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Equivalence, Adaptation, And Explicitation In Translating Euphemisms: A Comparative Study Of English And Uzbek Media Discourse

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Abstract: This study explores three key strategies - equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation - used in translating euphemisms from English to Uzbek within media texts. Drawing on examples from political, economic, and social news discourse, the research highlights how each strategy contributes to preserving the semantic, pragmatic, and cultural functions of euphemistic language. While equivalence provides lexical correspondence, it may fail to convey implicit socio-political nuances. Adaptation enables cultural alignment by reconstructing euphemisms in contextually appropriate forms. Explicitation ensures communicative clarity by revealing implied meanings otherwise obscured by linguistic or cultural gaps. The findings suggest that successful euphemism translation requires a careful balance of semantic fidelity and cultural sensitivity. The study concludes that functional and pragmatic approaches, rather than literal translation, are key to maintaining the communicative integrity and emotional resonance of euphemisms in cross-cultural media discourse.

Keywords: Euphemism; media discourse; translation

strategies; equivalence; adaptation; explicitation; cross-cultural communication; pragmatic translation; Uzbek-English translation; linguistic sensitivity.

Introduction: Euphemisms are more than mere linguistic substitutions; they are culturally encoded expressions that reflect the ideological, social, and psychological frameworks of a society. In media discourse, euphemisms function as strategic tools to mitigate negative connotations, preserve politeness, avoid taboo, and maintain sociopolitical neutrality. Their role is particularly salient in sensitive domains such as politics, economics, gender, and morality, where direct expressions may be perceived as offensive, inappropriate, or politically problematic.

The process of translating euphemisms across languages poses significant challenges, particularly when the source and target cultures differ markedly in terms of communicative norms and cultural taboos. In the case of English and Uzbek media discourse, these challenges become more pronounced due to divergent socio-cultural values - such as Western individualism and political correctness versus Eastern collectivism and moral conservatism. Euphemisms that are neutral or softened in one language may carry unintended implications or appear overly explicit in another.

Roman Jakobson (1959) identified different types of equivalence - interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic - while Eugene Nida distinguished between formal equivalence (word-for-word fidelity) and dynamic equivalence (functional, audience-oriented translation). Although equivalence remains a foundational concept, it often proves insufficient for culturally nuanced units like euphemisms, where implicit meaning and emotional tone must also be preserved.

To address these challenges, translators often employ additional strategies such as adaptation, which involves restructuring the source expression to align with the cultural norms and expectations of the target audience, and explicitation, where implicit meanings are made overt to ensure clarity and comprehension. These strategies go beyond lexical substitution and require the translator to act as an intercultural mediator, capable of interpreting and re-contextualizing euphemistic language within the framework of the target culture.

This study aims to investigate the use of equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation strategies in translating euphemisms from English to Uzbek within media discourse. Drawing on examples from official statements, news articles, and media broadcasts, it examines how these strategies are applied to maintain

the semantic integrity, pragmatic function, and cultural sensitivity of euphemistic expressions. By doing so, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the translator's role in managing cultural and communicative subtleties in media translation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative and comparative textual analysis approach to examine the translation strategies applied to euphemistic expressions in English and Uzbek media discourse. The aim is to identify how translators utilize equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation in order to preserve the communicative, cultural, and emotional functions of euphemisms during the translation process.

2.1. Data Collection

The data were collected from authentic media sources in both English and Uzbek languages, focusing on journalistic and official discourses where euphemisms are frequently used. English-language data were extracted from online news portals such as The New York Times, BBC News, and The Guardian, while the Uzbek-language corpus was compiled from prominent national outlets including Gazeta.uz, Kun.uz, and official government statements available through Lex.uz. A total of 60 euphemistic expressions were selected, covering topics such as military conflicts, economic downsizing, gender-based issues, public morality, and political communication.

The selection criteria included:

- High frequency of euphemism usage in political, economic, and social contexts;
- Translatability issues that arise due to cultural divergence;
- Presence of functional equivalents or significant deviations in translation;
- Representation of different translation strategies (equivalence, adaptation, explicitation).

2.2. Analytical Framework

The analysis of translation strategies is grounded in theoretical models established by Jakobson (1959), Nida (1964), Bassnett (1991), and Chesterman (1997). Each euphemistic instance was analyzed according to its:

- lexical content and denotative meaning,
- implied or connotative meaning,
- cultural function and pragmatic impact in the source context,
- corresponding translation in the target text.

