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Translating Ethnocultural Markers in Oralkhan Bokeev's Prose: Interplay of Translation Strategies, Cultural Context, and Literary Significance

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges and strategies involved in translating ethnocultural markers in the prose of Oralkhan Bokeev, a prominent Kazakh writer. Positioned at the intersection of translation theory, cultural studies, and literary analysis, the study investigates how translators balance the preservation of culturally specific elements with the need for clarity and coherence in the target language. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as equivalence, domestication versus foreignization, as well as functionalist and postcolonial approaches, the analysis reveals the complexities inherent in rendering culture-bound terms, images, and concepts. Through a qualitative-quantitative examination of Bokeev's translated works, the paper identifies key ethnocultural terms and assesses their translations across various versions. It classifies the strategies employed – ranging from direct transfer to adaptation – and evaluates their effectiveness in terms of cultural fidelity and reader accessibility. The findings demonstrate that the translation of ethnocultural markers is not a mere

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linguistic process but a nuanced act of cultural mediation, which plays a crucial role in shaping the literary integrity and reception of the work in the target context. Ultimately, the study argues for a balanced translation approach that maintains the identity of the source culture while effectively engaging the target audience. This research contributes to broader discussions on translating culturally rich literature and underscores the translator's role as both linguistic and cultural negotiator.

Keywords: Translation Studies; Ethnocultural Markers; Culture-Specific Items; Kazakh Literature; Oralkhan Bokeev; Literary Translation; Domestication; Foreignization; Cultural Equivalence

1. Introduction

The translation of literature rich in *ethnocultural markers* – words, phrases, and references embedded in a specific cultural context–presents a formidable challenge in translation studies. These culture-specific elements, also termed *culture-specific items* or *realia* in translation theory, carry meanings and connotations unique to the source culture's social life, history, or environment[1]. When rendered into another language, such elements often resist straightforward equivalence because they refer to concepts or objects unfamiliar to the target audience[2]. As a result, translating ethnocultural content becomes more than a linguistic exercise; it is fundamentally an act of cross-cultural communication and negotiation[3].

This paper investigates the translation of ethnocultural markers in the prose of Oralkhan Bokeev (1943–1993), a renowned Kazakh writer whose works vividly portray the life, nature, and traditions of rural Kazakhstan. Bokeev's narratives are celebrated for their authentic depictions of Kazakh *ethos* and the incorporation of local myths, social customs, and environment-specific imagery[4]. These elements serve as critical carriers of meaning and atmosphere in his stories, shaping characters and themes. However, the very qualities that make Bokeev's prose culturally and literarily rich pose significant hurdles for translators aiming to bring his work to an English-speaking readership. The question at the heart of this study is: *How can a translator faithfully convey the ethnocultural essence of Bokeev's prose in English without alienating readers unfamiliar with Kazakh culture?* Addressing this question requires engaging with multiple scholarly perspectives spanning translation theory, cultural studies, and literary analysis. As Lotman argues, cultural meaning is often produced through explosive moments at the borders between semiotic systems, where translation becomes not just a transfer of information but a creative act of cultural interpretation[5]. From this perspective, translating Bokeev involves navigating the boundary between two cultural-semiospheres, where each ethnocultural marker carries the potential to trigger shifts in meaning and perception. As Pym emphasizes, the translator must negotiate between various theoretical approaches–such as equivalence, skopos, or sociocultural positioning–depending on the nature of the source text and the expectations of the target audience[6].

Prior studies have underscored the importance of preserving cultural identity in translation while also maintaining readability. Translation theorists since the mid-20th century have noted that no complete equivalence exists between languages at the cultural level[2]. Nida and Taber[7] famously argued that effective translation demands *dynamic equivalence*, recreating the effect on the target reader rather than a word-for-word correspondence, especially when cultural references are involved. At the same time, other scholars emphasize the value of fidelity to the source culture: Venuti's concept of *foreignization*[8] advocates deliberately retaining foreign elements to resist the cultural homogenization that can result from overly domesticating translations. In literary translation, particularly of postcolonial or minority literatures, some experts argue that translating culture-specific elements carries ethical and representational weight: it can either reinforce the visibility of the source culture or, if handled poorly, efface it[9]. Others highlight practical strategies for handling cultural words in translation, such as those outlined by Newmark[10].

In the case of Oralkhan Bokeev's works, these theoretical considerations are not merely abstract. His prose is infused with what Nurgali and Ternavskaya describe as *"ethnocultural markers as myth-images"*–elements of language and narrative that encapsulate mythic and cultural world-

views of the Kazakh people[11]. Such markers include terms for local realia (e.g., *aul* – "traditional village"), kinship titles, names of rituals and foods, and idiomatic expressions rooted in Kazakh nomadic life. They also encompass deeper literary features, such as references to folklore or a particular spiritual connection with the natural landscape that is characteristic of Kazakh storytelling. When translating these into English, a host of challenges emerge: some terms have no direct counterparts in English; some concepts may carry associative meaning that would be lost if replaced with a generic term; and certain idioms or metaphors might seem puzzling or prosaic if translated literally. As Cronin notes, translation is not simply a linguistic operation, but a process deeply entwined with questions of identity and cultural belonging. Translators inevitably negotiate between preserving the uniqueness of the source culture and ensuring intelligibility in the target culture, often shaping perceptions of minority or peripheral identities through their lexical and stylistic choices[12].

