

LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF RENDERING RUSSIAN REALIA IN THE TRANSLATIONS BY CHOLPON

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Abstract

The article examines how Abdulhamid Cholpon (1897-1938) carried Russian realia into Uzbek when he translated Pushkin, Gogol and Gorky and, through Russian, Shakespeare. Drawing on the realia theory of S. Vlahov and S. Florin and on J. F. Aixela's account of culture-specific items, it traces two recurring solutions, the sound-based transcription of ranks and proper names and the substitution of everyday items by Arabic and Persian words already settled in Uzbek. The choices are read against I. Even-Zohar's polysystem reasoning, which explains why translation held a central position in the young Uzbek literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

Keywords. Realia, culture-specific items, literary translation, Cholpon, Russian classics, Uzbek literature, foreignization, domestication, transcription, polysystem.

Introduction

Abdulhamid Sulaymon o'g'li Yunusov, who signed his work as Cho'lpon, the morning star, stands among the founders of modern Uzbek lyric poetry and among the most active translators of the Jadid generation [5; 11]. Throughout his life Russian served as his single window onto European letters. Born in Andijan in 1897, he read Arabic, Persian and Russian, and he reached European drama and fiction only through their Russian versions. Between the middle of the 1920s and 1934 he worked in Moscow at the Uzbek Drama Studio, where he prepared Uzbek renderings of Pushkin, Gogol, Gorky and Shakespeare. The first Uzbek Hamlet reached the stage in 1934, while Dubrovskiy and Boris Godunov followed in 1936 and Revizor entered the studio repertoire [19; 15]. In 1937 arrest ended this labour, in 1938 a firing squad ended his life, and only in 1956 did rehabilitation arrive.

The problem that this study addresses concerns realia, the words that name objects and institutions peculiar to one people and strange to another. In their classic study S. Vlahov and S. Florin gave the concept its enduring shape, defining such units by their national or historical colour and by the absence of ready correspondences in another language [3, p. 47]. Culture stands behind every such word, and P. Newmark offered a working definition of the term, which he put in these words. "I define culture as the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression." [16, p. 94]. Russian classics carry a dense load of these markers, from social ranks such as боярин and помещик to measures such as верста and аршин, and from Orthodox practice to peasant household goods. When Cholpon moved this material into Uzbek, he wrote for readers whose everyday world rested on Turkic speech, Islamic custom and a long Persian literary memory. Two cultural systems met inside every line he rendered. How a translator of his moment resolved that meeting, and what the resolution reveals about contact between Russian and Uzbek culture, is the question



pursued here, since the single dedicated study of his Pushkin work remains T. Rakhimov's 1993 dissertation [7].

Methods and literature review

The study works on contrastive material and reads each Uzbek solution against its Russian source. Behind that reading lie several procedures. Componential analysis separates the cultural semes of a Russian unit from its referential core, which makes visible what survives and what falls away in Uzbek. Alongside this, the realia grouping proposed by Vlakhov and Florin sorts the examples by domain, while Aixela's account of culture-specific items supplies the names for the moves a translator can make, from sound-based copying to outright substitution [3; 12]. Venuti's pairing of foreignizing and domesticating choices frames the stylistic effect of each move [21]. From descriptive translation studies in the line of Toury comes the idea of a norm, so that recurring solutions read as habits rather than accidents [20]. Close textual comparison, supported by the biographical record in Karimov and Sharafiddinov [5; 11] and by Rakhimov's earlier observations [7], completes the method.

