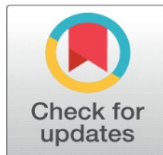
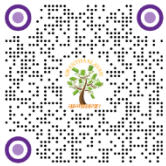


CULTURAL REALITIES IN THE TEXTS OF TOLSTOY AND CHEKHOV IN TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

The works of Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov serve as profound reflections of Russia's national and cultural identity, encoded through language and marked vocabulary. This study examines the translation of culturally specific linguistic realities in their texts, focusing on the strategies employed to preserve the cultural and semantic nuances inherent in the original works. The research defines the cultural code as a matrix structuring perception and evaluation of the world, emphasizing its role in shaping national identity. This study examines the methods of conveying culturally specific words – linguistic realities in the works of the authors. Having no equivalents in the translated language, these units are nevertheless significant because they convey national identity. The study categorizes cultural realities into distinct semantic groups: onomastic, every day, religious, socio-political, and cultural-historical units. Through comparative analysis of source texts and their English translations, the research identifies key methods of conveying these realities. Proper names are predominantly rendered via transcription and transliteration, while other categories employ functional analogues, translation transformations (generalization, specification, metonymic transfer), and descriptive translation to compensate for lexical gaps.

The findings demonstrate that while complete equivalence is often unattainable, the strategic application of these methods ensures the preservation of cultural specificity. The study underscores the translator's role as a mediator of cultural memory, advocating for approaches that balance fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience. This analysis contributes to broader discussions on cross-cultural communication in literary translation and the challenges of transmitting national identity across linguistic boundaries.

Keywords: Cultural Code, Linguistic Realities, Literary Translation, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Translation Strategies, National Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

The works of Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov have become known to foreign readers largely through translations.

The interpretation of culture-specific words is crucial when translating any literary work, since it is precisely these cultural realities that reflect the uniqueness and flavor of the culture depicted in the original text [Kunina et al. \(2017\)](#).

The concept of the cultural code is explored in semiotics, cultural studies, linguoculturology, psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, ethnology, folklore studies, sociology, economics, literary studies, and other fields. A pressing issue is

the application of the cultural code concept to literary studies and the characterization of systems of basic cultural codes.

Among the most frequently cited definitions are those by R. Barthes, C. Rapaille, and V. Krasnykh. R. Barthes interprets the cultural code as a trace of accumulated experience [Barthes \(2020\)](#). C. Rapaille defines it as subconscious meanings formed in society under the influence of national culture (Rapaille, 2010). V. Krasnykh describes it as a cultural matrix ("grid") used to evaluate and structure the surrounding world [Krasnykh \(2022\)](#).

At its core, a code is a set of rules or a system of signs used to encode and decode knowledge or to store and transmit information. Accordingly, a cultural code is an informative system of cultural signs (its symbols, artifacts) or the "language" of a culture, carrying specific meaning within a particular ethnic context [Paine \(2022\)](#). Cultural codes are inherent in all cultural languages and may evolve over time, altering their sign systems, simplifying, or becoming more complex.

The national-cultural code is a fundamental unit of culture. According to N.I. and S.M. Tolstykh, "culture is a hierarchically organized system of various codes - secondary sign systems that use different forms and material means to encode the same content, which ultimately reflects the 'worldview' of a given society. These diverse codes can be correlated through translation from one language to another via a shared semantic plane that serves as an intermediary language" [Pavlova and Potovskaya \(2024\)](#). In other words, the primary means of preserving and transmitting the distinctiveness of a culture - as a specific level of a society's spiritual development - is its cultural code.

Successful cultural communication relies on the correlation of different cultural codes.

The foundation of a cultural code can be any set of perceived realities - natural phenomena, clothing, architecture, etc. People also employ cultural codes in communication. To fully comprehend a message, one must be familiar with the interlocutor's cultural background and understand the cultural code activated in a given communicative act [Yusupova and Asaturova \(2022\)](#). For example, in Russian lyrical poetry, depictions of nature often carry stylistic and patriotic connotations unique to Russian culture. A foreigner unfamiliar with the symbolic meaning of nature in another culture may struggle to grasp these nuances.

Every language contains "key words" - lexical units that are particularly significant and indicative of a specific culture [Wierzbicka \(2014\)](#). These words reflect national character and cultural ideas. Identifying such lexical units and cultural concepts helps analyze the linguistic representation of national-cultural codes.

Language is a reflection of culture. The connection between language and culture manifests at the lexical level, particularly in nationally marked vocabulary. Thus, culturally marked lexicon expresses the cultural elements of peoples and ethnic groups. The customs, languages, and cultures of different nations vary significantly. Each country perceives the world through its own lens, and sometimes, representatives of different nationalities find it difficult to understand one another. Therefore, studying culturally marked vocabulary enhances translation adequacy and equivalence, ultimately enabling a more detailed and accurate understanding of foreign cultures.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological foundation of this research is a comprehensive approach integrating several complementary methods:

- Comparative-contrastive analysis,
- Linguocultural analysis,
- Translation studies analysis,
- Interpretative analysis.

The combined application of these methods allows for a thorough and accurate description of the linguocultural specificity in Tolstoy's and Chekhov's works, revealing their national-cultural identity and examining the possibilities of preserving and transmitting these linguocultural features in translation.

2.1. RESEARCH MATERIAL

The study examines Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* and its English translation by Louise and Aylmer Maude and selected short stories by Anton Chekhov in Constance Garnett's translation. From these texts, 383 cultural-historical realia reflecting 19th-century Russian reality were extracted.