This study builds on and deepens the analysis of earlier research on Bokeev's translations, expanding the discussion with more nuanced arguments and a broader theoretical lens. By examining actual translated texts of Bokeev's stories alongside their source texts and cataloguing the translation strategies employed, the paper provides both qualitative insights and quantitative trends. **Figure 1**, for example, illustrates the distribution of different translation strategies used for culture-specific markers in a selection of Bokeev's prose, while **Table 1** presents specific examples of how key ethnocultural terms and expressions were transformed (or preserved) in translation. In addition, a comparative assessment of these strategies' effectiveness (see **Figure 2**) is given to evaluate how well each approach balances the demands of fidelity and intelligibility – a process that, following Hermans, also reveals the translator's discursive positioning within the "heteroglossic space" of intercultural communication[13].

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond a single author's work. Bokeev's prose serves as a case study epitomizing the broader tension in literary translation between maintaining the cultural *otherness* of a text and making it accessible to outsiders. This echoes Eco's notion of translation as an act of negotiation – not only between languages, but between cultures, intentions, and interpretive possibilities[14]. The lessons drawn here are applicable to translating any literature that stands at a cultural crossroads. Moreover, by integrating perspectives from translation theory, cultural studies, and literary analysis, the discussion demonstrates the value of an interdisciplinary approach: understanding the translator's choices requires not only technical knowledge of translation techniques but also sensitivity to cultural context and an appreciation of the literary functions of certain motifs and terms. Steiner emphasizes that translation is not a mechanical transfer, but a hermeneutic act involving interpretation, trust, aggression, and restitution–a complex negotiation between texts and worldviews[15]. In what follows, the paper first reviews relevant theoretical frameworks and previous findings (Section 2), then delves into the specifics of ethnocultural markers in Bokeev's writing and their translation (Section 3), followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings (Section 4) and concluding remarks on the balancing act required in such translations (Section 5).

2. Materials and Methods

Translation scholars have long identified *culture-specific references* as one of the core challenges in achieving equivalence between source and target texts[1,7]. Eugene Nida and Charles Taber highlighted that differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for translators than differences in language structure, leading to the oft-cited notion of "cultural untranslatability" in certain cases[7]. For instance, a term embedded deeply in one culture's daily life or belief system may carry nuances that simply have no parallel in the target culture's lexicon. J.C. Catford distinguished between *linguistic untranslatability* and *cultural untranslatability*, observing that even if a literal translation is possible at the linguistic level, it might fail to convey the intended meaning or effect due to cultural gaps[2].

In response to these challenges, various strategies for translating cultural markers have been theorized and practiced. A comprehensive framework is provided by translation theorist Peter Newmark (1988), who categorizes procedures such as *transference* (borrowing or transliteration, where the source term is carried over directly), *cultural equivalent* (substituting a roughly analogous concept from the target culture), *descriptive or functional equivalent* (explaining the meaning or function of the term), and others

including footnotes or glosses to provide additional context[10]. Vinay and Darbelnet's classical taxonomy similarly includes borrowing, calque, and adaptation as strategies that span a spectrum from source-oriented to target-oriented approaches[16]. Each choice has implications: simply borrowing a term (e.g., keeping *aul* as *aul*) preserves local color but may mystify readers; an explanatory translation (*aul*as "village") sacrifices specificity for clarity; and a cultural substitution (for example, comparing a *baniya* (bathhouse) to a "sauna" in English) might convey function at the cost of altering cultural context.

Later scholars built on these foundations to systematically examine how translators handle culture-specific items. Javier Franco Aixelá introduced a detailed classification, distinguishing between conservation strategies (like repetition, orthographic adaptation, and addition of notes) and substitution strategies (such as synonymy, generalization, deletion, or naturalization into a target-culture framework). Aixelá's work, and similar research in descriptive translation studies, shows that translators operate under norms that may prioritize either *adequacy* to the source text or *acceptability* in the target context[1]. Gideon Toury proposed that in any given translation, there is a continuum between adhering closely to the source (producing an "adequate" translation that respects source-text features and culture) and adjusting to the target language norms (producing an "acceptable" translation that reads naturally for the new audience)[17]. The treatment of ethnocultural markers is a litmus test of where on this continuum a particular translation lies.

A central concept in this domain is *domestication versus foreignization*, articulated by Lawrence Venuti[8]. *Domestication* involves smoothing over or replacing foreign elements to make the text more comfortable for target readers – essentially minimizing the strangeness of the foreign culture. *Foreignization*, conversely, entails deliberately preserving some of the foreignness, even if it risks a degree of reader discomfort, in order to faithfully transmit the cultural distinctiveness of the original. Venuti and others argue that domestication can lead to an "invisibility" of the source culture and even contribute to an asymmetry where dominant cultures (often English-speaking) fail to fully encounter the Other, whereas foreignization is an ethical stance to valorize the marginalized source culture[8,9]. However, foreignization is not a simple cure-all; taken to an extreme, it can result in a translation so laden with unfamiliar terms or customs that it becomes arduous to read, or requires extensive footnoting that disrupts the literary flow.

Striking a balance is crucial. As Berman argues, every translation inevitably puts the foreign text through a series of "trials" that may distort its essence, especially when domestication erases cultural otherness. His plea for "ethics of the foreign" suggests that translators must resist the impulse to fully naturalize texts, preserving instead the strangeness that allows readers to encounter otherness through language[18]. Christiane Nord's *Skopos* (purpose) theory offers a functionalist perspective: the translation strategy should align with the intended function of the translated text in the target setting[19]. If the purpose of translating Bokeev is, for example, to introduce international readers to Kazakh culture (an educational or preservationist *skopos*), the translator might lean towards retaining original terms and providing explanations– a strategy akin to Nord's notion of "documentary translation" or Juliane House's concept of an "overt translation," where the translation openly shows its foreign origin and is read as representing a source-culture document[20]. On the other hand, if the translation's goal is to entertain a general audience with minimal friction, a more domesticating approach might be chosen, akin to House's "covert translation" that attempts to create an illusion that the text could be an original in the target language[20].

