

## "CULTURAL REALITY IN LANGUAGE: THE LINGUISTIC AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF CULINARY REALITIES IN CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION"

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### **Abstract**

This article explores culinary realities as a distinct category of cultural realities in language and translation. It examines the linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of food-related terms, their role in shaping cultural identity, and the challenges they pose in translation. Special attention is given to English-Korean and English-Uzbek translation examples. The study proposes strategies for domesticating and foreignizing culinary terms while maintaining cultural authenticity and reader comprehension.

### **Keywords**

culinary reality, translation strategy, cultural context, linguistics, pragmatics

### **Introduction**

Cultural realities encompass the tangible and intangible elements of a society, reflected through language. Among these, culinary realities—terms related to food, cooking, and dining practices—play a unique role in representing a community's identity, historical experience, and social values. Unlike universal lexical items, culinary realities often lack direct equivalents in other languages due to the interplay of taste, tradition, and cultural symbolism.

This study focuses on culinary realities in the English, Korean, and Uzbek contexts. By analyzing translation strategies, semantic nuances, and pragmatic considerations, it aims to provide insights into effective cross-cultural communication.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural realities, including culinary realities, are widely recognized in translation studies as complex linguistic and cultural phenomena that pose significant challenges to translators. Scholars in both Western and East Asian contexts have emphasized that these realities cannot be adequately rendered

through simple literal translation due to their dense semantic, pragmatic, and symbolic content. Linguistic research demonstrates that cultural realities encompass not only lexical meaning but also embedded social norms, historical contexts, and symbolic associations that are deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of a society (Baker, 1992; Venuti, 1995). In particular, culinary realities serve as a microcosm of cultural identity, linking everyday practices with broader societal values and historical narratives.

In Korean linguistics, researchers such as Lee Sun Ok (2001) and Kim Jin Su (2007) highlight the multifunctional nature of food-related terms. These terms are not merely nominal; they encode ritual significance, regional identity, and social etiquette. For instance, **김치** (kimchi) is widely recognized as Korea's national dish, but its significance extends far beyond the culinary sphere. It symbolizes communal cooperation during the kimjang season (the traditional cabbage fermentation process), embodies intergenerational knowledge, and functions as a marker of Korean identity both domestically and internationally. Lee Sun Ok (2001) argues that such terms are inseparable from their sociocultural and historical contexts, and failure to account for these contexts in translation leads to cultural impoverishment.

Similarly, **불고기** (bulgogi), while often translated simply as "marinated grilled beef," carries connotations of celebratory meals, familial gatherings, and traditional preparation methods unique to Korean culture.

Western translation scholars emphasize parallel phenomena in English. Culinary terms such as "Thanksgiving turkey," "Sunday roast," or "pumpkin pie" are embedded with ritual, temporal, and social significance. A literal translation into another language—e.g., rendering "Thanksgiving turkey" as "holiday turkey"—fails to convey the historical symbolism of Thanksgiving as a colonial and national commemoration, the social practice of family gatherings, and the emotional resonance attached to the dish. This aligns with the observations of cultural linguists like Katan (2014), who note that culinary realities act as "semiotic carriers of cultural memory" and require strategies that preserve both meaning and context.

Cross-cultural studies on culinary translation further highlight the interaction between language and cognition. Korean linguists such as Park (2010) and Choi (2015) emphasize that many food terms carry polysemous meanings that shift depending on context, audience, and function. For example, **떡** (tteok) can refer to rice cakes in general but also serves symbolic functions in festivals, weddings, and ancestral rites. Therefore, translation requires not only lexical equivalence but also

pragmatic and cultural adaptation. In some cases, glosses, descriptive explanations, or transliterations are employed to retain the source culture's specificity while facilitating comprehension for the target audience.

Moreover, comparative research reveals that culinary realities are closely tied to social stratification, regional variation, and historical continuity. In Korea, variations in kimchi preparation reflect regional climates, local ingredients, and historical trade patterns. Similarly, in English-speaking countries, the ingredients and presentation of traditional dishes can differ significantly between regions, reflecting local identity and social customs. Linguistic and anthropological approaches converge on the understanding that culinary terms are repositories of collective knowledge and cultural norms. Ignoring these dimensions during translation risks erasing the cultural and emotional resonance embedded in the source text (Nida, 1964; House, 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, translating culinary realities involves a balance between domestication, where terms are adapted to the target culture, and foreignization, where source culture elements are retained to preserve authenticity. In Korean-English translation, domesticating strategies might render **김치** as "spicy fermented cabbage," making the dish understandable to English readers but stripping away layers of cultural context. Conversely, foreignization preserves the original term "kimchi" and often supplements it with explanatory notes or footnotes to convey social, historical, and symbolic connotations. This dual approach is endorsed by cross-cultural translation theorists, including Hatim and Mason (1997) and Kim Jin Su (2012), who argue that the translator's role is not merely linguistic but also ethnocultural mediation.

### Classification of Culinary Realities

Culinary realities can be systematically classified into several categories based on their semantic, cultural, and functional dimensions. Understanding these categories facilitates more accurate translation and deeper comprehension of the social and symbolic roles of food in different cultures.

