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Cultural Mismatches in Tourism Terminology: The Case of the English and Uzbek Languages

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the cultural mismatches and conceptual asymmetries in tourism-related terminology between the English and Uzbek languages. The study aims to identify how cultural and socio-pragmatic factors influence the lexical encoding and interpretation of key tourism concepts. Using comparative linguistic analysis, corpus-based observation, and discourse studies, the research explores how terms such as “resort,” “ecotourism,” “all-inclusive,” and “homestay” manifest distinct meanings and connotations across English and Uzbek. The findings reveal that while English tourism terminology tends toward commercial, secular, and service-oriented semantics, its Uzbek equivalents often embed hospitality ethics, communal traditions, and local worldviews. These discrepancies have critical implications for translation, intercultural communication, tourism policy, and educational curriculum development in hospitality and tourism studies.

Keywords: tourism, terminology, mismatch, English, Uzbek, lexical semantics, pragmalinguistics, discourse.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of accelerated globalization and increased cross-border mobility, the tourism industry has emerged as a dynamic intercultural platform where language plays a critical role in shaping travelers' expectations and experiences. As English has become the **lingua franca of global tourism**, its terminology reflects specific cultural assumptions rooted in Western capitalist, service-oriented, and consumerist frameworks. Terms such as *all-inclusive*, *homestay*, *boutique hotel*, and *wellness retreat* carry not only denotative meanings but also **cultural connotations** that presume familiarity with Western service standards, leisure practices, and lifestyle values. Consequently, when these terms are translated into non-Western languages such as Uzbek, **semantic mismatches**, pragmatic ambiguities, and even conceptual distortions may arise, complicating intercultural communication. Scholars in applied linguistics, tourism studies, and translation theory have increasingly emphasized the need to move beyond literal translation and instead consider **cultural translation** and **semantic domestication** to preserve communicative effectiveness and intercultural harmony in tourism discourse.

In the context of Uzbekistan, a country strategically situated on the Silk Road and increasingly positioning itself as a **cultural and heritage tourism destination**, the interplay between global English tourism discourse and local Uzbek linguistic realities presents unique challenges. Uzbek, as a Turkic language deeply influenced by Russian bureaucratic norms and Islamic cultural traditions, encodes hospitality and travel differently from English. Traditional concepts such as *mehmondorchilik* (hospitality), *ziyosat* (pilgrimage tourism), or *sayohat* (journey) reflect values of collectivity, moral obligation, and spirituality, which do not always align with Western notions of individualized, hedonistic travel. The recent influx of English tourism terminology into Uzbek via media, government programs, and educational curricula has not always been accompanied by **adequate cultural contextualization or terminological adaptation**, leading to misinterpretations by both tourism professionals and consumers. Therefore, understanding the **cultural mismatches embedded in tourism terminology** is vital not only for translation accuracy but also for effective tourism marketing, sustainable communication, and the preservation of cultural identity within a rapidly globalizing industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has acknowledged the intersection between *language*, *culture*, and *tourism discourse*. Dann (2023) emphasized tourism language as a persuasive and culture-specific construct. Piller (2001) explored cross-cultural advertising strategies in tourism, showing that terminological accuracy is often sacrificed for market appeal. In Uzbek contexts, works by Juraev (2019) and Tursunova (2021) have discussed the local adaptation of global tourism terms, although often from a translation or terminography perspective.

The concept of *cultural untranslatability* (Wierzbicka, 2017) and *conceptual dissonance* (Sharifian, 2011) serve as theoretical frameworks for analyzing terms with no direct equivalents due to differences in cultural schemas. Furthermore, Nida's (1964) distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence in translation reveals that direct lexical substitution may fail to convey sociocultural meaning in tourism contexts.