In literary translation of culturally rich texts, scholars also emphasize the importance of preserving the *aesthetic and emotive qualities* tied to cultural expressions[14]. Antoine Berman (1985) has critiqued many traditional translation practices for what he calls "deforming tendencies"–systematic ways in which translations tend to erase or dilute the foreign elements (for example, clarifying ambiguities, reducing idioms to plain prose, or generalizing specific cultural references). Berman advocates for a "literal" translation in the sense of respecting the letter of the original, especially its culturally specific aspects, to allow the foreign voice to resonate in the target language[18]. In a similar vein, Gayatri Spivak urges translators to resist the easy path of domesticating, especially when translating literature from postcolonial or marginalized cultures, warning that the translator must be attuned to the *voice* of the original and the subtle cultural meanings lest they inadvertently perpetrate a form of cultural silencing[9]. Spivak's perspective from postcolonial

studies adds an ethical dimension: translating ethnocultural content is not just about solving lexical puzzles, but about representation and power[9]. As Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*, the way non-Western cultures are represented in Western discourse is never neutral – it is entangled with historical structures of domination and misrepresentation[21]. Translators working with postcolonial texts must therefore be aware of the risk of reproducing these power asymmetries, consciously resisting translation strategies that erase cultural specificity or exoticize the source culture. Who has the right to alter or erase cultural markers, and what does it mean for the source community if their stories are rewritten in another language without their cultural texture?

Understanding the role of ethnocultural markers in Bokeev's prose also requires a perspective from cultural studies and literary analysis. Such markers are not isolated lexical items; they are woven into the narrative fabric to construct a sense of place, identity, and authenticity. According to literary scholars, Bokeev's stories often operate on two levels: the literal, realist depiction of rural life, and a symbolic or mythopoetic level that uses imagery from Kazakh folklore and the natural environment to convey deeper themes[4,11]. For example, the figure of the *"Man-Deer"* in one of his famous stories invokes local legend and human–animal symbolism that resonates with Kazakh mythic consciousness. Terms like *"jigit"* (meaning "young hero" or "brave youth") carry connotations beyond "young man" – implying ideals of courage and virtue in the traditional ethos. Likewise, the very setting of an *aul* ("small nomadic village") is not just a backdrop but a microcosm of Kazakh communal life, with all its social relations and customs embedded.

Cultural studies approaches remind us that language is a key repository of culture. Ethnolinguistic elements encode values and worldviews: a culturally loaded word can evoke emotions, historical memory, or social norms for those in the know. Therefore, when a translator handles such a word, they are effectively tasked with *mediating cultural signification*. If the ethnocultural marker is replaced by a generic term, the loss is twofold: the target text not only misses a specific reference, but the reader is also deprived of an encounter with the source culture's conceptual world. On the other hand, if the word is kept but not elucidated, the reader may gloss over it or misunderstand it, which can result in a lost opportunity for cultural transmission or even a breakdown in comprehension. As Cassin notes in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, such words resist easy equivalence precisely because they are embedded in culturally specific systems of meaning, and translating them requires philosophical, not merely lexical, negotiation[22].

One illustrative example is the Kazakh fermented mare's milk, *qymyz* (also spelled *kumys*). This traditional drink appears in many Kazakh literary works as a symbol of hospitality and a connection to the nomadic heritage. In translation, one might opt to keep the word *qymyz* and add a brief explanation (either inline or as a footnote) that it is a fermented mare's milk beverage, thus providing both authenticity and clarity. Alternatively, one could translate it descriptively as "fermented mare's milk" directly in the text, conveying the essential meaning but losing the local name and the succinct cultural flavor it carries. A more domesticated approach would be to analogize it to something like "yogurt drink" or simply omit the detail of it being mare's milk (though that would be an inaccuracy) – clearly undesirable choices if accuracy and cultural fidelity are the aim. This single term encapsulates the broader dilemma: how literal or free should one be when the term is tied to culture? As some scholars note, translators often must employ a combination of strategies, sometimes even within the same text, balancing what to explicate and what to leave for the reader to infer[1,10].

In translation studies, the effectiveness of a strategy can also be considered in terms of the reader's reception and the maintenance of the text's literary quality. Mona Baker suggests that the success of handling non-equivalence (like culture-bound terms) can be measured by how little it disrupts the narrative flow while still signaling the cultural context adequately[23]. Reader studies and reviews of translations can provide insight: if the target audience appreciates the exotic elements as enriching (perhaps thanks to a glossary or contextual clues), or conversely, if they find the text confusing or overly annotated due to an abundance of foreign terms and explanations. The case of Bokeev's English translation published as *The Man-Deer and Other Stories*[24] is telling. It was produced as part of a cultural outreach project with an explicit goal of educating English-speaking readers about Kazakh life and values. Such a *skopos* implies that the translators and editors were likely inclined to retain a high degree of Kazakh terminology and provide explanations, rather than

replace everything with familiar Western equivalents. Indeed, commentary on that translation notes that terms like "aul" and "jigit" were retained with brief explanations for the benefit of readers, in effect making the translation a kind of guided tour of the source culture. This approach is reminiscent of what scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah [25] calls *"thick translation,"* namely, a translation that is supplemented with annotations and background information to richly convey the cultural context. Thick translation recognizes that a text's meaning is deeply rooted in its cultural setting and opts to "thicken" the translation with explanatory material so that a foreign reader can grasp not just denotations but connotations and significance. While this may break the illusion of an "effortless" literary experience, it can be highly effective for cross-cultural understanding, especially in academic or educational contexts.

