

Translating The Taste Of Tradition: Linguistic And Cultural Strategies In Rendering Uzbek Food Terminology Into English

Hojiyeva Mehrangiz G'ayrat kizi

ESP teacher, Bukhara State Medical Institute named after Abu Ali ibn Sino, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

PhD student, Bukhara State University

Received: 16 September 2025; **Accepted:** 09 October 2025; **Published:** 13 November 2025

Abstract: Translating Uzbek food terminology presents a complex intersection of language, culture, and cognition, where the absence of direct equivalents in the target language compels translators to employ diverse strategies. This article examines the principal methods used to render Uzbek culinary terms into English, highlighting the challenges of maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring intelligibility for non-Uzbek readers. The analysis focuses on transliteration, explanation, functional replacement (cultural substitution), and supplementary techniques such as calque, synonymous replacement, and descriptive transfer. Transliteration preserves the phonetic and cultural integrity of source terms like osh or palov, yet risks alienating readers unfamiliar with the culture. Explanatory and descriptive translation enhance cultural clarity by elaborating on ingredients and preparation methods, though they may burden the text stylistically. Functional replacement allows translators to convey equivalent impact through culturally resonant substitutions, as seen in the adaptation of idioms and dish names. The article further explores how figurative equivalence, such as rendering oysimon makaron for “elbow macaroni,” demonstrates the translator’s negotiation between semantic fidelity and cultural resonance. Overall, the study underscores that translating Uzbek food terminology requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural sensitivity and interpretive flexibility to bridge conceptual gaps and preserve the symbolic weight of national cuisine.

Keywords: Uzbek cuisine; food terminology; translation strategies; transliteration; cultural substitution; descriptive translation; functional equivalence; linguistic adaptation; intercultural communication; cultural resonance.

Introduction: Language and cuisine are deeply intertwined expressions of culture, identity, and collective memory. Food terminology, in particular, serves not merely as a linguistic label for culinary items but as a reflection of the values, traditions, and worldview of a people. Translating such culturally embedded terms poses a unique challenge, as it requires more than lexical substitution—it demands an understanding of both linguistic and cultural semiotics. In the context of Uzbek cuisine, which embodies centuries of history, ritual, and regional diversity, translators often find that direct equivalence in the target language is unattainable. Dishes such as palov, manti, sumalak, or sho'rva resist simple translation because they carry cultural connotations that extend

beyond their ingredients and preparation methods. Given this cultural depth, the act of translating Uzbek food terminology becomes a negotiation between fidelity and accessibility, between preserving authenticity and ensuring comprehension. Translators must decide whether to maintain the original term, describe its essence, or substitute it with a culturally familiar equivalent. These decisions reflect broader theoretical questions in translation studies concerning equivalence, domestication, and foreignization. The present article explores the range of strategies used to translate Uzbek culinary terms into English, analyzing their linguistic, cultural, and functional implications. By examining examples from literary and practical translation, the study aims to illuminate how

translators navigate the delicate balance between preserving the cultural identity of the source text and making it accessible to the target audience.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW.

To contextualize these challenges, it is necessary to review key theoretical approaches to the translation of culture-specific items. The translation of culturally bound expressions—particularly food-related terminology—has long been recognized as one of the most complex areas of translation studies. According to Nida (1964), the concept of equivalence—both formal and dynamic—lies at the heart of translation, yet true equivalence is often unattainable when cultural and conceptual systems differ fundamentally. Newmark (1988) further distinguishes between semantic and communicative translation, emphasizing that the translator must often prioritize conveying cultural meaning rather than linguistic form when dealing with *realia* and other culture-specific expressions.

Within this theoretical framework, food terminology occupies a special position. As Baker (2011) notes, culturally specific items are “those that carry an association unique to the source culture,” and translators must employ a range of strategies—such as cultural substitution, paraphrase, or borrowing—to achieve functional equivalence. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) classify these strategies under broader categories of direct and oblique translation, while Aixelá (1996) introduces the notion of culture-specific items (CSIs) and proposes a continuum of strategies ranging from preservation to naturalization. These foundational models underpin much of the current scholarship on culinary translation and cultural adaptation.

