Translation Problems of Non-Equivalent Vocabulary

Taira Hajiagha Akhundova [1]

[1] *Academy of the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan*
2 Zabrat-Mashtaga highway, Sabunchu district, Baku, AZ1039, Azerbaijan

Abstract. In every language, lexical units cannot be directly translated into other languages. These linguistic components, often called non-equivalent vocabulary or realia, are deeply rooted in a language's cultural and national background. The absence of direct equivalents for these terms in other languages necessitates using various translation methods. Non-equivalent vocabulary and realia are terms used interchangeably, and both denote language elements that lack a literal translation and are closely intertwined with culture.

Non-equivalent lexical units encompass names of items, concepts, and abstract entities representing specific national characteristics and everyday life. Their translation into other languages poses a significant challenge. While in-depth research on this issue is currently lacking, it is widely acknowledged that English is frequently employed as a means of communication in the global arena, often serving as the target language to communicate in economic, political-cultural, and other fields. This generates substantial difficulties in translating from other languages into English. Consequently, gaining insight into national colour words and realia, which complicate the translation process, is paramount. This article explores the linguistic and cultural aspects of non-equivalent vocabulary. Descriptive and comparative methods were applied in writing this article, utilising literature sources in Azerbaijani, Russian, and English.

Keywords: lexicon; non-equivalent; translation; literary; culture; translation.

INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly interconnected world, the process of translation holds immense significance. Translation serves as a vital bridge for different cultures to engage and assimilate with one another. Particularly in the realm of literary translation, every translation reflects linguocultural nuances. In the modern era, English has emerged as a language of global importance. Consequently, translating literary works from diverse nations into English has witnessed a substantial surge. Learning English today also reflects the culture of the English people, who are known for their strong adherence to traditions. "...language is the mirror of national culture, and behind it lies the national English culture and its way of life" [11, p. 10]. Both classical and contemporary Azerbaijani literature are being translated into various languages, including modern English. It is not merely translated language units but also the Azerbaijani people's culture, ethnography, customs, and traditions.

"Culture is a "second world created by human society" and a "universal historical category valid for all periods" [8, p. 109]. The study of non-equivalent vocabulary, which arises from the interaction of languages and cultures of different nations, is particularly fascinating from this standpoint. In linguistics, the terms non-equivalent vocabulary and realia are often used interchangeably. These terms mainly refer to lexical units that resist literal translation.

One of the main challenges in translating literary works, especially fiction, is dealing with non-equivalent vocabulary. This complexity becomes more pronounced when translating between languages of diverse cultures and traditions as it introduces difficulties in translating culture-specific lexis. Despite the variance and dynamism of cultures, their stability is rooted in tradition, with each nation's culture being underpinned by the

values inherited from previous generations, encapsulated in customs and traditions.

"Realia, as a cultural factor, significantly influences the language through its impact on customs, traditions, and holidays. In the case of English realia, their influence extends beyond shaping regional language variations to manifest in their translation into the Azerbaijani language as a consequence of the translation process" [1, p. 18].

All world languages are deeply intertwined with the cultural and ethnic history of their speakers. If a language contributes to the formation of a nation's culture, the culture, in turn, exerts a unique influence on the lexical composition of the language. The composition and development of the vocabulary significantly impact the trajectory of the language's evolution. Each language encompasses words distinct from those of other languages, and when these words are translated, they demand a specific approach from the translator. Some words are untranslatable, others may retain some aspects of their morphological and phonetic structure, and others may be replaced with different lexical units. These words often pertain to everyday life, history, and culture. They are specific to particular nations, countries, or regions and are not used by others. These words are referred to as non-equivalent lexis or realia. It's worth noting that non-equivalent lexis has been the focus of more studies by translation scholars than linguists, as translating these words has always posed challenges for translators. Two methods are commonly used when translating non-equivalent lexical units that have emerged with the advancements in science, technology, and information media:

1. The term "realia" refers to newly emerged words that are directly transferred or translated into another language without any alterations in pronunciation and spelling. For instance, words like *printer, modem, fax, sputnik, miss, mister, sir, hamburger*, etc., are considered realia. This concept also extends to the names of social networks such as *"Facebook", "Instagram", "WhatsApp", "Twitter", "Vine"* and others.