#### 1. Ingredients and Preparation

This category includes foods, condiments, or dishes that are unique to a particular culture and cannot be directly replicated elsewhere due to differences in available ingredients, climate, or traditional culinary techniques. For example, **doenjang** (**된장**) in Korean cuisine is a fermented soybean paste integral to soups and stews, carrying historical and nutritional significance. Similarly, **gochujang** (**고추장**), a spicy fermented chili paste, is not just a flavoring agent but a cultural symbol

representing Korean taste preferences and fermentation traditions. In the English context, there are fewer unique fermented pastes; however, items like **Clotted cream** in the United Kingdom, used with scones in traditional tea, exemplify ingredients deeply embedded in culinary heritage. In the Uzbek context, **sumalak**, a sweet paste made from sprouted wheat during Navruz, reflects both agricultural practices and communal traditions. These foods are difficult to convey in other languages without supplementary explanation or transliteration.

## 2. Ritual and Ceremony

Certain foods carry ritualistic, religious, or ceremonial significance, forming an essential part of cultural identity and communal memory. For instance, **tteokguk** (떡국) is consumed during Korean New Year celebrations, symbolizing age, renewal, and good fortune. Translating it merely as “rice cake soup” omits these ritual connotations, potentially reducing cultural understanding. In Uzbekistan, **sumalak** is prepared collectively during Navruz, a festival celebrating spring and renewal, and its preparation embodies communal cooperation and ancestral continuity. Similarly, in English-speaking countries, **Christmas pudding** or **Easter eggs** are not only foods but also carriers of ritual and seasonal meaning, representing religious and cultural traditions. Recognizing these ritualistic associations is critical for translators seeking to preserve both meaning and cultural significance.

## 3. Everyday Consumption

Many culinary realities are part of routine dietary habits but still carry social or cultural meanings. For example, **banchan** (반찬), the assortment of side dishes served with Korean meals, reflects not only culinary diversity but also principles of balance, harmony, and etiquette in Korean dining. In the English context, items like **afternoon tea sandwiches** or **Sunday roast** serve a similar role, representing habitual culinary practices with implicit social rules and values. Uzbek cuisine also features everyday items, such as **plov**, which is both a staple food and a symbol of hospitality, often prepared for guests or communal gatherings. These seemingly ordinary foods encode social norms, regional identity, and shared values that must be considered in translation.

## 4. Metaphoric and Symbolic Uses

Culinary terms are frequently employed metaphorically or idiomatically, enriching language with cultural symbolism. In English, the term “**breadwinner**” denotes a family provider, linking food to social roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Korean uses **밥벌이** (bapbeori) to refer to earning a living, literally translating as “rice

earning," reflecting the centrality of rice in Korean sustenance. Uzbek also employs metaphorical expressions, such as "**non topish**" (literally "to get bread"), meaning to earn a living. Translators must recognize these metaphoric extensions, as literal translations may fail to convey the underlying cultural and social meanings.

### Challenges in Translation

Translating culinary realities presents two primary challenges:

1. Lack of Direct Equivalence

Many culturally specific foods have no exact counterpart in the target language. For instance, **tteokguk** (떡국), a soup made with sliced rice cakes traditionally eaten on New Year's Day in Korea, cannot be fully conveyed by the literal term "rice cake soup." Its associations with aging, renewal, and luck are culturally embedded, requiring additional explanation or adaptation in translation. Similarly, **halva** in Uzbekistan has diverse textures and preparation methods, from flour-based to nut-based, and its significance in ceremonies cannot be captured by a single term like "sweet confection."

2. Cultural Comprehension

Translators must convey both the semantic meaning of a dish and its cultural significance. For example, when translating Korean **김치** (kimchi) into English, it is often necessary to provide contextual notes explaining its preparation, role in Korean meals, and symbolic meaning related to identity and communal life. Likewise, Uzbek dishes like **plov** or **norin** carry social and regional connotations, which may be unfamiliar to foreign audiences. Failure to address these dimensions can result in cultural misinterpretation or dilution of meaning.

3. Strategies for Effective Translation

To address these challenges, translators employ strategies such as **foreignization**, retaining the original term with explanatory notes, or **domestication**, adapting the concept to a target language equivalent. For example, **tteokguk** may be translated as "Korean New Year rice cake soup" with a footnote explaining its symbolic meaning. Similarly, **sumalak** might be transliterated with a descriptive explanation to preserve its cultural essence. Such strategies aim to balance accessibility for the target audience while maintaining fidelity to the source culture.

The classification of culinary realities and the challenges associated with their translation highlight the intricate relationship between language, culture, and social practice. Accurate rendering of these realities requires not only linguistic expertise but also deep cultural understanding, ethnographic awareness, and strategic

adaptation to ensure that the target audience appreciates both the literal and symbolic significance of the source material.

