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TRANSLATING UZBEK CULTURAL IDENTITY IN "BYGONE DAYS": A COGNITIVE STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This paper examines how Uzbek cultural identity is rendered in the English translation of Abdulla Qodiriy's novel "O'tkan Kunlar", published in English as "Bygone Days". Using a cognitive stylistic framework, the study explores how culturally specific concepts, imagery, and narrative voice are reconstructed for an English-speaking readership. Particular attention is given to conceptual metaphor, mental space construction, and the translator's handling of culture-bound lexical items such as terms for social rank, clothing, and domestic space. The analysis draws on selected passages from the source text and its English translation, comparing how each version guides the reader toward particular cognitive and emotional interpretations. The findings suggest that translation choices at the lexical and structural level significantly shape how foreign readers conceptualize nineteenth-century Uzbek social life, and that certain culturally dense expressions inevitably undergo simplification or reframing in the target language. The study contributes to a growing body of research on literary translation from Uzbek into English and offers insights relevant to translators, literary scholars, and students of cognitive stylistics.

Keywords: cognitive stylistics, literary translation, cultural identity, Bygone Days, Abdulla Qodiriy, conceptual metaphor, mental spaces, Uzbek literature, culture-bound terms, translation studies

Introduction. Literary translation is never a neutral transfer of words from one language into another; it is an act of cultural interpretation in which the translator must decide, consciously or not, how much of the source culture's conceptual world to preserve, adapt, or replace. This challenge becomes especially pronounced when the source text is deeply embedded in a specific historical and cultural setting, as is the case with Abdulla Qodiriy's novel "O'tkan Kunlar" (1925), widely regarded as the first Uzbek novel and a foundational text of modern Uzbek literature [1]. Its English translation, published under the title "Bygone Days", introduces English-language readers to nineteenth-century Uzbek social life, moral codes, and domestic customs, all of which are expressed through language that is thick with cultural specificity.

Cognitive stylistics offers a productive framework for examining how such cultural specificity survives, or fails to survive, the translation process. Rather than treating style as a purely aesthetic feature of a text, cognitive stylistics investigates how linguistic choices shape the mental representations that readers construct — the conceptual metaphors they activate, the mental spaces they build, and the emotional and evaluative stances they adopt toward characters and events. When a novel is translated, these cognitive structures must, in effect, be rebuilt for a new readership using different linguistic and cultural materials [2].

Uzbek scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the translation of national literary classics into English, recognizing both the opportunities and the risks this process presents for the international representation of Uzbek culture [3]. "Bygone Days" is a particularly instructive case study because it combines a richly detailed depiction of pre-colonial Uzbek society with a narrative

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style that relies heavily on culturally specific idiom, honorific address forms, and descriptions of material culture — all elements that pose well-documented challenges for translators working between typologically distant languages such as Uzbek and English [4].

Literature Review. Cognitive stylistics emerged as a distinct field at the intersection of cognitive linguistics and literary stylistics, building on the premise that literary meaning is constructed through the same cognitive mechanisms that underlie everyday language comprehension — categorization, metaphor, mental space construction, and figure-ground organization [2]. Central to this approach is the idea that a text does not simply describe a world; it provides linguistic cues that guide the reader in constructing a mental model of that world, complete with spatial, temporal, and evaluative structure. Applied to translation, this perspective suggests that even small shifts in wording can alter the mental model a reader builds, with consequences for how faithfully a translated text conveys the source culture's conceptual world.

Within Uzbek literary scholarship, "O'tkan Kunlar" has long been studied as a foundational text that encodes the moral, social, and aesthetic values of late nineteenth-century Turkestan. Nortojiyeva's analysis of the novel's narrative structure highlights how Qodiriy uses detailed descriptions of domestic ritual — tea ceremonies, wedding customs, forms of greeting — to construct a coherent cultural world that carries strong symbolic weight for Uzbek readers [1]. This density of cultural encoding is precisely what creates difficulty for translators attempting to render the text for an audience unfamiliar with these customs.

Ergashev's research on the translation of Uzbek classical prose into English identifies a recurring pattern in which culture-specific terms — particularly those relating to social rank (such as terms for various categories of officials and elders) and traditional clothing — are either domesticated through approximate English equivalents or foreignized through transliteration accompanied by explanatory glosses [3]. Both strategies carry cognitive consequences: domestication tends to assimilate the source culture into categories already familiar to the target reader, while foreignization preserves distinctiveness at the cost of requiring additional interpretive effort from the reader.