2. When naming new technology, the function it performs is taken into account. For example, the English term "washing machine" is a combination of the words "washing" and "machine", and in Azerbaijani, it is translated as "paltaryuyan maşin" (clothes washing machine).

In the contemporary era, fostering mutual relations and cultural connections between nations is essential. A nation's identity is intricately linked to its connections and cultural interchanges with other nations. The degree to which a nation cultivates cultural connections with others directly influences its developmental trajectory. The more a nation engages in cultural exchange, the more it fosters progress, whereas isolation from other nations impedes development.

Linguoculturology is a foundational approach within linguistics aimed at scrutinising and delineating the national-cultural attributes inherent in non-equivalent lexical units. Within the domain of linguocultural research, the explication of extralinguistic factors manifested in the component composition of non-equivalent lexis is identified and categorised. This emphasis on the substance of non-equivalent lexis underscores the pivotal role of undertaking historical and etymological interpretations of its constituent elements and archetypes. Non-equivalent lexis encompasses an intricate linguistic phenomenon in its capacity to reflect extralinguistic factors, embodying lexical units in the source language that lack precise analogues within the target language's vocabulary. This category of lexical units is occasionally referred to as untranslatable language components, owing to the inherent challenge of their literal translation. In this context, non-equivalence is construed in line with the concept of "equivalence", defining it as "constant equivalent correspondences between units of the source and target texts, irrespective of context" [15, p. 189].

Despite an exact equivalent in the target language, non-equivalent vocabulary can still be translated without losing its semantic integrity.

There are various classifications of non-equivalent vocabulary. Some authors include exoticisms, interjections, phraseological units, cavities, and neologisms in this category.

A linguo-cultural approach is a superficial method for identifying the national-cultural characteristics of non-equivalent vocabulary. This method has been called the "samovar" method in subsequent studies. This is because, in the linguocultural approach, the explanation of the reflection of the culture in realia often uses the classic example of the expression "going to Tula with your samovar." The components of this expression, "Tula" and "samovar," belong to the non-equivalent vocabulary of the Russian

language and, therefore, contribute to the national character of the given phraseological unit.

In the linguo-cultural aspect, keywords create a vivid portrayal of the world creatively, and even as global changes occur in worldviews, they remain immutable. Thus, they are directly related to the more general system of human ideas. Currently, numerous linguistic-cultural studies have emerged. Viewing non-equivalent vocabulary as a key to understanding the content of a particular cultural concept is a fundamental characteristic of studies within this approach.

Consequently, within the framework of the lingua-cultural approach, the national and cultural originality of non-equivalent vocabulary is demonstrated through the accumulation of ideas surrounding these cultural concepts, stereotypes, and national cultural norms as perceived by the language users.

The correlation between language and culture becomes more apparent when considering non-equivalent lexical units. Within a specific culture, the language generates particular terms or a non-equivalent lexical layer to denote the name of a created object or an occurring event.

Language accumulates and preserves knowledge about the world around us. It is the product of a nation's collective memory. "It mirrors a nation's past and present, the key to understanding a given people's lifestyle and social structure. Generally, it is the key to knowledge" [13, p. 3].

To achieve full proficiency in any language, memorising its vocabulary and understanding its phonetic and grammatical structure is insufficient. Effectively learning a new language also requires an understanding of extralinguistic factors. Profound knowledge of a nation's historical culture and ethnographic aspects is essential in this endeavour. Similarly, in translation, it is inadequate only to comprehend the structural organisation of the source language. It is imperative also to grasp and evaluate extralinguistic factors. Linguocultural realia can be validated through numerous examples, demonstrating their reliance on a nation's consciousness and worldview. The translation process necessitates more than just comprehending the grammatical structures and active vocabulary of both the source and target languages. The translator must comprehensively understand the source and target languages and the cultures, traditions, behavioural norms, history, geography, economy, political structure, and socio-political conditions of both nations. Alongside the external linguistic factors in the source and target languages, changes in a nation's culture also hold significant importance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The comparison of non-equivalent lexical items in the translation process reveals both commonalities and distinct characteristics. These differences are primarily observed in linguocultural realia. For example, within the English and Azerbaijani languages, which possess diverse structures, non-equivalent lexical units exhibit varying linguocultural elements more prominently. We perceive the interconnectedness of language and culture precisely within these expressions.

