THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING CULTURAL WORDS FROM KARAKALPAK INTO ENGLISH

Atrawbaeva Risgul Tursinbay qizi
Nukus State Pedagogical Institute
Faculty of Philology, 3rd-year student
risgulatrawbay@gmail.com
Jienbaeva Dilfuza Rustem qizi
Nukus State Pedagogical Institute
Faculty of Philology, 3rd-year student
dilfuzajienbaeva2005@gmail.com

Introduction. Translation is not merely the transfer of words from one language to another. It is, above all, the process of building a bridge between cultures. This truth becomes especially evident in languages with a small yet culturally rich heritage among them, the Karakalpak language. The Karakalpak language is a rare linguistic treasure of the Central Asian peoples. The Aral Sea basin, the desert way of life, ancient traditions, and a distinct social structure have all left their unique lexical imprint on this language. For this reason, "cultural words" in Karakalpak that is, lexical units reflecting a particular people's lifestyle, customs, beliefs, and environment pose serious challenges in the process of translation.

This thesis examines the problem from three angles: theoretical foundations, the typology of cultural words, and translation strategies.

Theoretical framework. The concept of cultural words**.** The term “cultural word” or cultureme in scholarly literature is widely used in linguistics and translation studies. Vermeer (1983) and Nord (1997) define cultural words as “lexical units for which no equivalent exists in the target language, or for which the match is incomplete.” Nida (1964) draws a distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence, arguing that cultural words require a dynamic approach in translation. Venuti (1995) differentiates between two fundamental strategies: foreignization preserving the source culture's strangeness and domestication adapting the text to feel natural in the target culture. The choice between these two strategies in the translation of cultural words remains the translator's central dilemma.

The particular status of the karakalpak language. Karakalpak belongs to the Kipchak group of the Turkic language family. However, its lexicon was shaped by geographical isolation, alternating periods of sedentary and nomadic life, as well as intensive contact with Persian, Mongolian, and Russian. This makes the translation of

Karakalpak cultural words all the more complex: a word often carries not only a cultural but also a historical and ecological weight.

Typology of cultural words. Cultural words in Karakalpak can be grouped into the following categories:

Category	**Examples**	**Translation Challenge**	**Possible Strategy**
Domestic & material culture	otaw (portable dwelling), shańyraq (crown ring of a yurt)	No equivalent concept exists	Transliteration + gloss
Nature & ecology	qum (desert sand, also a spiritual concept), post-Aral landscapes	Ecological meaning is lost	Contextual translation
Social relations	quda-anda (kinship system), jetim-jesir (social category)	Cultural breadth is lost	Descriptive translation
Ritual & ceremony	suw bayramy (water festival), toy dastany	Multilayered meaning	Gloss + equivalent search
Oral tradition concepts	zhyrau (epic bard), dastan	Genre label does not fully transfer	Borrowing + explanatory note
Food culture	qawyrdaq, shelpek, sorpa	Gastronomic cultural gap	Transliteration

Analysis of core challenges. The lexical gap problem. The phenomenon known in translation studies as a lexical gap the complete absence in the target language of a word expressing a given concept frequently arises with Karakalpak cultural words. Take shańyraq, for instance. It is not simply “a circular opening at the top of a yurt.” It is the symbol of family unity, of ancestral spirit, and of the spiritual center of the home. No single word or phrase in English or Uzbek can contain all of this meaning. In such cases, the translator faces two paths:

Assimilation: explaining the concept through an analogy familiar to the target culture (but at the risk of losing meaning);

Exoticization: preserving the word in its original form with an explanatory note (but at the cost of readability).

Multilayered Semantic Complexity**.** Some Karakalpak words carry denotative and connotative meanings that diverge sharply from one another. The word zhyrau can denotatively be rendered as “singer” yet it actually refers to a social institution the keeper of epic tradition, a folk sage, and oral historian rolled into one. Translating such polysemic structures with a single word is an act of semantic reduction.

The context of ecological loss**.** The lexical shifts in Karakalpak arising from the drying of the Aral Sea deserve particular attention. Words and phrases rooted in Oraldan (from the sea) are today changing not only in translation but within the language itself. This places a new question before the translator: how does one “freeze” and translate the realities of a language that is itself in flux?

The standardization problem**.** A unified lexicographic standard for Karakalpak has not yet been fully established. Variation in the pronunciation and spelling of a single word across different dialects and written sources complicates the translator's work considerably. Compounding this, direct professional translations from Karakalpak into English remain extremely scarce.

Translation strategies. A proposal**.** Taking the above challenges into account, a multi-layered strategy is recommended for translating cultural words from Karakalpak:

Layer 1 - Identification: Recognizing the cultural word in the source text and determining its category.

Layer 2 - Semantic Analysis: Separately analyzing the word's denotative, connotative, and pragmatic meanings.

Layer 3 - Strategy Selection: Choosing one of the following based on the target audience, text genre, and context:

Transliteration (preserving the original form)

Descriptive translation (explanatory paraphrase)

Finding a functional equivalent

Paraphrase + explanatory note

Layer 4 - Glossary System: Developing a system of glosses for scholarly and literary translations this is the most reliable means of preserving cultural meaning without disrupting the reading experience.

Conclusion. Translating cultural words in the Karakalpak language is not merely a linguistic problem it is a question of preserving and transmitting a culture. In this process, the translator acts not only as a language specialist but as a cultural mediator.

The challenge stems from three primary causes: lexical gaps, multilayered semantics, and the absence of standardization. Addressing these issues requires sustained scholarly work at the intersection of theoretical translation studies, lexicography, and cultural studies. Looking ahead, the creation of an annotated dictionary of Karakalpak cultural vocabulary and the standardization of translation criteria remain among the most pressing priorities for the field.

References

1. Nida, E. A. (1964). Toward a Science of Translating. Leiden: Brill.
2. Venuti, L. (1995). The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation. London: Routledge.
3. Nord, C. (1997). Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained. Manchester: St. Jerome.
4. Vermeer, H. J. (1983). Skopos and commission in translational action. Readings in Translation Theory, 173–187.
5. Baskakov, N. A. (1952). Karakalpakskiy yazyk [The Karakalpak Language]. Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences.
6. Erzin, A. (2008). Lexicographic problems of the Karakalpak language. Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, 3, 45–52.
7. Baker, M. (1992). In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. London: Routledge.
8. Bayimbetova, M., & Kurbanbaev, D. (2020). Comparative study of modality in English and Karakalpak languages. SDU Bulletin: Philology, 1(52).