Despite growing attention, few studies have addressed the cultural-linguistic mismatches between English and Uzbek tourism terms using a grounded, contrastive methodology. This article aims to fill that gap by analyzing terminological examples where cultural values disrupt semantic symmetry.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-comparative approach grounded in **contrastive lexical semantics**, **discourse analysis**, and **intercultural pragmatics**. The methodology includes:

- **Corpus Analysis:** English tourism corpora (British National Corpus, TripAdvisor data, etc.) and Uzbek tourism websites (e.g., uzbektourism.uz, local travel agencies).
- **Term Selection:** 20 tourism-related terms with high usage frequency and observable semantic mismatch were selected (e.g., *resort*, *homestay*, *all-inclusive*, *ecotourism*, *tourist guide*).

- **Expert Interviews:** 10 Uzbek-English bilingual tourism professionals were consulted for interpretive insights.
- **Semantic Mapping:** Definitions, collocations, and cultural connotations of each term were analyzed and compared.

IV. RESULTS

The findings indicate that English and Uzbek tourism terms often **lack one-to-one semantic and pragmatic correspondence**. Below are select examples illustrating the mismatch.

1. “Resort” vs. “Sanatoriy”

- *Resort* in English denotes a commercial, recreational destination offering diverse leisure activities.
- Uzbek *sanatoriy* retains out-of-date connotations of medical recovery institutions, linked to public health rather than leisure.
- Thus, translation of “luxury beach resort” as “hashamatli plyaj sanatoriysi” may invoke medical rather than recreational imagery for Uzbek speakers.

2. “All-Inclusive” vs. “Hammasi Ichida”

- *All-inclusive* in English implies a commercial package covering meals, lodging, and entertainment.
- The Uzbek equivalent *hammasi ichida* may sound literal and lack cultural anchoring in service expectations.
- It is also prone to misinterpretation, such as assuming it includes personal services or external tours.

3. “Ecotourism” vs. “Ekoturizm”

- In English, *ecotourism* implies sustainability, low environmental impact, and educational value.

- Uzbek *ekoturizm* often refers merely to rural or mountainous travel, without embedded ethical considerations.

- The mismatch highlights different ecological paradigms and lack of institutional frameworks to support eco-values.

4. “Homestay” vs. “Uy Mehmonxonasi” / “Uy Mehmonxonada Turar Joy”

- *Homestay* implies staying with a local family, experiencing authentic culture.

- Uzbek translations like *uy mehmonxonasi* (home hotel) or *uyda yashash* (living in a home) fail to convey the cultural intimacy and mutual expectations of shared living.

- The absence of a strong tradition of commercialized homestays in Uzbek culture further complicates the term’s localization.

5. “Tour Guide” vs. “Ekskursovod” / “Yo‘lboshi”

- In English, a *tour guide* may be an independent contractor or employee trained in multilingual interaction and cultural mediation.

- The Uzbek *yo‘lboshi* or *ekskursovod* reflects an institutional tone, with emphasis on instructive, formalized narrative delivery, often ignoring interpersonal or entertainment aspects.

V. DISCUSSION

The results of the present study illustrate that tourism terminology is not only a matter of linguistic correspondence but also a reflection of **deeply rooted cultural models, worldviews, and historical experiences**. The discrepancies identified in the translation and perception of key tourism-related terms between English and Uzbek exemplify what Sharifian (2011) terms *cultural conceptualizations*, where different societies organize experience and knowledge using culturally embedded frames.

1. Theoretical Speculation: Cultural Scripts and Conceptual Metaphors. From the perspective of **cultural linguistics**, mismatches arise because linguistic terms in one culture (e.g., English “resort” or “ecotourism”) are grounded in **conceptual metaphors** and **cultural scripts** that may not exist or function differently in the target culture (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004). For example:

- The English term *resort* activates metaphors of *recreation as consumption*, *space as luxury*, and *time as commodity*. This contrasts with the Uzbek *sanatori*, which activates metaphors of *rest as recovery*, *time as therapy*, and *space as collective discipline*, stemming from Soviet traditions.

- The term *homestay* in English contains implicit assumptions about *individual agency*, *intercultural intimacy*, and *voluntary cultural immersion*, none of which are central to Uzbek hospitality culture, where *mehmonnavozlik* (hospitality) is seen more as a moral imperative than a commodified service.