In the Uzbek context, recent studies (e.g., Karimov, 2023; Azzamov, 2023) have examined how translators handle the transference of gastronomic terms and idiomatic expressions across cultural boundaries. Their research highlights that Uzbek dishes often encapsulate symbolic meanings tied to hospitality, celebration, and identity, making literal translation inadequate. For instance, *osh* or *palov* functions not merely as a national dish but as a cultural emblem associated with communal gatherings and social harmony. Translating such terms therefore requires sensitivity to both their linguistic form and cultural resonance.

Shuttleworth and Cowie (2004) point out that transliteration—a process that transfers the phonetic structure of a term into the target language—can preserve cultural authenticity but risks alienating readers unfamiliar with the source culture. Conversely,

explanatory or descriptive translation enhances understanding but may compromise textual fluency. Baker’s (2011) concept of cultural substitution offers a middle ground, allowing translators to evoke a similar response in the target reader through contextually familiar equivalents, even when semantic fidelity is reduced.

The literature further reveals that culturally adaptive translation often involves a combination of strategies rather than reliance on a single approach. Azzamov (2023) demonstrates this flexibility in his example of *oysimon makaron* (“moon-shaped pasta”) for “elbow macaroni,” which replaces literal meaning with culturally resonant imagery. This illustrates how translators employ figurative or analogical equivalence to maintain both comprehension and cultural harmony.

In summary, previous research underscores that translating Uzbek food terminology requires a multidimensional approach grounded in both linguistic theory and cultural pragmatics. It demands that translator’s function as cultural mediators, interpreting not just words but the lived experiences and values they represent. Building on this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following sections examine transliteration, explanation, and cultural substitution as core strategies in rendering Uzbek culinary terminology into English while maintaining both linguistic precision and cultural resonance.

Translation Strategies. Translators of Uzbek food terminology confront a formidable challenge: bridging a cultural and conceptual gap where direct equivalence is often impossible. The arsenal of translation strategies is therefore extensive, each carrying its own set of advantages and pitfalls.

One of the most common approaches is transliteration, in which a word is rendered into the target language’s alphabet, often accompanied by a footnote or explanation. Relying on phonetic rather than semantic correspondence, transliteration is effective for rendering names, *realia*, and other culturally specific items that lack precise equivalents in the target language (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004, p. 175). Scholars have noted that “transliteration as a process is distinct from translation because of its conventionalized, predictable nature,” as defined in the Dictionary of Translation Studies (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 2004, p. 190) For instance, the Uzbek word *osh* (which can refer to the general dish of pilaf or specifically to the revered *palov*) is frequently left untranslated to preserve its unique cultural resonance. While this strategy maintains the original’s phonetic integrity and prevents misinterpretation, it can create

a barrier for readers unfamiliar with the source language and may appear lazy if no explanation is provided.

Moving beyond transliteration, translators often employ explanatory or descriptive strategies to ensure cultural clarity and accessibility. A second major strategy is explanation, which involves providing a descriptive definition or commentary to clarify the meaning of a culturally specific term. This approach prioritizes clarity and cultural transfer over formal correspondence. For example, *barra kabob* may be translated as “lamb, potatoes, and onions cooked in the fat of the lamb,” and *no’xat sho’rva* as “chickpea soup.” Similarly, dishes such as *manti* can be rendered as “steamed dumplings stuffed with minced meat and onions,” while *chuchvara* is described as “small boiled dumplings in broth.” Such descriptive translation helps convey the main ingredients and method of preparation to readers who may be unfamiliar with these items. This method is particularly effective in conveying the essence of a dish when no direct equivalent exists in the target language. However, it may render the text cumbersome and disrupt its natural flow. Furthermore, as seen with *palov*, describing it simply as a “rice dish like pilaf” still fails to capture its profound national and ceremonial significance.

Functional replacement, also known as cultural substitution, is another technique in which the translator replaces a source term with a familiar one in the target culture. According to Baker (2011, p. 29), cultural substitution “involves replacing a culture-specific item or expression with a target-language item which does not have the same propositional meaning but is likely to have a similar impact on the target reader, for instance by evoking a similar context in the target culture.” For example, the Uzbek *somsa* may be translated as “Uzbek samosa” to indicate its similarity to the South Asian dish while distinguishing it as a unique variant. Similarly, the English idiom to bring home the bacon is rendered in Uzbek as *oilani boqmoq* (literally, “to earn money”), since bacon is not a traditional food in Uzbekistan. This strategy helps readers grasp the function of the concept but may obscure the original’s cultural specificity.

