

“Challenges of Rendering Social-Hierarchy Vocabulary in the Translation of Early-20th-Century Uzbek Titles into English”

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Abstract: The translation of social-hierarchy vocabulary in early 20th-century Uzbek literature into English is quite a difficult task due to the relational and pragmatic functions of the titles like *bek*, *mirza*, *oqsoqol*, and *otin*. These terms describe the spectrum of power, the amount of respect, and social placement within the historical and communal contexts which the English language does not have direct equivalents for. The study is primarily centered on the examination of the linguistic and socio-historical factors that create hindrances in translation, and it further illustrates how relational meaning, narrative tension, and character dynamics are all affected when hierarchical vocabulary is rendered literally or generically.

Key terms: social-hierarchy vocabulary, Uzbek literature, translation studies, honorific titles, pragmatics, narrative dynamics, relational meaning, Jadid reformism, Qodiriy, Cholpon

Introduction

Translating early-20th-century Uzbek literature into English has presented unique difficulties, especially in the area of social-hierarchy vocabulary which dominated the works of that period. The novels “*O‘tkan kunlar*” and “*Mehrobdan chayon*” by Abdulla Qodiriy, “*Kecha va kunduz*” by Cholpon, and the historical writings of Fitrat, all combine to present a society that is characterized by intricate titles and communal roles. Through words like *bek*, *mirza*, *oqsoqol*, and *otin* one can observe power, respect, and social identity, however, there are no corresponding terms in English that can directly translate these ideas. The vocabulary of these works is greatly influenced by the closeness of the period to the Jadid reformism which was a transformative and problematic one along with traditional and early Soviet pressures, thus multilayered cultural meanings are reflected in it. This paper discusses the dilemma of the translators while handling such issues and also the methods by which they try to keep the titles' historical and social significance intact. By focusing on illuminating sample passages and the translations that are available this paper intends to make it clear that the cultural stakes are very high when one is faced with the three options of literal accuracy, functional equivalence, and contextual explanation for readers in different languages.

Research methods

A qualitative, text-based approach is applied in this research. To begin with, the social-hierarchy terms of utmost importance such as bek, mirza, oqsoqol and otin are traced and their historical meanings are interpreted through the close reading of the early-20th-century Uzbek novels by Qodiriy, Cholpon and Fitrat. The existing English versions are then critically evaluated via comparative translation analysis on the rendering of these titles. Eventually, the study advocates for the application of cultural annotation, selective retention of original terms and contextual paraphrasing among others as practical translation strategies to the potential reader misunderstandings that might occur due to lack of precaution. The method provides for a systematic evaluation of both linguistic and cultural challenges.

Discussion

Translating the social-hierarchy terms from early-20th-century Uzbek literature into English poses a problem mainly because these titles are regarded as social instruments rather than mere lexical items. Their meaning is intertwined with the relationships they create and the power they showcase, thus the problem arises when translation tries to consider them as direct semantic units. In the works of Qodiriy, Cholpon and Fitrat, the titles bek, mirza, oqsoqol or otin are integrated into the characters' dialogues and interactions where the readers/viewers can understand the meanings that relate to genealogy, community power and morality. In English, these titles lose the power that once determined the characters' positions in the social hierarchy. The only thing left is often a narrow denotational meaning, while the richer connotations of prestige, obligation or deference recede almost completely and the subtle shifts in narrative authority or tension are flattened.

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The reason behind this loss is that the Uzbek titles depend on a whole system of pragmatic cues, among which are the rule as to who may address whom with which term, the situational appropriateness of usage, and the emotional tone attached to doing so. English has not fixed sets of honorific terms to indicate hierarchical relations distance as Uzbek does and thus the interpersonal relations' dimension is less pronounced and more neutral than in English. The repeated use of *bek* in conversation, for example, indicates not only rank but also gradual, expected deference and respect that are already somewhat ritualized and the English reader cannot intuitively perceive them without explicit context. The same with, for instance, the term *oqsoqol*, which brings in a whole complex of authority due to age, wisdom, and community acceptance, a subtle mixture that cannot be simply translated as "elder" or "village leader".