The interrelationship between language and culture has been extensively examined in the works of the prominent German linguist Humboldt. One of his collections of articles is even titled "Philosophy of Language and Culture" [7, p. 19].

Authors engaged in linguo-cultural studies associate language with the character of a nation and discuss how a nation's character influences language. According to Humboldt, language is closely related to the spirit and intricately tied to a nation's character. Based on the structure and lexis of a language, certain conclusions can be drawn about the character of the people who speak it: "Only language is capable of expressing the most peculiar and subtlest features of national spirit and character, and of penetrating their innermost secrets" [14, p. 24]. The soul of a nation resides in their language, while their beliefs, worldview, and culture are reflected in reality used within that language.

Non-equivalent lexical units often remain transiently or permanently in languages of other nations. In the translation process, non-equivalent vocabulary from the source language is transferred to the target language, enriching the lexical layer of the target language. Often, these lexicons retain their spelling and pronunciation form as in the source language, while sometimes they are rendered using transliteration. For instance, "Creole" in English is transliterated as "Kreol" in Azerbaijani, referring to the earlier generations of immigrants from Spain and France who arrived in America.

The concept of non-equivalent vocabulary refers to linguistic units that lack equivalents in another

language. Every nation and language in the world possesses its unique non-equivalent lexical layer. These distinctive lexical units and expressions are seen as constituting the vocabulary of a language. Non-equivalent vocabulary has long been an area of interest for specialists in country studies, cultural studies, and lexicography. "Words and phrases challenging to translate into another language due to their national colour are termed linguistic realia. These realia encapsulate the names of objects, concepts, and unique entities inherently linked to national characteristics and customs. Such words fall into the category of non-equivalent lexical units [10, p. 43]".

The analysis of non-equivalent vocabulary and identifying their core expressions in language has been the focus of extensive research by numerous scholars, and ongoing research continues in this field. Based on our review of scholarly literature, non-equivalent vocabulary refers to words representing concepts, objects, or situations that are not fully expressed in the spoken discourse of another language. These include the names of material cultural items that serve as expressions of the normative meanings of words. These names reflect various factors, such as the state structure of any country, the history and culture of a nation, and the linguistic connections specific to a language. Non-equivalent lexical units in the original text represent national-specific features of life and everyday life in a particular country, reflecting the cultural code.

As noted, the term non-equivalent vocabulary is also expressed through realia. Translation issues of non-equivalent lexicons have been investigated by linguists such as Vlakhov, Florin, Komissarov, Vereshagin, and Kostomarov in various periods. Recently published explanatory dictionaries of linguistic terms define realia as follows: "Realia-1. Various social, political, ethnographic, psychological, etc., factors studied by foreign linguistics (extralinguistics); 2. Fundamental material culture items for the nominative meaning of a word [16, p. 627]".

Starting from the 1950s, the term realia began to be discussed as the carrier of national colour. Fedorov refers to these terms as "specific national words without equivalents in other languages" [4, p. 140]. Other linguists consider non-equivalent lexicons as "groups of words expressing specific understandings unique to another nation" [17, p. 110]. Some linguists discuss realia in terms of background information, indicating that it

represents the socio-material culture characteristic of a particular nation and is reflected in its language.

The exploration of these words essentially begins with Eugene Nida, considered one of the pioneers of modern translation studies. He was an American linguist known for translating the Bible into English and researched the challenges posed by cultural differences between the source and target languages in translation. Nida referred to these words as "cultural " and "culture-specific words". He advocated for replacing or adapting these words with those existing in or similar to the culture of the source language to ensure that the content of the text is conveyed clearly and accurately to the reader [12, p. 25].

In the "Explanatory Dictionary of Translation Studies Terms", the authors provide information about non-equivalent vocabulary. Non-equivalent vocabulary encompasses the following concepts:

"1. Words or realia that signify an object, item, concept, or situation not commonly found in the everyday speech of speakers of another language.

2. In external linguistics and translation studies, for instance, the investigation of various factors reflected in a language as a result of the state structure of a particular country, the history and culture of a specific nation, and the language interactions of the speakers of that language.