Following the thematic classification of lexical units proposed by S. Vlachov and S. Florin and G.D. Tomakhin [Atashova and Ashirov \(2025\)](#), we categorized the realia into subclasses and determined their frequency:

Table 1

Table 1	
Subclass	Frequency (%)
Everyday life	18%
Onomastic	24%
Art & culture	16%
Religious	5%
Labor	11%
Ethnic objects	8%
Measures & money	6%
Socio-political	12%

The distribution of realia across these subclasses is uneven. The dominance of everyday life and onomastic realia can be attributed to their functional role in depicting the protagonists' lifestyles and reconstructing their inner and outer worlds. In contrast, measures and money appear less frequently, as they primarily serve to quantify objects or phenomena rather than convey deeper cultural meaning.

We conducted a comparative analysis of the English translations of the identified realia, evaluating the effectiveness of the translation strategies employed. A translation was deemed successful if it adequately conveyed the author's original intent.

Our key findings are:

- inadequate translation or omission of realia may lead to distortion of character portrayals, misrepresentation of Russia's cultural image, loss of the author's intended meaning and style.

- effective translation, however enriches the target-language text, brings it closer to the original, enhances the recipient's cultural understanding.

This analysis provides insights into how translation choices impact the preservation of cultural authenticity in literary works.

3. DISCUSSION

The challenge of translating culture-specific (non-equivalent) lexis, which has existed since the inception of translation studies, remains highly relevant in contemporary translation research.

An analysis of works by Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov has identified the following dominant strategies for translating culturally marked vocabulary:

- transliteration and transcription,
- descriptive translation,
- modulation (meaning adaptation),
- holistic transformation,
- contextual translation,
- omission.

These translation methods were observed in rendering all identified categories of nationally marked vocabulary.

Onomastic realia is predominantly translated via transliteration/transcription (Сергей Михайлыч - Sergey Mikhaylych; Николашка – Nikolashka).

Everyday realia of domestic life are rendered through:

- contextual translation and functional equivalents (often preserving denotative meaning but losing cultural nuance): холстинковая блуза с открытыми рукавами - a gingham blouse with loose sleeves, ставешки в окнах - the windows shuttered, за три версты - two miles away.
- **generalization and specification:** сапай - orchard (contextual shift from "shed" to "fruit garden").
- **descriptive translation:** истопник - the man in charge of the heating, полуштоф - half bottle.

Religious realia are mainly translated via:

- **description:** сквозь царские двери - through the central door of the altar-screen.
- **generalization:** говеть - to fast.
- **omission:** ступени паперти - steps up to the building.

Neutralization is also identified in some cases.

Realia of the group covering social status and occupations are introduced via such strategies as:

- **generalization:** дворовые - servants,
- **calquing:** коллежский регистратор - collegiate registrar,
- **functional equivalents:** исправник - inspector.

Omission in select instances also occurs.

Challenges in preserving cultural codes are obvious. Despite the efforts, translators do not always succeed in fully conveying the national-cultural code of

the source text while maintaining adequacy and equivalence. This difficulty stems from the unique and idiosyncratic lexical choices of the original authors, which are deeply rooted in their cultural context.

Quantitative analysis made it possible to present the distribution of translation methods for culture-specific lexis in the analyzed works in [Diagram 1](#) (see below for percentage breakdown).

Diagram 1

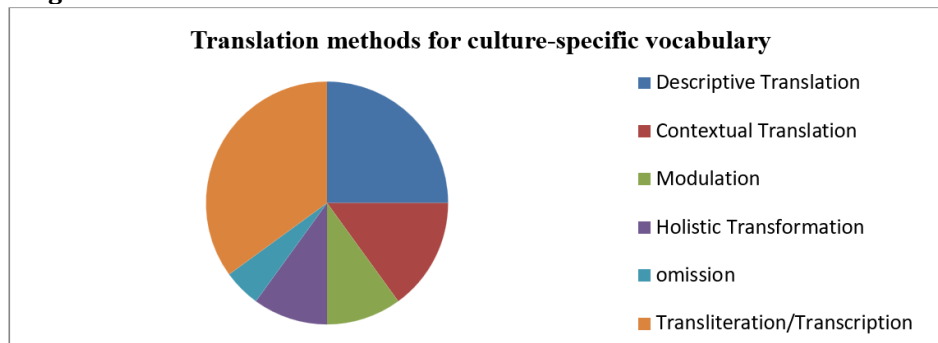


Diagram 1

4. CONCLUSION

The works of eminent Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov embody the national-cultural code of the Russian nation. At the linguistic level, this code manifests through culture-specific words often imbued with additional connotative meanings.

The nationally-marked vocabulary in Tolstoy's and Chekhov's works, which reflects the distinctiveness of Russian culture, was not fully preserved in translation and may remain obscure to foreign readers.

For the translation of proper nouns, a combination of transcription and transliteration was employed. In all other cases, approximate translation methods were utilized, including: selection of functional equivalents, meaning modulation, generalization and specification techniques, descriptive translation, contextual translation.

The choice of specific method was context-dependent. The necessary neutralization in translation - resulting from lexical gaps in the target language and leading to partial loss or obscuring of connotative meaning - was deemed justified as it preserves the core semantic content. In several instances, omission of culture-marked lexicon was observed as a translation strategy.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

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