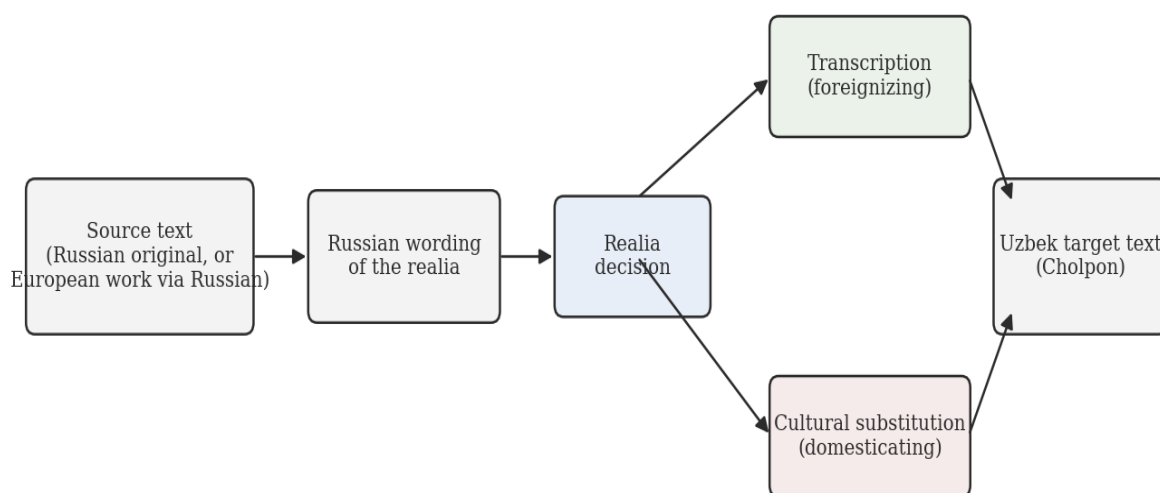
Russian translation theory built the ground on which any account of realia now stands. Within that tradition A. V. Fedorov argued for a linguistic basis for the study of literary translation [10], Ya. I. Retsker described the regular correspondences that let a translator move between systems [8], and L. S. Barkhudarov set the analysis at the level of language and text together [1]. V. N. Komissarov gave the equivalence relation its detailed linguistic statement [6], V. S. Vinogradov concentrated on the lexical questions where realia sit [2], and N. K. Garbovsky later gathered these strands into a broad theory of translation [4]. Beyond Russia, Western scholarship widened the angle on culture itself. P. Newmark distinguished cultural from universal language and listed the procedures open to a translator of cultural words [16], while M. Baker classified the kinds of non-equivalence a translator meets at word level [13]. For his part, J. F. Aixela defined the culture-specific item and ranged the available strategies from conservation to substitution [12], and L. Venuti recovered the long quarrel between fluent and resistant translation [21]. I. Even-Zohar placed translated literature inside a moving system of relations [14], and G. Toury turned the study toward the norms that govern real choices [20]. Closer to home, Uzbek scholarship supplies the local ground. G. Salomov treated the theory of translation and its literary tradition for an Uzbek readership [9], N. Karimov and O. Sharafiddinov reconstructed Cholpon's life and craft [5; 11], and T. Rakhimov examined his Pushkin translations in the only monographic study of the subject [7]. More recently, articles by Kh. Tojiyev with N. Khamdamova and by N. Jabborov with Sh. Hojjeva have returned to his Hamlet and to his place in world literature [19; 15].

Results

Two routes carried Russian into Cholpon's Uzbek. Pushkin, Gogol and Gorky reached him as Russian originals, so their realia were the realia of Russian life. Shakespeare, Schiller and Moliere reached him only after a Russian translator had already reshaped them, which means that the Russian colour in those plays was itself a translator's deposit rather than the author's. Figure 1 sets out both routes and marks the point at which a realia decision became unavoidable. The doubled mediation matters for the Hamlet of 1934, whose Russian source is still debated,



since Tojiyev and Khamdamova name P. A. Kanshin's prose Shakespeare while other readers hear M. Lozinsky's 1936 verse behind the Uzbek lines [19]. Toury describes the general condition of such work in these terms. "Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions, i.e., at least two sets of norm-systems on each level. Thus, the 'value' behind it may be described as consisting of two major elements: (1) being a text in a certain language, and hence occupying a position, or filling in a slot, in the appropriate culture, or in a certain section thereof; (2) constituting a representation in that language/culture of another, pre-existing text in some other language." [20, p. 56].



Pushkin, Gogol and Gorky enter as Russian originals; Shakespeare, Schiller and Moliere enter through a Russian translation.

Figure 1. The double-mediation pathway of Cholpon's translations and the realia decision point.

The Uzbek text therefore answered to two sets of norms at once, the Russian wording that delivered the material and the Uzbek world that received it.