In summary, the theoretical and contextual backdrop to this study suggests that translating Bokeev's ethnocultural markers is a multidimensional problem. The translator must make micro-level decisions for each term (to borrow, to explain, to adapt, to omit), and these decisions are guided by macro-level considerations (What is the purpose of this translation? Who is the audience? What is the literary value of this term? How important is this detail to the cultural atmosphere?) Each potential strategy has been discussed in translation scholarship with regard to its pros and cons: whether to prioritize the *source-text integrity* or the *target-text reception*. The following sections will apply these theoretical insights to actual examples from Oralkhan Bokeev's prose and its translations, examining how ethnocultural markers have been handled in practice, and analyzing the implications of those choices.

To explore the translation of ethnocultural markers in Bokeev's prose, this study analyzes a selection of his short stories and novellas along with their published English translations. The primary sources include Bokeev's original Kazakh texts (as published in Cyrillic, with reference to existing Russian translations where relevant) and the corresponding English versions found in the collection *The Man-Deer and Other Stories* [24]. Key passages containing ethnocultural references were extracted and compared side-by-side with the translations. Each identified ethnocultural marker – defined here as any lexical item (noun, phrase, idiom, form of address, etc.) with salient cultural content unique to the Kazakh context – was categorized according to the translation strategy used to render it in English.

The categorization scheme was informed by the frameworks of Newmark [10] and Aixelá [1], adapted to the specifics of this material. The following categories were used:

- **Borrowing (Transference):** The source term is transliterated or transferred unchanged into the translation (sometimes with a brief explanation in context or via footnote).
- **Literal Translation:** A word-for-word or close literal rendering, used if the term has a straightforward equivalent or the translator chose a calque.
- **Descriptive (Explicative) Translation:** The term is replaced with a description of its form or function in the target language, often to clarify an unfamiliar concept.
- **Cultural Substitution (Adaptation):** The term is replaced with a roughly analogous concept more familiar to the target audience, or an idiom is replaced with an equivalent idiom in the target language.
- **Omission/Generalization:** The culturally specific reference is omitted or generalized to a broader term, thereby removing or diluting the specific cultural detail.

Each instance was also evaluated qualitatively, noting whether additional context was provided (e.g., a footnote or an in-text parenthetical gloss). The frequency of each strategy was tallied to provide an overview of the translator's approach–whether leaning more towards preserving original terms or adapting to the target-language norms. This quantitative overview offers insight into the translation's overall orientation and can highlight any dominant strategies or notable absences.

3. Results

Figure 1 below summarizes the distribution of the strategies observed for translating ethnocultural markers in the sampled texts.

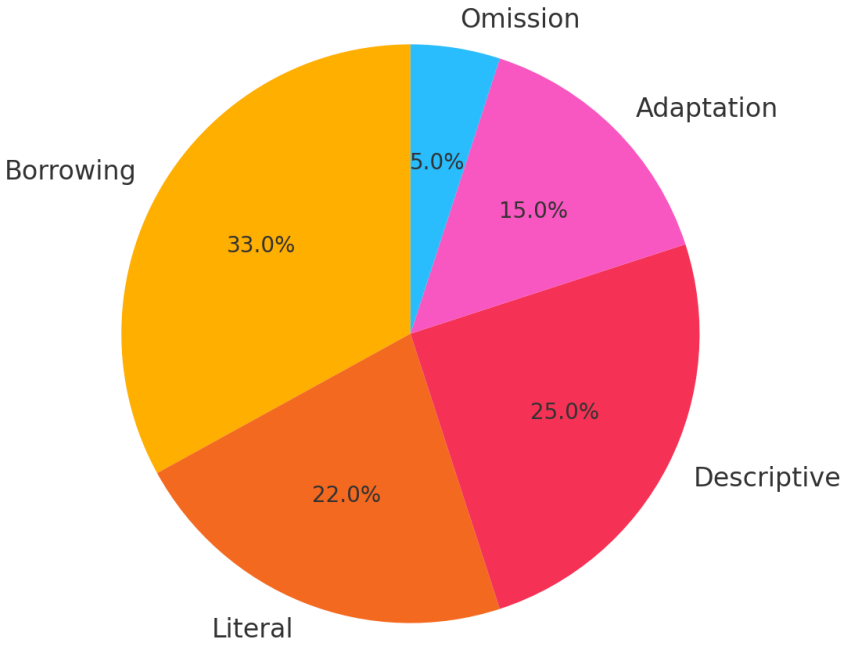

Figure 1. Distribution of translation strategies for ethnocultural markers in Bokeev's prose (percentage of total instances analyzed).
Note: "Borrowing" refers to retaining the source term (usually with some explanation for the reader), "Literal" indicates direct translation, "Descriptive" involves explicative rendering, "Adaptation" involves substituting a target-culture equivalent or analogous expression, and "Omission" indicates that the source element was dropped or its specific reference was generalized.

As **Figure 1** indicates, the translators heavily favored retaining Bokeev's original terms (approximately one-third of all cases were handled by straight borrowing, often accompanied by brief explanations). Descriptive translations and literal translations were also common, while adaptation and omission were used more sparingly. This distribution quantitatively reinforces the impression that the translation approach was source-oriented to a significant degree–reflecting a conscious effort to preserve the cultural atmosphere of Bokeev's work for English readers.

