present another challenge, especially when translating French works about Central Asian history. French historical texts may include references to European monarchs, Catholic traditions, or political institutions unfamiliar to Uzbek readers. Translators must decide whether to add explanatory notes, incorporate clarification into the text, or adapt references to the target culture. In Ermatov’s translation of Amir Temur Saltanati, references to European rulers and diplomatic relations were clarified to help Uzbek readers understand historical context. This approach preserved historical accuracy while ensuring accessibility.

Proper names and titles also require careful treatment. French literature includes names with symbolic or historical significance. Translators must choose between transliteration, translation, or explanation. In historical works translated by Ermatov, names of cities, institutions, and personalities were consistently transliterated while contextual information was added where necessary. This strategy preserved authenticity and avoided cultural distortion. Translating French literature into Uzbek involves complex challenges arising from linguistic structure, cultural differences, national mentality, stylistic norms, and historical context. Cultural realia, idiomatic expressions, narrative style, and historical references all require careful interpretation and creative adaptation. Bahodir Ermatov’s translations demonstrate effective strategies for addressing these challenges through balanced adaptation, functional equivalence, explanatory translation, and stylistic restructuring. His work shows that literary translation requires not only linguistic competence but also deep cultural understanding and artistic sensitivity, confirming the view of translation scholars that translators serve as mediators between cultures and interpreters of historical experience (Bassnett, 2014; Venuti, 1995).

The Role of the Translator

A translator in literary translation is not merely a linguistic technician but an intercultural mediator. Translation scholars emphasize that translators

reconstruct meaning for new readers through cultural interpretation (Bassnett, 2014). Their linguistic competence, aesthetic sensitivity, and cultural knowledge determine translation quality. Ermatov's translations demonstrate this principle. His knowledge of French historiography allowed him to translate works such as Amir Temur Saltanati and Marcel Brion's studies accurately while adapting them to Uzbek literary norms. According to Vinogradov, literary translation requires creative interpretation rather than mechanical substitution (Vinogradov, 2001). Ermatov's work reflects this approach.

Translators also carry ethical responsibility. They must respect historical truth, authorial intention, and reader expectations. By translating Western European works about Amir Temur, Ermatov helped Uzbek readers access diverse perspectives on their own history.

CONCLUSION

Recreating national identity in literary translation is a complex process requiring linguistic mastery and cultural competence. Literary texts carry cultural memory, symbolism, and historical knowledge that must be reconstructed in translation. As Newmark notes, translation transfers both semantic content and cultural context (Newmark, 1988).

Bahodir Ermatov's translations of French historical works demonstrate successful strategies for preserving national identity. His translations of Lucien Keren's Amir Temur Saltanati and other works introduced important European historiographic materials to Uzbek readers while maintaining cultural authenticity. His work shows that effective literary translation requires a mastery of both languages, deep cultural awareness, careful stylistic adaptation and respect for historical truth and artistic style. Future research should analyze parallel French-Uzbek texts to develop methodological guidelines for translators. Such research will strengthen translation studies and intercultural understanding.

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