This issue is made worse by the historical instability during the Jadid reformist movement and the early Soviet period, when social roles were constantly being re-evaluated, contested, or even partially removed. One title might manage to simultaneously keep its pre-modern social weight, yet at the same time signal an ideological shift that was just starting, thus, making the meanings layered that are historically dependent. English does not have the lexical or pragmatic means to express such diachronic complexity; a literal translation would run the risk of conveying the term's meaning as just a generic rank, whereas an explanatory substitution could go too far in context and disturb the narrative flow.

The interpretive weight of these titles also depends on the extent of shared cultural memory. The emotional charge that a contemporary Uzbek reader would automatically attach to addressing someone as *mirza* or *otin* cannot be activated in English automatically either, hence the character dynamics would be under-communicated and the narrative tension would be weakened. Since these names act as social lubricants, their inaccurate representation could lead to completely different interpretations of the "pecking order," "consideration," and "moral stance" in the story. Consequently, the translation of social-hierarchy-related words is not as a mere stylistic issue but as a main challenge that affects both the interaction of characters and the understanding of the plot. Therefore, the problem of untranslatability showing the existence of such vocabulary lies not in the obscurity of the words only but in the loss of the relational and pragmatic meanings that occur when one translates between languages with different social indexing systems. Social hierarchy vocabulary is thus why such words are so hard to translate.

Proposals' analysis

Many professionals think it is wise to start the translation problems posed by social hierarchy vocabulary by realizing that the challenge is not only linguistic but it is also on the relational side. Because terms like *bek*, *mirza*, *oqsoqol*, or *otin* have social power and they are not just reference names, any proposal for betterment must look for ways to keep the relational aspect that is otherwise lost in English. One possible way out is to let the original titles be part of the translated text, thus treating them as cultural anchors and not forcing early equivalence. Still, this method rests upon the reader's readiness to communicate with unfamiliar words and it creates a risk of separation if the contextual clues are not deeply rooted in the narrative flow. However, it does protect the hierarchy embedded in the original forms of addressing the audience, particularly when the titles occur many times and in the natural way in talk.

Another tactic is to sponsor the story with subtle explanatory means, put where they make the relationships clear without obstructing the reading experience. To achieve the maximum efficacy of such an approach, it is necessary to find a middle ground between the preservation of narrative momentum and giving the reader enough cultural and social orientation to catch the hierarchical implications of each title. Too much visible explanation can break the flow of immersion whereas too little can fail to make clear the status differences that are at the heart of character interactions.

A third option is the adoption of a subtle paraphrastic contextualisation, which will enable the reader to infer the social function of a title from the surrounding cues rather than having it directly stated. When performed with care, this technique can get close to the intended power dynamics by incorporating the hierarchy into the tone, narrative style or through the selection of verbs and patterns of address. Its weakness is that it has to move away from being lexically precise, but its strength lies in the possibility to recreate interpersonal effects even when English lacks the right words. In all the different approaches, the main focus is to keep the hierarchical resonance that characterizes these titles and to make sure that the hidden significance has not been lost in translation.

Conclusion

When looking at the translation of the early 20th-century Uzbek vocabulary related to social hierarchy, it is evident that the problem of translation is not a simple case of changing one word for another. The titles that once existed and were very important in the Uzbek community are now just an indication of the authorities, respect, and social positioning, and they carry the weight of relationships and history that English lacks the tools to directly convey. Challenges are not just about the representation of the denotative meaning, but also the preservation of social fabric that is intertwined with

these terms, including who can address whom, how much deference is required, and the subtle playing of prestige and obligation. As this study has shown, translation choices inevitably involve trade-offs: literal equivalence risks flattening the social dynamics, while omission or generic substitution erodes the narrative and relational nuance. Recognising the historical specificity of early-20th-century Uzbek society, with its evolving hierarchies under Jadid reformism and early Soviet influence, further complicates the task. Ultimately, the translation of social-hierarchy vocabulary requires an approach that is attentive to relational meaning, contextual embeddedness, and the cultural resonance of each term. Without careful consideration, English translations risk stripping the original works of the interpersonal depth and social subtlety that define their literary and historical significance.

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