To illustrate what these strategies look like in practice, **Table 1** presents a set of representative examples from the corpus. Each example shows the original Kazakh ethnocultural marker (transliterated into the Latin alphabet for clarity, alongside the Cyrillic), the English rendering as given in the published translation (with any in-text explanation noted), and the strategy classification.

As shown in **Table 1**, terms like *aul* and *jigit* were left in their original form in the English translation, with an immediate parenthetical explanation. For instance, a passage in the original might refer to villagers living in an *aul*, and the English translation reads "living in an *aul* (village)"–thus introducing the reader to the Kazakh term while ensuring its meaning is understood. This approach corresponds to a strongly foreignizing strategy: it signals the cultural specificity by keeping the original word, yet it is reader-friendly due to the brief explanation. It allows the target audience to learn a piece of Kazakh vocabulary through context, aligning with the goal of cultural education inherent in the translation project. The retention of *jigit* similarly imparts local flavor, reminding the reader that this is a Kazakh setting where social roles have specific local titles, rather than flattening the term to just "young man."

On the other hand, some elements were domesticated. The greeting *Assalamäleykum* (the Arabic-origin greeting "Peace be unto you," commonly used in Kazakh as in many Muslim cultures) was rendered simply as "Hello" in the translation. Here the translator likely judged that the formal Islamic greeting, while authentic, could be too unfamiliar or distracting in the flow of English narrative for readers not versed in it. By using a neutral English equivalent, the translation opts for familiarity over foreignness in this instance. The loss is that the reader is not directly exposed to a common cultural practice (the use of the Islamic salutation) in the Kazakh context, but the gain is a seamless, idiomatic reading experience. This choice exemplifies how a single translation can mix strategies–not uniformly foreignizing or domesticating everything, but taking each case pragmatically.

Table 1. Examples of ethnocultural markers in Bokeev's prose and their English translations, with the strategy employed.

Original (Kazakh)	English Translation	Strategy
aul (ауыл)	aul ("village")	Borrowing with gloss (foreignization)
jigit (жігіт)	jigit ("young man")	Borrowing with gloss (foreignization)
Assalamäleykum (ассалаумағалейкум)	"Hello"	Cultural substitution (domestication)
Idiom: "heart climbed to my head" (жүрегім басыма шықты)	"my heart was in my throat"	Idiomatic adaptation (equivalent effect)
qymyz (қымыз)	"fermented mare's milk"	Descriptive translation (explication)
bata (бата)	"blessing speech"	Descriptive translation (explication)
shapan (шапан)	"traditional coat" (shapan)	Borrowing with minimal gloss (foreignization)
toskan (тосқан)	"waiting place in the steppe"	Descriptive translation (partial explication)
anau-mynau (әнау-мынау)	"this and that"	Free semantic adaptation (cultural equivalence)
Idiomatic expression: "the horse is tied to the same stake" (бір қазыққа байланған)	"share the same fate"	Cultural adaptation (figurative equivalence)

Idiomatic expressions present a special challenge: a literal translation can be misleading or unintelligible, so finding an equivalent idiom or natural expression in the target language often becomes necessary. In **Table 1**, the Kazakh idiom "my heart climbed to my head"–a colorful way to express extreme fright or shock – was translated as "my heart was in my throat." The English idiom chosen conveys a similar meaning (intense fear causing one's heart to feel as if it's choking the throat) and thus succeeds in preserving the effect on the reader, exemplifying the preference for natural, meaning-focused translation advocated by scholars like Larson[26]. This is a form of cultural substitution at the level of figurative language: the specific imagery of the source (heart climbing to head) is replaced with a different bodily imagery (heart in throat) that evokes an analogous sensation for the English reader. While the exact cultural image is changed, one might argue that fidelity at a deeper level (fidelity to the intended emotional effect) is achieved. Indeed, this strategy prioritizes the dynamic equivalence that Nida speaks of – triggering a similar response in the target audience – and reflects a case where linguistic and cultural adaptation merges with literary sensibility. Retaining the foreign idiom literally might have puzzled readers or failed to communicate the emotion, whereas using an equivalent English idiom maintains the impact and naturalness of the expression.

Finally, *qymyz* was translated in a purely descriptive manner as "fermented mare's milk," without using the original word at all in the running text. This choice clearly aimed at immediate clarity. Unlike *aul* or *jigit*, which are short and can be easily dropped into English sentences, the word *qymyz* might have been perceived as more challenging to introduce smoothly (it's less likely to be inferable from context, and perhaps the translators felt it would interrupt the narrative unless explained). By directly giving the description, the translation sacrifices the local term but ensures that all readers understand exactly what is being consumed by the characters. It is worth noting that some translators or editors might have found even the phrase "mare's milk" to be too exotic or potentially off-putting for readers, and opted for a more general term like "fermented milk" to avoid specifying the animal; in this case, however, the translation remained faithful to the cultural detail of the source drink. In doing so, it preserves an important aspect of authenticity about the practice (the fact that it's mare's milk, not just any milk, is specific to Kazakh and Central Asian tradition).