Based on these factors, each euphemism was categorized under one of the three strategies:

- **Equivalence:** Literal or functional equivalents

preserving semantic and stylistic features;

- **Adaptation:** Contextual transformation to fit cultural and social norms of the target language;
- **Explicitation:** Addition or clarification of implicit meanings to improve comprehensibility.

The analysis paid special attention to the translator's choice in balancing cultural sensitivity, pragmatic clarity, and stylistic neutrality, particularly when dealing with euphemisms involving taboo subjects or politically sensitive matters.

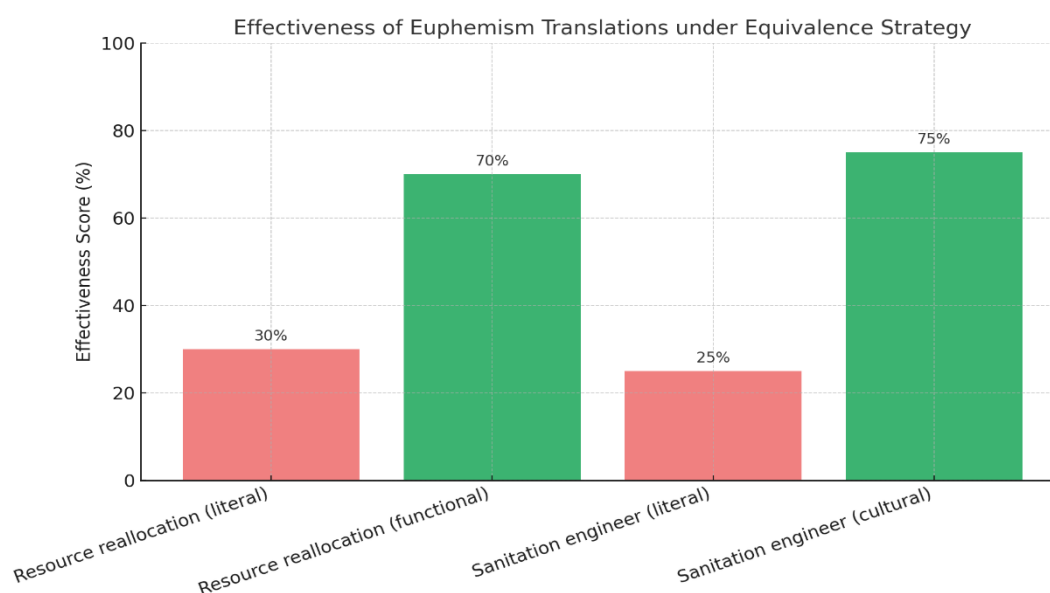
This methodological framework allowed for a nuanced examination of how translation decisions shape the reception and interpretation of euphemistic language across cultures, thereby highlighting the translator's role as both a linguistic and cultural mediator.

RESULTS

The analysis of euphemism translation from English into Uzbek media discourse revealed three dominant strategies: equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation. Each strategy was found to serve specific linguistic and socio-pragmatic functions, depending on the euphemism's thematic field, cultural sensitivity, and communicative purpose. Below are the findings categorized by strategy.

3.1. Equivalence

Equivalence was applied in cases where a direct or functionally similar euphemism existed in both English and Uzbek. However, the analysis indicated that purely formal equivalence was insufficient in most cases, particularly when euphemisms masked negative realities. For instance, the English euphemism



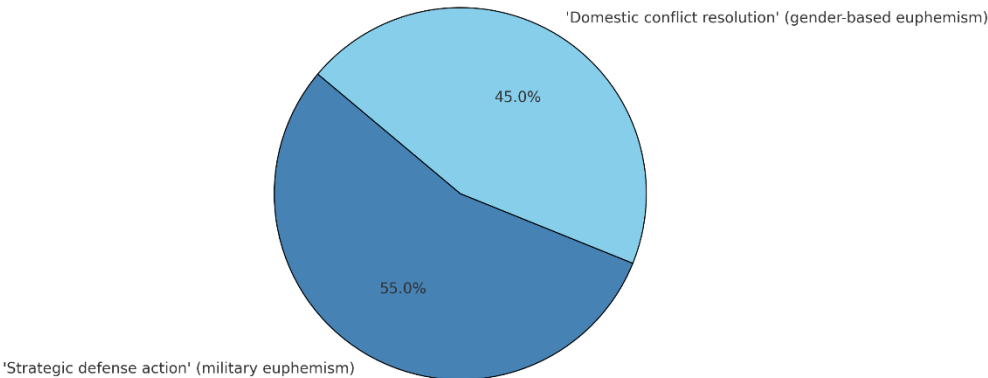
"resource reallocation" - often used in political discourse to conceal job cuts or budget reductions—was translated literally as "resurslarni qayta taqsimlash". While semantically correct, this version failed to convey the underlying socio-economic implications. An improved functional equivalent such as "byudjetni qisqartirish" better captured the euphemistic intent, preserving both the technical and affective tones. Similarly, "sanitation engineer", an American euphemism for low-prestige sanitation jobs, was occasionally translated as "sanitariya muhandisi". This literal equivalence led to confusion in Uzbek media, where "muhandis" denotes a qualified professional. A more culturally appropriate alternative