The realia in these works fall into clear domains. Social ranks dominate the historical drama, where царь, боярин, князь, воевода and самозванец carry the weight of Muscovite hierarchy, while the provincial world of Dubrovskiy turns on помещик, исправник, заседатель and the address сударь. Measures and money form a second domain, with верста, аршин, сажень and the paper ассигнация standing for a metric and fiscal order with no Uzbek twin. Orthodox practice supplies a third, from обедня and вечерня to the кутья of a funeral meal. Table 1 collects representative units by domain and pairs each with the work in which Cholpon met it. Aixela gives the technical name for what such units are. "Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text." [12, p. 58].



Table 1. Russian realia by domain in the works translated by Cholpon.

Domain	Russian realia (examples)	Source work
Social ranks and titles	царь, боярин, князь, воевода, самозванец	Boris Godunov
Provincial gentry and office	помещик, исправник, заседатель, сударь	Dubrovskiy
Administration and place	губерния, уезд, имение, Кремль, Чудов монастырь	Boris Godunov; Dubrovskiy
Measures and money	верста, аршин, сажень, ассигнация, рубль	Dubrovskiy; Boris Godunov
Orthodox religion	обедня, вечерня, икона, кутья, патриарх	Boris Godunov
Material culture and daily life	кибитка, тройка, ямщик, кафтан, самовар	Dubrovskiy; Revizor

Each domain pressed the translator toward a different balance between keeping the foreign shape and reaching for a familiar one.

Sound-based copying was Cholpon's first answer for ranks and names. He kept Дубровский, Троекуров and the Russian given names with their patronymics, and he carried titles such as боярин and царь into Uzbek by transcription rather than by a search for a local equivalent [7]. This choice preserves the foreign surface and asks the Uzbek reader to move toward the Russian world. Schleiermacher had set out the underlying alternative more than a century earlier, and he put the choice in these terms. "Either the translator leaves the writer in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him. These two paths are so very different from one another that one or the other must certainly be followed as strictly as possible, any attempt to combine them being certain to produce a highly unreliable result and to carry with it the danger that writer and reader might miss each other completely." [18, p. 49].

Cholpon's main solutions on Aixela's conservation to substitution scale

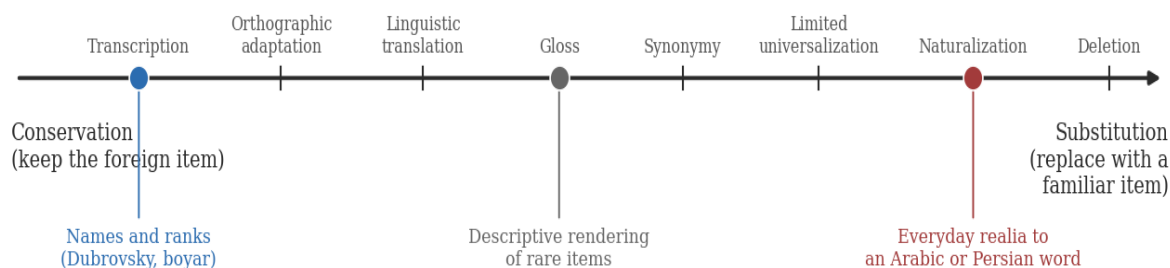


Figure 2. Cholpon's realia-rendering strategies on Aixela's conservation to substitution scale.



Transcription sits at the conserving end of that line, where the foreign item keeps its form. The opposite pole, at which the Russian item gives way to an Uzbek one, governs the next group of examples.

For everyday and social realia Cholpon often took the opposite path. Where a Russian word named a thing that Uzbek custom already knew under an Arabic or Persian name, he reached for that received word, and the borrowed item dissolved into the target culture [7; 9]. Baker names this move directly and describes cultural substitution in the following way. “This strategy 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. The main advantage of using this strategy is that it gives the reader a concept with which s/he can identify, something familiar and appealing.” [13, p. 31]. Such substitution carried a cost that contemporaries noticed, and at the 1952 Tashkent conference on questions of literary translation critics complained that renderings of Pushkin had been filled with Arabic and Persian words foreign to ordinary Uzbek speech. Table 2 sets the main strategies side by side, gives each a short definition and supplies an example from Cholpon's practice.

Table 2. Strategies for rendering Russian realia in Cholpon's translations.

