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“COMPLEX” LEXIS IN TRANSLATION: PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING BARBARISMS, JARGON, TABOO AND EUPHEMISMS

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Abstract

This article examines the distinctive characteristics of translating the most complex lexical layers in the translation process: barbarisms, jargons, slang, euphemisms, and taboo words. The study analyzes the functional roles of these lexical units within literary texts, as well as the linguistic and cultural challenges that arise when rendering them from one language to another. Furthermore, the author provides practical recommendations on strategies for maintaining semantic equivalence, preserving stylistic nuances, and implementing cultural adaptation when translating this “complex” vocabulary.

Keywords: Translation theory, lexicology, barbarism, jargon, slang, euphemism, taboo, stylistic transformation, cultural adaptation, literary text.

Introduction

Barbarisms are foreign words that have entered a language without fully adapting to its native grammatical and phonetic rules, remaining unchanged (or undergoing very minimal changes). They are often used to lend a “distinctive flavor” to speech or to depict a specific atmosphere.

In English, many barbarisms are derived from French, Latin, and Italian, and they still retain a “foreign” feel:

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Tête-à-tête (French)	A confidential conversation between two people.
Ad infinitum (Latin)	To infinity; forever or without limit.
Persona non grata (Latin)	An unwelcome or unacceptable person.
Ciao (Italian)	Hello or goodbye (used in informal contexts).
Al dente (Italian)	Food (typically pasta) cooked so as to be still firm when bitten.
Zeitgeist (German)	The defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history.

In the Uzbek language, **barbarisms** are primarily increasing due to the influence of Russian, Arabic, and, more recently, English. These terms are most frequently encountered in everyday conversation and on social media platforms.

Source Word	Language of Origin	Uzbek Meaning/Equivalent	English Translation of Meaning
Poka	Russian	Xayr, hozircha.	Bye / See you for now.
Konechno	Russian	Albatta.	Of course / Certainly.
Davay	Russian	Bo'pti, qani ketdik (undash).	Alright / Let's go (encouragement).
Okey (OK)	English	Yaxshi, kelishdik.	Okay / Agreed.
Hype (Xayp)	English	Shov-shuv ko'tarish.	Creating a buzz / Creating a stir.
Wow (Vau)	English	Hayrat ifodasi.	An expression of amazement.

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Characteristics of Barbarisms

Orthography (Spelling): They are often written as they appear in the original language. For instance, in English texts, French words are frequently italicized to distinguish them.

Temporality: If a barbarism becomes widely popular in a language, it evolves into a loanword (borrowing) and is no longer considered a barbarism (e.g., the word "computer" is now a standard term).

Purpose: Authors use them to showcase their linguistic knowledge or to indicate a character's foreign background.

Creating Local Color: To provide a sense of the country or environment where the events are taking place.

Speech Individualization: To highlight a character's education level, the languages they know, or the specific era they belong to.

Satire and Humor: Sometimes, a character's attempt to look "modern" by using foreign words incorrectly or out of place is used to create a comedic effect (comism).

Barbarisms in literature

In literature, barbarisms (foreign words) are primarily used to reveal a character's personality, demonstrate their social background, or recreate the atmosphere of the period in which the work was written.

Agatha Christie's Works (Hercule Poirot): As a famous detective, Poirot frequently uses phrases like "Mon ami" (my friend), "Merci" (thank thank you), or "n'est-ce pas?" (isn't that so?). This serves as a constant reminder to the reader of his Belgian origin.

Uzbek Literature: Particularly during the Jadidism period and later works, Russian or Turkic-Tatar words were used as barbarisms.

Abdulla Qodiriy, "Days Gone By": In some parts of the novel, concepts that were newly introduced at the time appear in the characters' speech or the author's

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narration. For example, words like “samovar” or “dvoryan” (nobleman) were considered pure barbarisms back then.

O‘tkir Hoshimov, “Between Two Doors” : In scenes depicting the war era and post-war life, Russian words such as “shinel” (greatcoat), “payok” (rations), and “kontora” (office) were used in characters’ speech without conforming to Uzbek grammar. This illustrates the encounter of rural people with the language of a new era.