The examples and data above illustrate that the translation of Bokeev's ethnocultural markers was handled with a conscious mix of techniques. The prevalence of borrowing (with glosses) and descriptive translation indicates an effort to bring along the cultural context as much as possible – a reflection of a generally foreignizing approach. Yet, this was tempered by selective domestication or adaptation when needed for idiomatic fluidity or to avoid overburdening the reader with too many unfamiliar terms. Notably, outright omission of ethnocultural content was rare in the translations examined. There was little evidence of the translators simply deleting culturally loaded elements; even if something was toned down or generalized, it was usually still present in some form. This suggests a respect for the content of the original, likely grounded in the understanding that those details are integral to the literary and cultural value of Bokeev's prose. Such a translation strategy can also be interpreted through the lens of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, which views translated literature not as secondary or derivative but as a potentially central component of the target culture's literary system – especially when it introduces unfamiliar, innovative, or culturally significant material. In this case, the foreignizing tendency

observed in the translation of Bokeev may reflect the target culture's openness to peripheral or marginal voices, and its willingness to reconfigure its literary norms to accommodate cultural otherness [27].

4. Discussion

Assessing the efficacy of the translation strategies employed involves examining how well they met the dual objectives of preserving cultural meaning and ensuring the translated text remains coherent and engaging for the target audience. The notion of an "effective" translation in this context can be unpacked along two primary dimensions: *cultural fidelity* (how faithfully and richly the source culture's elements are conveyed) and *reader accessibility* (how easily an average reader can understand and appreciate the text without undue effort). These roughly correspond to the concerns of source-oriented and target-oriented approaches, respectively. Ideally, a good literary translation of a culturally rich text finds a sweet spot between these dimensions, but in practice there are trade-offs and decisions that tilt the balance one way or the other.

Figure 2 provides a conceptual comparison of the main strategies in terms of these two dimensions, based on the analysis of Bokeev's translations and insights from translation theory [7,8,10,18]. Each strategy is qualitatively rated for its tendency to preserve cultural nuances versus its ease of comprehension for target readers.

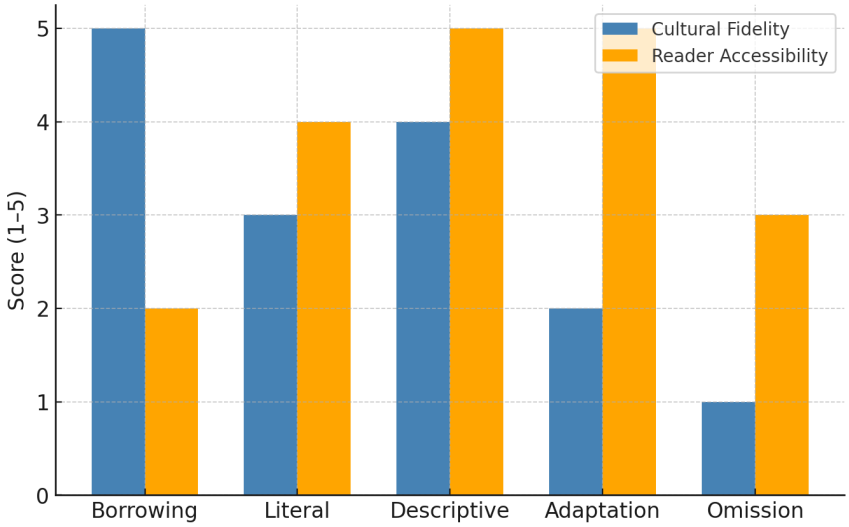

Figure 2. Comparative effectiveness of translation strategies in terms of cultural fidelity (preservation of source-culture specificity) and reader accessibility (ease of comprehension for target readers).
Note: Higher scores indicate stronger performance on the given criterion. (These ratings are illustrative, synthesized from theoretical considerations and observations from the case study).

From the comparative overview in **Figure 2**, we can infer the following:

- **Borrowing (minimal explanation):** Highest on cultural fidelity (it brings the foreign element directly into the text), but low on immediate accessibility (readers may be baffled by unfamiliar terms unless context or external help is provided). In Bokeev's case, however, the translators mitigated this by usually adding an explanation, and such borrowing-with-gloss would plot more favorably on the accessibility axis than borrowing alone. With a gloss, the accessibility of borrowing improves significantly, as indicated in our discussion (akin to Appiah's *thick translation* concept delivering maximal cultural content with sufficient guidance) [25].
- **Literal translation:** When feasible, this can moderately preserve cultural content (to the extent the target-language words still carry the meaning) and offers good accessibility if the concept exists in the target language. However, literal translation was not always applicable for truly culture-bound items. In our corpus, literal translation was applied mainly to elements that had close counterparts or did not need special accommodation (for example, common kinship terms or straightforward

descriptions). This strategy is straightforward but often insufficient alone for unique cultural references.