Sharipova's comparative study of honorific and address forms in Uzbek-English literary translation demonstrates that the intricate system of respect and social distance encoded in Uzbek address terms is frequently flattened in English translation, where a more limited repertoire of naming conventions is available [4]. This flattening, she argues, can subtly alter the reader's perception of character relationships and social hierarchy, since much of the original social information carried by address forms is lost or must be reconstructed through other means, such as explicit narrative commentary.

International research on the cognitive stylistics of translation has similarly emphasized that translators act as mediators of conceptual structure, not merely of linguistic form. Work on conceptual metaphor in translated literature has shown that metaphorical expressions rooted in one culture's embodied experience do not always map neatly onto another language's metaphorical repertoire, requiring the translator to choose between preserving the original image, substituting a target-culture equivalent, or paraphrasing the underlying meaning [5]. These findings provide a useful comparative backdrop for examining the specific translation strategies used in "Bygone Days".

Taken together, the existing literature suggests that translating Uzbek cultural identity into English involves a series of cognitively consequential choices at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. However, few studies have applied a systematic cognitive stylistic framework specifically to "Bygone Days", and the present study aims to address this gap through close textual analysis.

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Methods. The analysis is based on a parallel reading of the Uzbek source text "O'tkan Kunlar" by Abdulla Qodiriy (1925 original, 1994 standardized edition) and its published English translation, "Bygone Days". From the full novel, twelve extended passages were selected for close analysis on the basis of their density of culturally specific content: four passages describing domestic and ceremonial space, four passages involving forms of address and social hierarchy, and four passages containing figurative or idiomatic language tied to Uzbek cultural concepts of honor, fate, and family duty [1, 3].

Analytical Framework. The study adopts a cognitive stylistic framework combining conceptual metaphor theory and mental space theory. Each selected passage was analyzed in the source and target text along three dimensions: (i) the conceptual metaphors activated by the wording, (ii) the mental spaces constructed for characters, settings, and social relationships, and (iii) the evaluative and emotional stance conveyed toward events and characters [2, 5]. This tripartite framework allows for a systematic comparison of how the source and target texts differ in the cognitive structures they invite readers to build.

Comparative Procedure. For each passage, the Uzbek source text was first analyzed independently to identify culturally specific lexical items, honorifics, and figurative expressions, along with the conceptual structures they appear to activate for an Uzbek reader. The corresponding English translation was then analyzed using the same categories. The two analyses were then compared to identify patterns of equivalence, shift, omission, or addition. Particular attention was paid to cases in which the translator introduced explanatory material not present in the source text, since such additions indicate points where the translator judged the target reader's cultural knowledge to be insufficient for direct transfer [3, 4].

Interpretive Criteria. Translation strategies identified in the comparative analysis were classified into four categories commonly used in translation studies: domestication (replacement with a familiar target-culture equivalent), foreignization (retention of the source term, often with a gloss), omission (removal of the culturally specific element), and compensation (the introduction of an alternative device elsewhere in the text to recover lost meaning). These categories were applied qualitatively to each of the twelve passages, and recurring patterns across passages were used to draw broader conclusions about the translation's overall approach to cultural identity [4, 5].

Overall Patterns and Implications. Across the twelve passages examined, domestication and compensation emerged as the dominant translation strategies, with foreignization used more selectively for terms considered essential to the narrative's cultural texture, such as specific items of traditional dress or well-known cultural institutions. Omission was comparatively rare, suggesting that the translator generally sought to preserve cultural content in some form rather than removing it outright, even where direct equivalence was unavailable.

These findings suggest that the English translation of "Bygone Days" achieves a workable balance between accessibility for the target readership and fidelity to the source culture's conceptual world, though this balance is achieved at a measurable cognitive cost: certain forms of implicit social and emotional meaning that Uzbek readers access intuitively through address forms, spatial description, and figurative language must be reconstructed more explicitly for English readers, often through added narrative commentary. This has broader implications for the translation of other Uzbek literary classics, suggesting that translators face a structural trade-off between cultural density and cross-cultural accessibility that cannot be fully resolved through any single translation strategy [1, 3, 4].

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Conclusion. This study has examined how Uzbek cultural identity is reconstructed in the English translation of “Bygone Days” through a cognitive stylistic lens. The analysis shows that domestic space, social hierarchy, and figurative language undergo systematic transformation in translation, typically through domestication and compensatory narrative expansion rather than outright omission. These shifts alter the cognitive and emotional pathways through which readers construct meaning, even as they preserve the novel’s core narrative content. The findings highlight the value of cognitive stylistics as a tool for understanding literary translation and point to a broader need for further research on how Uzbek literary classics are represented for international readerships. Future studies could extend this analysis to other works of classical Uzbek prose translated into English.

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