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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TRANSLATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LEXICAL REALIA

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Abstract: *This article explores the influence of cultural differences on the translation of lexical realias, focusing on English and Russian. Lexical realias, deeply rooted in specific cultures, often pose challenges to translators aiming to preserve their cultural and contextual significance. The article analyzes translation strategies and methods used to adapt these unique cultural elements while maintaining their essence. By comparing examples from English and Russian, the study highlights the nuanced interplay between language and culture in translation.*

Key words: *translation, lexical realias, cultural differences, equivalence, adaptation, English, Russian, translation strategies.*

Language serves as both a medium of communication and a repository of culture. Translators play a critical role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, particularly when working with languages like English and Russian that differ significantly in historical and cultural contexts. Lexical realias—words or expressions uniquely tied to a specific culture—pose one of the greatest challenges in translation [1]. These terms often defy direct translation due to their cultural specificity, carrying connotations that extend far beyond their literal meanings.

For example, the Russian term “самовар” (samovar) symbolizes more than just a tea urn; it reflects the essence of Russian hospitality and traditions. Conversely, the English concept of “afternoon tea” involves not only a meal but a cultural ritual emblematic of British social customs [5]. Such examples illustrate the need for translators to navigate cultural nuances with both linguistic skill and cultural insight.

This study investigates the role of cultural differences in translating lexical realias between English and Russian, using comparative analysis to identify common challenges and effective strategies. By drawing on examples from classical and contemporary literature, media, and everyday language, the research highlights methods for preserving the integrity of culturally bound terms in translation.

The study utilizes qualitative methods, combining descriptive analysis with semantic and contextual interpretation. Primary sources include canonical works such as Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* [2] and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* [3], alongside contemporary texts like news articles, film subtitles, and social media posts.

Comparative analysis and semantic mapping are employed to explore the translation of lexical realias in both directions between English and Russian.

Key translation strategies examined include:

1. Transliteration and Borrowing – Preserving the original term in its native form [1].
2. Descriptive Translation – Providing an explanation of the term’s meaning [5].
3. Substitution – Replacing the term with a culturally analogous concept in the target language [1, 5].
4. Contextual Adaptation – Adapting the term to align with the target culture while retaining its essence [5, 6].

The analysis is supported by examples from literature, media, and everyday communication to demonstrate the practical application of these strategies.

Effective translation of lexical realias requires an understanding of both linguistic structures and cultural contexts. Below is a detailed discussion of the primary strategies identified in this study:

1. Transliteration and Borrowing Transliteration involves preserving the phonetic form of the source term in the target language. This strategy is particularly useful for terms with no direct equivalent, allowing the cultural significance to be introduced without alteration. For example, the Russian term “самовар” (samovar) is often transliterated as “samovar” in English texts, with additional explanations provided in footnotes or appendices [5].

2. Descriptive Translation Descriptive translation conveys the meaning and cultural context of the source term by providing an explanation. For instance, the Russian festival “Масленица” (Maslenitsa) is often translated as “Pancake Week, a Russian festival marking the end of winter.” While this strategy ensures comprehension, it may lack the brevity and emotional resonance of the original [5].

3. Substitution When cultural parallels exist, substitution can make the term more relatable to the target audience. For example, the English concept of “afternoon tea” might be translated into Russian as “чаепитие” (“chaepitie”), aligning it with Russian tea-drinking traditions [5]. However, substitution risks oversimplifying the original term by omitting its unique cultural dimensions [6].

4. Contextual Adaptation Contextual adaptation modifies the term to suit the target culture while retaining its essence. This approach is particularly effective for idiomatic expressions and culturally specific practices. For example, the Russian term “деревня” (derevnya) might be translated as “rural village” in English to evoke similar imagery of simplicity and nostalgia [5].

Cultural Embeddedness

Both English and Russian lexical realias reflect their respective cultural values and traditions. For example, the Russian “баня” (banya) encompasses not only a physical bathhouse but also a cultural practice associated with health, social bonding, and

relaxation. Translating it as “sauna” fails to capture these connotations [5]. Similarly, “Thanksgiving” in English represents a historical and cultural tradition that defies a simple translation [1, 5].

Challenges in Equivalence Achieving equivalence between English and Russian lexical realias is often fraught with difficulty. Transliteration retains the original form but may necessitate explanatory footnotes to ensure comprehension. For instance, transliterating “щи” (shchi) as “shchi” in English requires context to highlight its cultural significance as a traditional Russian soup [5].

Impact of Cultural Context

Successful translation relies on a deep understanding of the cultural contexts surrounding lexical realias. For example, the Russian term “деревня” (derevnya) evokes pastoral imagery and nostalgia, which may not align with the connotations of the English “village” [5]. Translators must carefully balance cultural fidelity and accessibility.

The translation of lexical realias between English and Russian reveals the intricate interplay between language and culture. Translators act as cultural mediators, ensuring that the essence of culturally specific terms is preserved while making them comprehensible to the target audience. Strategies such as transliteration, descriptive translation, substitution, and contextual adaptation enable translators to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication effectively [1, 5, 6].

This study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and linguistic creativity in translation. As globalization continues to foster cultural exchange, the role of translators in bridging cultural divides becomes increasingly vital [6]. Future research should explore additional strategies and technologies that can further enhance the translation of lexical realias.

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