A similar case of functional replacement is observed in the English translations of *O’tkan kunlar*, where the idiomatic phrase “*osh egasi bilan shirin*” (literally, “the plov tastes better when the host is present”) is adapted through culturally relevant expressions that reflect hospitality and togetherness instead of adhering to literal equivalence (Karimov, 2023, p. 45). *To’xtasinov* (2017, p. 307) renders it as “Everything good in its season,” *Yermakova* (2018, p. 281) translates it as

“Food is good when it’s cooked in the presence of guests,” and *R.M.* (2018, p. 512) writes “Meat is tastier when it is cooked in front of the guests.” These translations demonstrate the use of cultural substitution, whereby translators select expressions that convey comparable emotional and cultural resonance in English rather than reproducing the original form. Such adaptation reflects the translator’s effort to maintain cultural familiarity and achieve functional equivalence across linguistic and cultural boundaries. This example thus underscores how culturally grounded expressions in Uzbek literature require flexible, context-sensitive translation strategies.

A further category includes calque (literal translation of a phrase), synonymous replacement, and descriptive transfer, all of which aim to find a functional equivalent that fits the grammatical structure of the target language. For instance, the Uzbek phrase *milliy taom* can be rendered through calque as “national dish,” preserving the original structure. Synonymous replacement may involve translating *sho’rva* as “soup” or *lag’mon* as “noodles,” using general terms that convey a similar idea but lack the original’s cultural nuance. Descriptive transfer, on the other hand, provides a short explanation such as translating *sumalak* as “a sweet paste made from sprouted wheat, traditionally prepared for Navruz.”

A similar phenomenon is noted by *Azzamov* (2023, p. 18), who explains that the English term *elbow macaroni* is rendered in Uzbek as *oysimon makaron* (“moon-shaped pasta”), since English speakers liken the pasta’s shape to an elbow, while Uzbeks associate it with a crescent moon. This example illustrates how translators may replace literal meaning with culturally resonant imagery to achieve functional equivalence while maintaining the reader’s sense of familiarity. In this case, the semantic content of the original term is not preserved; instead, a figurative–visual equivalent based on analogy is created. The translator does not render the lexical meaning directly but rather finds an image that aligns with Uzbek cultural perception — the crescent moon shape — thus reflecting a culturally adaptive translation strategy.

CONCLUSION

The translation of Uzbek food terminology into English extends far beyond the lexical level; it represents a multidimensional act of cultural mediation. As this study has demonstrated, culinary lexicon embodies not only the material aspects of cuisine but also the historical memory, values, and social identity of the Uzbek people. The translator, therefore, must navigate between linguistic accuracy and cultural resonance,

ensuring that each rendered term conveys both meaning and cultural symbolism.

Among the strategies explored—transliteration, explanation, and functional replacement—none alone can fully capture the cultural depth of Uzbek gastronomy. Transliteration safeguards authenticity and cultural integrity, allowing readers to encounter the source culture in its original linguistic form. However, it requires supplementation with descriptive or explanatory notes to ensure accessibility. Explanatory and descriptive translation, while effective for clarity, can dilute stylistic fluidity, reminding us that translation is always a negotiation between precision and readability. Functional replacement or cultural substitution, on the other hand, enables translators to evoke equivalent emotional and contextual responses in the target audience, though it risks obscuring the unique identity of the source term.

The analysis further reveals that the successful translation of Uzbek food terminology depends on the translator's cultural competence and interpretive flexibility. Translators act as cultural interpreters—bridging conceptual gaps, reshaping imagery, and reconstructing the communicative intent of culturally bound expressions. The example of oysimon makaron illustrates that translation is not merely a linguistic substitution but a creative act of intercultural adaptation, where semantic fidelity yields to cultural intelligibility.

Ultimately, translating Uzbek culinary terminology is an exercise in striking a balance between preservation and adaptation. It calls for an integrated approach that harmonizes linguistic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of meaning. By recognizing food as both a linguistic and cultural text, translators contribute to the global circulation of Uzbek heritage, allowing the “taste of tradition” to transcend linguistic boundaries. Future research may expand this inquiry by examining the translation of Uzbek cuisine in audiovisual media, tourism discourse, and digital communication, where the dynamics of globalization further shape how national identity and culinary culture are represented across languages.

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