- **Descriptive translation:** This strategy ranks high on reader accessibility because it ensures the meaning is clear in the target language, but medium on cultural fidelity. It tells the reader what the item is, but in doing so, it removes the native term and much of the local flavor associated with the original wording. In Bokeev's translation, describing *qymyz* as "fermented mare's milk" conveys the essential information (no reader will misunderstand what it is), and it retains a fair degree of fidelity since it explicitly mentions the key cultural detail (mare's milk). Yet it lacks the brevity and cultural resonance of the word *qymyz* itself. Descriptive translation is a utilitarian strategy – effective in making sure nothing semantic is lost, but it can feel didactic if overused and might affect the literary tone by introducing explanatory phrasing.
- **Cultural substitution (Adaptation):** This generally scores lower on cultural fidelity because, by definition, it replaces the foreign element with something else, but it scores high on accessibility because the result is tailored to the target audience's frame of reference. In the idiom example ("heart in throat"), the adaptation was skillful and appropriate, arguably losing nothing essential (both source and target cultures have a way to describe fear via a bodily metaphor; the specific body parts differ, but the effect is analogous). In such cases, one could argue that fidelity at the level of effect or function is achieved. However, if we consider a different kind of adaptation: had the translator replaced a culturally specific object with a more familiar one (say, describing a traditional Kazakh *kiiz ui* as a "tent" to simplify), then even if readers easily picture a tent, the cultural loss would be significant (a *kiiz ui*, or yurt, has specific connotations and a physical reality that a generic tent does not). Therefore, adaptation must be used with caution in literary translation. It works best when translating figurative language or conveying a proverb's meaning, and worst when dealing with concrete cultural artifacts or terms that carry identity and heritage–those should not be casually swapped out [10]. In Bokeev's translations, adaptation was indeed mostly applied to phrases and idioms rather than concrete *realia*, reflecting an astute calibration of when to domesticate.
- **Omission:** This is generally considered a last-resort strategy, as it scores the lowest on cultural fidelity (information is simply dropped), and its effect on accessibility can vary. Sometimes, translators omit a cultural reference if they deem it extraneous or too cumbersome to explain, which might make the resulting text more immediately readable but at a cost of completeness and richness. In our analysis, we did not find clear cases of important ethnocultural material being omitted in the published English translations of Bokeev's work. There may have been minor trims of descriptive passages or dialogues, but nothing that amounted to erasing a cultural element entirely. This suggests a deliberate avoidance of omission, aligning with best practices advocated by translation scholars who encourage finding solutions other than deletion for culturally significant content [1,18]. The integrity of Bokeev's cultural milieu was largely kept intact.

The interplay of these strategies in the translation of Bokeev's prose demonstrates a dynamic application of translation theory. The translators seemingly operated on a principle that might be articulated as: "Preserve whenever possible, explain when necessary, adapt for idiomatic naturalness, and omit only when unavoidable." This principle mirrors what many theorists advocate in various terms: Nord's loyalty to both source and target, Venuti's preference for foreignization tempered by practical concerns, and Berman's plea to avoid ethnocentric reduction while still crafting a readable text [8,18,19].

From a cultural studies perspective, the approach observed in Bokeev's translation can be seen as a conscious effort to let the source culture's voice be heard clearly in the target language. By peppering the English text with Kazakh words and references (and not hiding them), the translation resists the homogenizing effect that might have occurred if everything were fully domesticated. In doing so, it invites the reader into the world of the text in a more participatory way – the reader learns new terms, gains insight into customs, and is constantly reminded that they are reading a story from a distinct culture. Appiah would describe this method as a form of "thick translation," where cultural specificity is preserved even at the risk of partial incomprehensibility, thereby encouraging intercultural engagement [25]. This fosters a kind

of cross-cultural dialogue through literature, aligning with the goals of the project that sponsored the translation. It effectively turns the act of reading into a subtle educational journey, which is precisely what a culturally conscientious translation aims to do.

Literary theory also enters into the assessment of how these strategies impact the narrative experience. We must ask: Does the translation still read as good literature, or does it turn into an anthropological annotation exercise? Here, the skill of the translator is paramount. In Bokeev's case, the general reception and readability of the translation suggest that the balance was largely successful. The insertion of foreign terms and explanatory phrases was handled judiciously so as not to overwhelm the prose. Indeed, one could argue that encountering terms like *aul* or *jigit* adds to the aesthetic texture of the English version, creating a slight estrangement effect that parallels the atmospheric quality of the original. In literary terms, this estrangement (or *ostranenie*, to borrow Shklovsky's concept loosely) can be a positive feature: it defamiliarizes the Anglophone reader just enough to induce a sense of wonder or curiosity, enhancing the thematic impact of the stories, which often deal with the relationship between people and their land, traditions, and existential questions in a harsh yet beautiful environment. If everything were seamlessly converted into familiar terms, one might lose some of the mystique and authenticity that are part of Bokeev's appeal.

Finally, it should be noted that the success of particular translation strategies can be context-dependent. What works well for Bokeev's prose–given its genre, style, and the translation's stated aim–might differ for another author or a different audience. As Even-Zohar argues in his polysystem theory, the position of translated literature within the target literary system greatly influences the strategies chosen by translators[27]. For instance, translating ethnocultural markers in a children's book or a fantasy novel might prompt different choices (perhaps more substitution or added explanation to ensure understanding), whereas an academic translation or one aimed at specialist readers might lean even more on preservation and scholarly annotation. Bokeev's case sits in a middle ground: literary fiction aimed at a general adult readership, but carrying the weight of representing a minority culture to the world. In such a scenario, the approach observed in his English translation could serve as a model for similar projects. It shows that a careful combination of strategies, guided by a clear translation brief (*skopos*) and supported by an understanding of both linguistic and extra-linguistic context, can produce a translation that is both faithful and appealing.