3. Material culture items that form the fundamental meaning of a word.

4. Words that denote the national-specific characteristics of national life and everyday activities.

5. Elements of cultural code manifested in the original text" [10, p. 81].

In many sources, non-equivalent vocabulary is presented as lexical units related to everyday lifestyle, national customs and traditions, national colour, and even mythical thinking. These lexical units are also evident in a nation's literature, particularly fiction. As a result, words used in a nation's language and literature, associated with their lifestyle and national details, fall under the category of non-equivalent vocabulary or realia.

In the source language, non-equivalent vocabulary refers to words that represent concepts and situations that do not have direct counterparts in the target language. These words often relate to the material and spiritual culture of the source language speakers. Non-equivalent vocabulary is frequently transmitted through literature

translation, complementing literary works' national and folkloric nature. It is identified by comparing the lexical levels of two languages or during translation. Words utilised in the language of a specific nation to denote concepts about the material culture, everyday life, geographical surroundings, and socio-historical characteristics of that nation are linguistic units present in the source language. They may necessitate elucidation when transferred into another language. An example of this challenge can be seen in translating Azerbaijani literary works into English, where non-equivalent vocabulary poses difficulties. For instance, in the English translation of Mammad Araz's poem, the name of Azerbaijan's national musical instrument, "saz", is mentioned:

> "Maybe we are two different saz,
> With the same strings" [2, p. 57].

In the context of this translation example, the term "saz" remains unchanged in the English text. This is because it's impossible to translate the term "saz" into English directly. As a result, a brief explanation is included at the bottom of the page: "Saz: a national folk musical instrument similar to a guitar". However, we contend that this explanation is inadequate. Rather than simply drawing a comparison to a guitar, a more comprehensive description of the "saz" can be presented to cater to the English-speaking audience.

Alternatively, in the English translation of Rustam Behrudi's poem "Hello, gallows" ("Salam, Dar Ağaci"), the Arabic-origin attributive phrase "əleyküm salam" is retained as it is, but the explanation was provided:

> Hello, Gallows!
> Aleykum-salam!
> I was not born to die by doom,
> Hello, Gallows,
> Aleykum-salam! [2, p. 185].

Similarly, religious lexicon-related words are sometimes conserved in their original form in translated literature. For instance, in the English translation of Musa Yaqub's poem, the phrase "vallah" is preserved as it is:

> Thus,
> One Vallah is yours,
> One Vallah is mine! [2, p. 78].

Non-equivalent lexical units are a captivating aspect of linguistics that possess distinct national identities. For instance, words such as "miss", "Mrs", "mister", "pound", "dollar", and "sir" in English are specific to English-speaking cultures. In contrast, words like "xanim", "bəy", and "ağa" in Azerbaijani are unique to Azerbaijani culture. Realia, such as "Big Ben" and the Eiffel Tower, are specific to English and French cultures and are not translated into other languages. In Azerbaijani, words like "kələğayi", "piti", "plov", "dolma", and "kabab" are examples of realia specific to the Azerbaijani language. These non-equivalent lexical units express the names of clothing, festivals, food, and objects and convey historical events and customs specific to a particular culture. Realia encompasses words that embody objects, events, or concepts characteristic of a nation's history and lifestyle and do not have equivalents in other languages.

CONCLUSIONS

In the previously mentioned examples, non-equivalent vocabulary has been examined in the context of literary works. However, non-equivalent vocabulary also exists within the terms of craftsmanship vocabulary. There is a continuing need for in-depth exploration of terms that lack equivalents.

In jewellery terminology, distinct linguistic units that are considered non-equivalent exist. Acknowledging that studying precious stones is known as gemology and regarded as a non-exact science is imperative. For instance, "fortress agate" is not simply translated as "fortress agate" but rather as a variety of agate with a texture resembling the layout of fortresses, specifically denoted as "patterned agate". Similarly, "angelskin" is not directly rendered as "angel skin-coloured coral" but as pink coral.

In jewellery terminology, calque and transcription translations often function as general equivalents.

The names of various jewellery techniques and types can be translated using descriptive translations, transcription, or transliteration. For example, a bangle bracelet can be translated as "браслет-бэнгл", which means "rigid metal bracelet". A slave bracelet can be translated as "браслет-слэйв", which refers to a bracelet connected to an attached ring on the finger with a chain. An armlet translates to "armlet" and refers to a bracelet for the wrist [9, p. 60].