Strategy	Brief definition	Example in Cholpon's practice
Transcription (sound copying)	the foreign form is reproduced in the target script	боярин rendered by sound; the names Дубровский and Троекуров kept
Cultural substitution	a foreign item is replaced by a familiar target item	a Russian everyday term replaced by an Arabic or Persian word at home in Uzbek
Descriptive rendering	the item is explained by its function	an obscure rank or object unfolded into a short Uzbek description
Archaisation	older bookish target words are chosen for dignity	old Arabic and bookish Uzbek words in Hamlet [19, p. 33]
Form shift (verse to prose)	the metrical form is changed to protect meaning	Hamlet rendered in prose; Boris Godunov kept in verse [15; 19]

The decision was never mechanical, since the same translator who transcribed a boyar might naturalise a measuring cup.

Cholpon's diction in Hamlet leaned toward the archaic and the bookish. Tojiyev and Khamdamova find the language of that translation

“rich and varied, but in a certain sense outdated” [19, p. 33], with a marked taste for old Arabic words, and they relay G. Salomov's judgement that the Uzbek Hamlet stands as a bold artistic experiment [19, p. 33]. The choice of prose over verse in Hamlet freed Cholpon to chase meaning, while in Boris Godunov he kept Pushkin's verse and, in the reading of Jabborov and Hojjeva, deepened “his understanding of Pushkin's poetic language” [15, p. 482]. A translation that reads smoothly hides the labour behind it, and Venuti has traced the long reign of this expectation. He states the point as follows. “A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or non-fiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers, and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent,



giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text — the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original.'" [21, p. 1]. The archaism that later readers heard as distance was, for Cholpon's first audience, a sign of literary dignity, a question that the reception history still has to weigh.

The stakes of this work reached beyond single words. Uzbek literature in the 1920s and 1930s was a young system in rapid change, exactly the condition under which translation stops being a marginal task and starts to shape the receiving literature. Even-Zohar set out when this happens, and he describes the relevant cases in these words. "Three major cases can be discerned, which are basically various manifestations of the same law: (a) when a polysystem has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is 'young,' in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either 'peripheral' (within a large group of correlated literatures) or 'weak,' or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature." [14, p. 47].

Cholpon's renderings of Pushkin and Shakespeare brought new verse habits, new dramatic forms and a new prose into Uzbek at the very moment the literature was forming its modern shape, so the way he handled Russian realia fed directly into the language that a generation of Uzbek writers would inherit. The way he met Russian realia therefore belongs to the history of Uzbek literary form, not only to the history of the Uzbek lexicon.

Discussion

The pattern that emerges is one of division by domain rather than a single fixed habit. On one side proper names and titles kept their Russian shape, while on the other everyday and social realia were drawn toward Uzbek through Arabic and Persian words already at home in the language, which matches the split that Nida drew between formal and dynamic correspondence. He observed that there are "fundamentally two different types of equivalence, one which may be called formal and another which is primarily dynamic" [17, p. 159]. In practice Cholpon answered with formal correspondence where identity of reference mattered, as with persons and ranks, and with dynamic correspondence where effect on the reader weighed more than the foreign label. The double mediation through Russian complicates the picture further, because part of the foreign colour in the European plays had already been filtered by a Russian translator before Cholpon began, so what reached Uzbek was a second-order image of the original.

Several limits frame these findings. As yet the source text of the Uzbek Hamlet has not been fixed with certainty, and only a line by line comparison with both Kanshin and Lozinsky can settle whether Cholpon worked from prose, from verse or from a mixture of the two [19]. Archival dates for some of the prose translations remain approximate, which a search in the Navoiy literary museum and the national library could repair. Read against Even-Zohar's reasoning, the broader significance is nonetheless clear, since Cholpon's choices about Russian realia entered Uzbek letters at a forming stage and helped decide how a foreign world would sound in Uzbek. His translations carried the Jadid wish to bring world literature within reach of an Uzbek reader, and they did so at the level of the single culture-bound word.



Conclusion

Cholpon met Russian realia with two main solutions, the transcription of names and ranks that kept the Russian world visible and the substitution of everyday items by Arabic and Persian words already settled in Uzbek. Across the texts his domain-by-domain handling shows a translator weighing identity of reference against effect on the reader, and doing so under the added pressure of a Russian intermediary that had already coloured the European plays. The linguoculturological value of this work lies in the way it let an Uzbek readership of the 1920s and 1930s encounter Russian and, behind it, European culture in a form their own language could hold. What still awaits the field is a full collation of his Hamlet against its Russian sources, the step that would turn a reading of his realia into a complete account of his method.

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