like "tozalik xodimi" or "kommunal xizmatlar xodimi" maintained the euphemism's social softening function.

3.2. Adaptation

Adaptation emerged as the most effective strategy for cross-cultural euphemism translation. It involved reshaping the euphemistic expression to align with the cultural and pragmatic norms of the target language, thereby preserving the original's communicative intent.

The euphemism "pre-emptive strike" was adapted as "strategik mudofaa harakati" in Uzbek, avoiding the aggressiveness implied by a literal translation ("oldindan hujum"). This adaptation mirrored the political neutrality and defensive framing found in the source text, making the term palatable for Uzbek audiences.



Another example comes from gender-related euphemisms. The phrase "domestic conflict resolution" found in Uzbek legal texts—translated from "domestic abuse interventions"—reflects a deliberate adaptation. The use of "mojaro" (conflict) and "tartibga solish" (regulation) softens the serious nature of the subject while preserving bureaucratic neutrality, in line with Uzbek cultural and institutional discourse norms.

3.3. Explicitation

Explicitation - was employed in instances where the euphemistic expression in English would be unclear, culturally alien, or misleading if translated directly. Through explicitation, implicit or connotative meanings were made explicit in the target language. An illustrative example is the English phrase "She had a little work done", which implies cosmetic surgery. In Uzbek, a literal translation such as "u biroz ishladi" is

semantically opaque. Instead, explicitation rendered this as "u yuziga plastik operatsiya qildirdi", clarifying the euphemistic intent for a culturally unfamiliar audience. Similarly, "exclusive adult content" - commonly used in digital platforms was found to obscure pornographic material. In Uzbek, a literal version such as "kattalar uchun kontent" could be interpreted as general mature content (e.g., training programs). Explicitation helped resolve this ambiguity by using the clarified translation: "kattalar uchun mo‘ljallangan (pornografik) sahnalar".

Finally, the expression "was caught in an immoral situation" used in Uzbek news to euphemistically describe public indecency or prostitution was translated back into English with an explanatory addition: "was caught in an immoral situation (possibly involving inappropriate or illicit behavior)". This maintained the euphemistic tone while providing essential contextual understanding.

Table 1: Explicitation Strategy in Euphemism Translation

Original Euphemism (English)	Literal Translation (Uzbek)	Explicated Translation (Uzbek)	Function of Explicitation
She had a little work done	U biroz ishladi	U yuziga plastik operatsiya qildirdi	Clarifies implied cosmetic surgery
Exclusive adult content	Kattalar uchun kontent	Kattalar uchun mo‘ljallangan (pornografik) sahnalar	Distinguishes pornographic from general adult content
Was caught in an immoral situation	Axloqiy me’yorlarga zid holatda qo‘lga tushdi	Axloqiy me’yorlarga zid holatda qo‘lga tushdi (jinoyat yoki odobsiz xatti-harakatda gumon qilingan)	Clarifies euphemism for public indecency or illicit behavior

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the translation of euphemisms in media discourse is not merely a linguistic operation, but a complex process involving semantic nuance, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic judgment. The three translation strategies examined - equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation - demonstrated distinct advantages and limitations depending on the euphemism's function, context, and cultural salience.

Equivalence, while traditionally considered the foundation of translation theory, proved to be insufficient when applied in its formal or literal sense. As seen in the case of "resource reallocation" and "sanitation engineer", literal translations often failed to capture the socio-political intent or stylistic neutrality embedded in the original euphemism. Adaptation emerged as the most effective strategy in preserving the communicative impact of euphemisms. The examples of "pre-emptive strike" and "domestic abuse" revealed how euphemisms could be recontextualized in Uzbek to reflect political neutrality and institutional norms. These adaptations not only aligned with local discursive conventions but also ensured that the euphemism's social function - mitigating harsh realities - remained intact. This supports Bassnett's (1991) view of adaptation as a vital tool in cross-cultural translation where literal equivalence fails.