### Methodology and Data

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a comparative analysis of English, Korean, and Uzbek texts to investigate the translation of culinary realities. The data were drawn from diverse sources, including culinary articles, recipe books, ethnographic studies, and literary texts, ensuring a comprehensive representation of cultural contexts. Both source texts and their translations were analyzed to understand how semantic, pragmatic, and cultural meanings are preserved, adapted, or explained in translation.

The research emphasizes translation strategies for handling culinary realities, including:

1. Domestication - Adapting a culinary term to a concept familiar in the target culture. For example, translating **김치** (kimchi) as “fermented cabbage” in English simplifies the term for general comprehension but sacrifices cultural nuance, as the dish represents Korean identity, fermentation traditions, and communal preparation practices.

2. Foreignization - Retaining the original term and providing additional explanation or footnotes. This strategy preserves cultural authenticity and introduces the reader to new concepts. For instance, **kimchi** may be rendered as “kimchi, a traditional Korean fermented cabbage dish,” accompanied by contextual notes about its historical, nutritional, and social significance.

3. Descriptive Translation - Offering detailed descriptions of culinary practices, ingredients, or rituals associated with the dish. For example, **tteokguk** (떡국) can be translated as “tteokguk, a traditional rice cake soup eaten during Korean Lunar New Year, symbolizing age and renewal.” This method combines clarity with cultural depth, making it suitable for academic or ethnographic publications.

### Case Studies

#### 1. Kimchi (김치)

- a) English Domestication: “fermented cabbage”
- b) English Foreignization: “kimchi, a traditional Korean fermented cabbage dish”
- c) Uzbek Descriptive Translation: “kimchi, Koreya oshxonasida an'anaviy tayyorlanadigan, fermentatsiyadan o'tgan karam taomi”

Kimchi demonstrates how a simple ingredient (cabbage) embodies collective memory, regional variation, and social identity, which are lost if only a literal translation is applied.

## 2. Tteokguk (떡국)

a) English Descriptive Translation: "tteokguk, a soup of thinly sliced rice cakes traditionally eaten during Korean New Year"

b) Uzbek Transliteration and Note: "tteokguk, Koreya Yangi yili kunlarida iste'mol qilinadigan, yupqa kesilgan guruch keklari bilan tayyorlanadigan sho'rva"

The dish is culturally significant because it symbolizes aging, renewal, and good fortune. A literal translation, such as "rice cake soup," fails to capture these ritualistic connotations.

## 3. Thanksgiving Turkey (United States)

Korean Translation: "추수감사절 칠면조 요리 (literal), with explanatory note on cultural context"

Uzbek Translation: "Thanksgiving kurka go'shti, (AQShda har yili minnatdorchilik bayramida tayyorlanadigan an'anaviy taom)"

This example illustrates how English culinary terms may require descriptive contextualization when translated into Korean or Uzbek due to differences in ritual and seasonal practices.

## 4. Sumalak (Uzbek)

English Descriptive Translation: "sumalak, a sweet wheat germ pudding prepared during Navruz festival in Uzbekistan"

Korean Transliteration with Explanation: "수말락, 우즈베키스탄의 나브루즈 축제 기간에 준비되는 달콤한 밀싹 푸딩"

Sumalak's preparation involves communal effort, reflecting social cohesion and cultural continuity, which must be conveyed in translation beyond mere naming.

## 5. Banchan (반찬)

English Transliteration and Note: "banchan, assorted Korean side dishes served with every meal"

Uzbek Explanation: "banchan, har bir koreys taomiga xizmat qilinadigan turli xil kichik salatlar va garnirlar to'plami"

Banchan represents not just variety in taste but also etiquette, balance, and harmony in Korean dining culture.

Other examples include:

**Gochujang (고추장)** - Korean chili paste; symbolizes spiciness and fermentation culture.

**Plov (Uzbek)** - Uzbek pilaf; associated with hospitality and celebration.

**Eomuk (어묵)** - Korean fish cake; represents street food culture and convenience.

**Cholerm (Choler)** - A traditional Uzbek soup; carries regional identity and ritual significance.

**Cornbread (United States)** - Reflects Southern US culinary heritage.

Overall, these culinary realities demonstrate how food serves as a medium of cultural expression, reflecting historical traditions, social identity, and communal values across different societies. Translating such terms requires attention to both linguistic accuracy and cultural context to preserve their full meaning.

### Conclusion

Culinary realities, as a subset of cultural realities, reflect both tangible food items and intangible aspects of history, identity, and social values. They act as cultural markers revealing traditions, collective memory, and social practices.

Translating culinary realities presents challenges due to the lack of direct equivalents and the need to preserve cultural significance. Literal translation may overlook symbolic meaning, while excessive domestication can erase the source culture's identity. A balanced approach, using foreignization, domestication, and descriptive translation, helps retain cultural authenticity while ensuring comprehension.

Translators act as cultural mediators, requiring not only linguistic competence but also knowledge of historical, social, and symbolic contexts. Contextual adaptation is also important: domestication suits practical texts like cookbooks, while foreignization with explanation benefits literary or ethnographic works.

In conclusion, culinary realities are living representations of culture. Effective translation combines strategic methods with cultural literacy, allowing readers to access both the semantic content and cultural significance, fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication.

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