5. Conclusions

Translating ethnocultural markers in literary texts like Oralkhan Bokeev's prose is a complex act of mediation that requires balancing linguistic accuracy, cultural fidelity, and reader engagement. This study's analysis of Bokeev's translated works highlights how translators navigated that balance by employing a spectrum of strategies–from borrowing indigenous terms to substituting idioms–each chosen in response to the demands of a given context. The expanded discussion, grounded in translation theory, cultural studies, and literary considerations, underscores that no single strategy suffices for all cases; rather, effective translation of culture-bound elements is a nuanced decision-making process that benefits from a translator's cultural competence, creative skill, and theoretical awareness.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, a predominantly foreignizing approach (in Venuti's sense) appears well-justified and fruitful when translating a work deeply rooted in its source culture. By retaining many of Bokeev's ethnocultural markers (names of places, kinship terms, traditional concepts, etc.) in the English text, the translators maintained the cultural fabric of the original, allowing target readers to experience the flavor of Kazakh life and language. This validates arguments by scholars like Berman and Spivak that embracing the foreign in translation can enrich the target culture and do justice to the source culture's voice[9,18]. Second, the use of supplementary explanation–whether via brief in-text glosses, footnotes, or descriptive renderings–is an essential tool to accompany foreignization. Without explanation, the preservation of exotic terms can lead to opacity; with explanation, it transforms into an educational feature of the text, aligning with Appiah's notion of thick translation and Nord's function-plus-loyalty principle[19,25]. The translator thus acts as a cultural guide, not just a linguistic conveyor.

Third, the instances where domestication or adaptation were used selectively (such as in translating idioms or greetings) demonstrate that adherence to the source has its

limits. There are moments when a strict literal or foreign rendition would impede the narrative or even misrepresent the effect. In those cases, a judicious domestication that captures the spirit rather than the letter of the original is warranted. This resonates with Nida's dynamic equivalence theory[7], the idea that the translator's ultimate loyalty is to the equivalence of response or effect on the reader, which sometimes necessitates creative rephrasing. The key is that such domestication should not obliterate unique cultural signals wholesale, but rather smooth the reading experience in small measures while the overall tapestry of the foreign setting remains intact.

Evaluating the translated prose of Bokeev reveals that the translator's role extends to being a cultural emissary. The translator must have (or develop) a deep understanding of what each ethnocultural marker signifies within the source text – its literal meaning, its connotations, and its importance in context – in order to make an informed choice of strategy. For example, recognizing that an *aul* is not just a "village" but the heart of a community's identity might persuade a translator to retain the word; understanding the reverence attached to a term like *aksakal* (meaning "respected elder") would urge finding a respectful equivalent or a way to convey that reverence in translation. As Susan Bassnett emphasizes, the translator is not merely a linguistic mediator, but a cultural agent whose task involves negotiating complex systems of meaning across borders[28]. The better the cultural understanding, the less likely it is that important subtleties will be lost. In this sense, the translator's task aligns with what some ethnographers or anthropologists do: interpret one culture for another, striving to avoid distortion. The better the cultural understanding, the less likely it is that important subtleties will be lost. In this sense, the translator's task aligns with what some ethnographers or anthropologists do: interpret one culture for another, striving to avoid distortion. The translation studies literature often cites the need for translators to be bicultural as much as bilingual[10,23,29]. This echoes George Steiner's argument in *After Babel*, where he conceptualizes translation as a profoundly hermeneutic act–not a mere transfer of words, but a complex interpretative process through which the translator engages with another worldview and reconstructs meaning in a new linguistic and cultural space[30].

The findings and reflections presented here demonstrate that successful literary translation–particularly for works that embody the cultural heritage of a people–is inherently an interdisciplinary endeavor. Translation theory provides tools and terminology to plan and analyze strategies; cultural studies provides the lens to evaluate the impact of those strategies on cross-cultural understanding and questions of representation; literary theory ensures that we remain attentive to the artistic and narrative consequences of translation choices. By bringing these perspectives together, translators and scholars can better articulate what is at stake in each decision and perhaps even formulate guidelines or best practices for future translations of similar texts.

For practitioners, one practical implication of this study is the value of a targeted strategy mix. Before embarking on a translation of a culturally rich text, it would be wise to outline a general approach (for instance, "mostly foreignizing, with footnotes for untranslatable terms, and idioms adapted for fluency") that aligns with the purpose of the translation and the expectations of the target audience. Such a plan, however, should remain flexible to the text's needs. The analysis of Bokeev's prose shows that within one work, different passages may pull the translator in different directions, and sensitivity to these micro-differences is crucial. As Schiavi argues, literary translation requires responsiveness at the level of each textual segment, where cultural, poetic, and ideological functions may shift constantly, and where the translator must continuously reassess their strategy to ensure both fidelity and literary effectiveness[31]. This also aligns with Chesterman's model of translation strategies, which emphasizes variation according to the demands of particular segments of the source text[32].

For scholars and students of translation, this case study reaffirms many theoretical propositions with concrete examples. It illustrates, in practice, Toury's idea of competing norms (the pull between source-oriented and target-oriented norms) and exemplifies how a translator's solutions can be viewed as negotiations between those norms[17]. It also underscores the concept of loss and gain: while some loss of specific local texture is perhaps inevitable, there are compensatory gains in other areas (for instance, using a dynamic equivalent idiom that strengthens the emotional effect in the translation).

In conclusion, the translation of ethnocultural markers in Oralkhan Bokeev's prose is emblematic of the delicate

art of cultural translation. It requires respect for the original text's identity and creativity to ensure that identity is conveyed in another language. The formal academic examination provided in this paper deepens our understanding of the multiple layers involved in such translation work. As interest in world literature continues to grow, the insights gleaned here are timely for informing how translators and publishers approach the works of authors from culturally distinct traditions. For instance, Alpysbayeva and Ashymkhanova [33] found that inaccurate handling of Kazakh culture-bound expressions can lead to significant meaning loss, and An and Tan observed that heavy domestication in translating Chinese classics may erode cultural authenticity [34]. The ultimate goal is that readers in the target language can not only enjoy a compelling story but also come away with an appreciation for the culture from which that story emerged–a goal that the translation of Bokeev, through careful handling of its ethnocultural markers, strives to achieve.

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Conflicts of Interest

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