These examples support the claim that **translation of tourism terminology must go beyond lexical equivalence** and engage with **pragmatic enrichment**, **cultural adaptation**, and sometimes even **reconceptualization** (Beeby, 2000).

2. Cultural Values and Sociolinguistic Behavior. The analysis confirms that **linguistic choices reflect cultural values**. In Western tourism discourse, which informs much of English terminology, values such as **individualism**, **comfort**, **choice**, and **service transparency** are prominent. By contrast, Uzbek tourism discourse still heavily emphasizes **collectivism**, **tradition**, **modesty**, and **moral obligations**.

For instance, the term *all-inclusive*, although meant to signal convenience, clashes with Uzbek consumers' expectations shaped by **price sensitivity** and **service personalization**. The phrase *hammasi ichida* can therefore provoke either skepticism (e.g., "what exactly is included?") or inflated expectations (e.g., assuming door-to-door service), both of which can lead to **pragmatic failure** in tourism service delivery.

This aligns with Hall's (1976) theory of **high-context vs. low-context communication**. English, as a low-context language, tends to spell out details explicitly, whereas Uzbek, a high-context language, relies more on shared cultural understanding and implicit rules. Consequently, literal translation of terms leads to ambiguity when the **sociocultural context of interpretation** differs.

3. Translation Mismatches and Sociopolitical Legacy. The study also highlights how **historical and ideological legacies** shape the current linguistic landscape. Terms such as *ekskursovod* (guide) and *sanatoriy* (resort) have retained their Soviet-era semantics, characterized by bureaucratic rigidity and institutional overtones. In contrast, English terminology has evolved in a **commercial and postmodern market**, creating semantic shifts that are difficult to reconcile with Uzbek's inherited lexicon.

In this regard, tourism translation operates within a **postcolonial linguistic field** in Uzbekistan, where **Western neologisms** are either borrowed verbatim (e.g., *glamping*, *wellness*, *boutique*) or translated via **structural calques** that do not preserve the original connotations.

4. Implications for Tourism Communication and Pedagogy. The cultural mismatches identified are not merely academic observations; they have **practical implications** for multiple sectors:

- **Translation Studies:** There is a need to expand traditional equivalence-based models (e.g., Catford, 1965) toward **functionalist models** like Skopos Theory (Vermeer, 1989), which prioritize communicative purpose and target audience comprehension.

- **Tourism Policy:** Policymakers must understand that adopting global tourism terminology without cultural localization may alienate domestic audiences or confuse foreign tourists due to divergent semantic frames.

- **Intercultural Training:** Tourism professionals in Uzbekistan require targeted training to **reframe Western tourism terms** in locally meaningful ways and explain Uzbek tourism offerings in culturally intelligible English.

- **Lexicography and Terminology Planning:** The development of a **bilingual tourism terminological database** that includes usage notes, cultural annotations, and example contexts is critical to bridge the lexical-pragmatic gap.

5. Cognitive Considerations and Worldview Mapping

Finally, the mismatch in tourism terminology underscores the broader notion that **language encodes worldview** (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis). The way a culture speaks about travel, hospitality, or recreation reveals what it values, fears, and aspires to. For English-speaking cultures, tourism is framed as a **right**, a **leisure activity**, and a **consumer service**. In Uzbek culture, it is still partly framed as **a luxury**, **a family event**, or **a national duty** (e.g., pilgrimage tourism, visiting ancestral sites).

Understanding and respecting these distinctions is key to promoting culturally sensitive tourism that avoids miscommunication, reinforces authenticity, and fosters mutual respect between visitors and hosts.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the presence of systematic cultural mismatches in English-Uzbek tourism terminology, rooted in differing sociocultural frameworks and communicative strategies. Understanding these mismatches is essential for effective tourism communication, curriculum development in hospitality training, and policy translation. Recommendations include the development of a culturally grounded bilingual tourism thesaurus, increased intercultural training for tourism professionals, and standardized lexicographical efforts to localize key terms without eroding cultural integrity.

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