Translation Features of Barbarisms

The primary function of barbarisms is to create a foreign atmosphere (local color) within the text. Therefore, the following methods are applied when translating them:

Strategy	Description	Example
Transliteration and Transcription	The barbarism is preserved in its original form, as translating it would eliminate its inherent "foreignness."	If the French phrase " Rendez-vous " in an English text is rendered as " Randevu " in Uzbek (instead of "Uchrashuv"), the French spirit is preserved.
Italicization or Quotation Marks	To ensure the reader recognizes the word as a deliberate "foreign" element, it is graphically distinguished from the rest of the text.	Bonjour, C'est la vie, "Ciao"
Descriptive Translation (Footnotes)	If the barbarism is likely to be misunderstood, a brief meaning is provided in a footnote or within parentheses.	Mon ami (my friend)

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Slang (derived from the English term for “language in motion” or jargon) refers to a unique collection of words and phrases that do not fall within the norms of the literary language but are widely used in informal, colloquial speech.

The key features that distinguish slang from other linguistic layers include:

Metaphorical Shift (Semantic Extension): Slang often assigns new, figurative meanings to common, well-known words.

Example: In some contexts, the word “**Dough**” or “**Bread**” (standard meaning: food items) is used as slang for “**money**.”

Emotional Expressiveness: Rather than simply conveying information, slang serves to express the speaker's attitude, such as humor, irony, or amazement.

Group Identity (Social Belonging): Slang is used to foster a sense of closeness within specific age groups (e.g., teenagers), interest groups (e.g., gamers), or professional communities.

Slang is not always restricted to “low-status” speech. If a slang term proves to be highly practical and resonates across all levels of society, it may eventually transition into the literary (standard) language over time.

Distinguishing Slang from Jargon

Slang and jargon are often confused because both belong to the category of informal speech. However, there are significant differences in their origins and intended purposes.

Argot (A type of Jargon): Sometimes jargon (especially among criminal subcultures) is used to **conceal meaning** from outsiders. Its primary purpose is secrecy.

Slang: Slang does not hide anything. On the contrary, it serves to **attract attention** and be distinctive, while remaining understandable to a broader social group.

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Characteristics of Translating Slang

Slang is considered one of the most difficult linguistic layers to translate because it is deeply rooted in **national and local culture**. When translating slang, there are three primary approaches:

Strategy	Description	Key Characteristics
Stylistic Equivalent	Finding a slang word in the target language that carries the exact same meaning and emotional weight as the original.	Preserves the tone and impact of the source text.
Neutralization	If no suitable slang exists in the target language, it is replaced with a standard literary word.	The meaning is conveyed, but the "flavor" or stylistic richness of the text is lost.
Calque (Literal Translation)	Translating the slang word-for-word.	This often leads to errors. For example, the English idiom " Keep your hair on! " (meaning: Calm down!) cannot be translated literally as "Sochingni boshingda tut."

The Concepts of Taboo and Euphemism

The concepts of **taboo** and **euphemism** are intrinsically linked, reflecting the cultural and ethical norms of a society. Their primary distinction lies in the fact that a **taboo** is a prohibition, whereas a **euphemism** is a "softened" word used to navigate or bypass that prohibition.

Taboo Words (Prohibited Language)

The word "taboo" originates from Polynesian languages, meaning "forbidden" or "sacred." In linguistics, **taboos** refer to words that are prohibited from use for

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specific reasons, such as: **Religious beliefs, Ethical or moral standards, Superstitions.**

Euphemisms (Softening Language)

The term “**Euphemism**” is derived from the Greek words eu (good) and phemi (I speak). These are milder, more polite words or expressions used in place of those considered taboo, harsh, or unpleasant to the ear.

Primary Functions of Euphemisms:

Concealing Harshness: Instead of saying “You are lying,” one might say, “That does not correspond to the truth.”

Softening Unpleasant News: Instead of saying “He/She died,” using terms like “Passed away,” “Departed this world,” or “Met their maker.”

Veiling Sensitive Topics: Using indirect expressions for sensitive subjects like pregnancy—for example, in Uzbek, using “Bo'yida bor” or “Og'ir oyoq”, and in English, using phrases like “**in the family way.**”

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