Explicitation, although less subtle, proved essential in situations where euphemisms relied heavily on implicit

cultural knowledge. The clarification of expressions like "She had a little work done" or "exclusive adult content" demonstrates how explicitation can bridge semantic gaps for target audiences who may lack the cultural references to infer euphemistic meaning. This aligns with Chesterman's (1997) notion that explicitation enhances textual coherence and cross-cultural comprehension. However, it also poses a risk of over-clarification, which can undermine the euphemistic tone and stylistic indirection.

An overarching observation from the analysis is that euphemism translation requires a flexible, context-sensitive approach that considers more than lexical substitution. It demands that the translator function as a mediator who evaluates each euphemistic unit not only in terms of denotative meaning but also in relation to social norms, genre conventions, and audience expectations in the target language. As the examples in Uzbek media show, cultural appropriateness often dictates how euphemisms are preserved, modified, or clarified.

Furthermore, the results confirm that euphemisms in political and legal discourse are especially prone to strategic manipulation. In both English and Uzbek contexts, euphemisms serve as rhetorical devices to obscure responsibility, downplay conflict, or maintain institutional decorum. Translators, therefore, must navigate not only linguistic fidelity but also the ethical implications of euphemistic translation. This necessitates a careful balance between transparency and discretion.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Euphemism Translation Strategies in Media Discourse

Translation Strategy	Description	Advantages	Limitations	Examples from Study
Equivalence	Finding a target language expression that serves the same function as the source euphemism (especially functional, not literal).	- Maintains communicative purpose- Preserves tone and intent in target culture	- Literal/formal equivalence often fails- May misrepresent socio-political context- Requires cultural insight	- "Resource reallocation" → literal Uzbek equivalent fails to convey political nuance- "Sanitation engineer" → loses stylistic neutrality
Adaptation	Modifying the euphemism to suit target culture norms and discursive conventions.	- Aligns with local cultural and institutional norms- Preserves the euphemism's social function- Ensures impact and tone	- May deviate from original wording- Requires deep contextual knowledge	- "Pre-emptive strike" adapted to reflect political neutrality- "Domestic abuse" localized to align with institutional

				discourse
Explicitation	Making implicit cultural or contextual meaning explicit for clarity in the target language.	- Enhances comprehension- Bridges cultural gaps- Increases textual coherence	- Can undermine euphemistic subtlety- Risks over-clarification and loss of tone	- "She had a little work done" → needs explanation in Uzbek culture- "Exclusive adult content" → clarified to ensure understanding

General Findings:

Aspect	Insight
Translator's Role	Acts as a cultural mediator rather than a word-for-word converter. Must evaluate euphemisms for social norms, genre, and audience expectations.
Cultural Sensitivity	Critical to preserving the pragmatic and emotional weight of euphemisms. Cultural appropriateness determines whether a euphemism is preserved, adapted, or explained.
Ethical Considerations	Especially in political/legal discourse, euphemisms obscure reality or shift responsibility. Translators must balance fidelity with discretion.
Best Practice	No single strategy is universally sufficient. A hybrid approach combining functional equivalence, adaptation, and selective explicitation is most effective.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the translation of euphemisms in English and Uzbek media discourse through the lens of three primary strategies: equivalence, adaptation, and explicitation. The analysis revealed that translating euphemisms requires more than direct lexical correspondence; it demands a nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, and communicative contexts in which these expressions operate.

Equivalence was shown to be useful primarily when functional or cultural parallels existed between the source and target languages. However, literal equivalence often proved inadequate in conveying the underlying pragmatics and softening functions of euphemistic language. Adaptation emerged as the most effective strategy, particularly in media and official discourses where cultural and political sensitivities are prominent. This approach allowed euphemisms to be reshaped to fit the ideological and institutional norms of the target culture without sacrificing communicative intent. Explicitation, while risking a loss of stylistic subtlety, served as a necessary tool in cases where the source euphemism was semantically opaque or culturally alien to the target audience.

The findings highlight that euphemism translation is not a mechanical process but an interpretive act requiring the translator to function as a cultural intermediary. A successful translation depends on the translator's ability to maintain the euphemism's intended tone, social acceptability, and pragmatic function, while simultaneously respecting the target language's cultural norms and audience expectations.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the importance of flexible and context-sensitive translation strategies when dealing with euphemisms. The optimal approach often lies in combining equivalence with adaptation or explicitation, depending on the socio-cultural landscape and communicative goals. As euphemisms continue to play a critical role in shaping public discourse and managing ideological framing, their accurate and culturally attuned translation remains essential for effective cross-cultural communication.

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