The term "ювелир" (jeweller) has seven corresponding terms in English, each with its nuances of meaning, which will be examined below.

"Jeweller" refers to a person who creates fine and fashionable jewellery. "Jewels" refers explicitly to fine jewellery made from precious materials. The term "bench jeweller" is also used in this context.

Most fine bench jewellers use the flexible-shaft tool with a variety of setting burrs to set all types of faceted stones [6, p. 76].

Большинство ювелиров используют гибкий вал со множеством насадок, что позволяет закрепить любые ограненные камни.

Əksər zərgərlər hər cür üzlü daşi bərkitməyə imkan verən çoxsayli başliği olan çevik vallardan istifadə edirlər.

A *bench jeweller* primarily works based on another's design, functioning as an executor or repairer rather than a designer, and is mainly skilled in minor technical abilities. A fine jeweller - *ювелир-художник* - zərgər-rəssam- can be described as a jewellery artist.

The "bench" specification is not crucial in terms of meaning, so it is possible to use the exact equivalents in example 5 as in example 4.

The terms "bench jeweller" and "fine jeweller" present a more complex problem with their contradictory nature:

This is important to bench and fine jewellers because they work with pricey gemstones and elaborate settings [6, p. 91].

Это одинаково важно и ремонтникам, и дизайнерам, поскольку работать приходится с дорогими камнями и сложными закрепками.

Bu, təmirçilər və dizaynerlər üçün eyni dərəcədə vacibdir, çünki onlar bahali daşlar və mürəkkəb bərkitmələrlə işləməli olurlar.

Hence, the non-equivalent lexicon is frequently encountered in literary works. However, examples of craftmanship-related vocabulary can also represent instances of a non-equivalent lexicon. When translating non-equivalent lexical items from the source language to the target language, these linguistic units are often left untranslated, necessitating the provision of explanations for such items at the bottom of the page.

REFERENCES

1. Agabayli, V. (2015). *The role of linguistic and cultural factors in forming US and Canadian variants of the English language* (Doctoral thesis) (in Azerbaijani).

2. Nuriyev, S., & Hajiyev, B. (2015). *Candles: 101 verse: contemporary Azerbaijani poetry (1960-2014)*. Baku: Azerbaijan translation centre under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

3. Dobrovolsky, D (1997). National and cultural specificity in phraseology. In *Questions of Linguistics*. Moscow (in Russian).

4. Fedorov A. (1958). *Introduction to translation theory*. Moscow: n. d. (in Russian).

5. Guliyeva, A. (2008). *Englishisms and translation*. Baku: Nurlan (in Azerbaijani).

6. Holschuh, B. (2009). *The jeweller's studio handbook: traditional and contemporary techniques for working with metal and mixed media materials*. Massachusetts: Quarry Books.

7. Humbold, W. (1985). *Language and philosophy culture*. Moscow: n. d. [In Russian].

8. Huseynov, I., & Efendiyev, T. (2012). *History of Culturology: A Textbook for Higher Education Institutions*. Baku: Mars (in Azerbaijani).

9. Lobatskaya, R. (2012). *Foreign language in the sphere of professional communications. English-Russian dictionary of jewellery terms*. Irkutsk (in Russian).

10. Manafoghlu, R., Taghisoy, N., & Kamal, R. (2010). *Explanatory Dictionary of Translation Studies terms*. Baku: Translator (in Azerbaijani).

11. Mirolyubov, A. (2001). Cultural studies in the system of modern language education. *IYASH, 3*, 1–14 (in Russian).

12. Nida, E. (1964). *Toward a Science of Translating*. Leiden.

13. Oshchepkova, V. (2006). *Language and culture.* Moscow: GLOSSA (in Russian).

14. Rajabli, A. (2004). *Wilhelm von Humboldt - the founder of general linguistics.* Baku: Nurlan (in Azerbaijani).

15. Rosenthal, D. (1976). *Dictionary-reference of linguistic terms.* Moscow: Prosveshcheniye.

16. Sadygova S., Huseynova N., Abdullayeva I. (2018). *Glossary of linguistic terms.* Baku: Science Publishing House (in Azerbaijani).

17. Vlakhov, C., & Florin, S. (1970). *The Untranslatable in Translation. Untranslatable. Realia.* Moscow (in Russian).