

TRANSLATORS AS CULTURAL MEDIATORS

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Abstract

This article argues that memoir translators do far more than substitute words; they act as cultural mediators whose personal lifeworlds shape every semantic choice. Drawing on phenomenology, affect theory and recent Uzbek-language scholarship, it shows how translators' memories, value frameworks and emotional repertoires guide the reframing of culturally charged episodes, the management of silence and even the pacing of narrative time. A critical synthesis of interview-based studies and textual comparisons reveals patterns of "selective resonance," whereby translators foreground experiences that echo their own while damping discordant images. Pedagogical and ethical implications are outlined for training programmes in global and Uzbek contexts.

Keywords. Cultural mediation; lifeworld; memoir translation; translator subjectivity; phenomenology; emotion; Uzbek studies; qualitative interviews.

Introduction

Personal lifeworlds often remain invisible in translation theory, yet memoir translators routinely mobilise their own biographies to mediate between author and reader. Early cultural-transfer accounts treated the translator as a neutral conduit, but ethnographic studies now document how embodied memories steer lexical selection in life writing (Zethsen, 2006). When a war veteran renders another veteran's recollections, for instance, she may preserve military jargon that a civilian translator would domesticate, thereby reinforcing insider authenticity.

Emotion research has supplied empirical backing for this intuition. In a landmark survey of 250 professionals, *Translation and Emotion* showed that high emotional-intelligence scores correlate with a greater willingness to retain pathos-laden passages, especially in autobiographical genres (Hubscher-Davidson, 2016). Follow-up interviews revealed that translators who had experienced similar traumas tended to "lean into" the source text's metaphors of pain instead of paraphrasing them – a finding echoed in Uzbek practice, where Inomjonova and Batirova (2024) note that childhood imagery in English memoirs is often amplified, not omitted, by translators who grew up in rural contexts.

The phenomenological notion of *lifeworld* clarifies why these patterns arise. Husserlian philosophy frames every act of understanding as horizon-bound; translators therefore approach texts through sedimented experiences that resist full bracketing. A recent ResearchGate study tracing memoir translation decisions confirms that cultural awareness, personal attributes and ideological stance jointly mould semantic shifts (Li, 2022). Uzbek scholar Gayvullayeva (2025) extends this argument, demonstrating how metaphors of



economic striving in American memoirs are systematically re-coded into proverbs valorising perseverance, mirroring post-Soviet value realignments.

Interview-based methodologies bring such tacit resonances to light. A ScienceDirect article on translators as cultural mediators recommends semi-structured interviews to capture the “back-stories” behind pivotal word choices (Alami & Banoori, 2015). In practice, eliciting *moment-by-moment* reflections uncovers latent affective triggers: one Uzbek interviewee confessed to down-toning references to parental neglect because they contradicted her normative view of family duty, thereby softening the memoir’s critique of patriarchal structures.

Selective resonance also governs the treatment of silence. Translators who have themselves endured oppression frequently foreground pauses or ellipses that signal unspeakable trauma. The New Yorker’s profile of Damion Searls contends that such decisions are “phenomenological,” rooted in the translator’s felt response to textual gaps rather than purely stylistic reasoning (Rees, 2024). Comparative evidence from Afrikaans Harry Potter translations illustrates the point: culturally dissonant jokes were replaced with local idioms, mediating humour across sensibilities while retaining narrative rhythm (Oosthuysen, 2003). While resonance enhances empathy, it risks ethnocentric filtering. Emotional-intelligence studies warn that strong affect can slide into over-identification, leading translators to erase cultural alterity (Pyourkov & Chen, 2014). A balanced stance emerges when translators cultivate *reflective distance*, a practice akin to phenomenological epoché. Kazemi and Sanei’s experiment on reframing strategies found that participants who journalled their emotional reactions before revising produced translations judged more faithful by bilingual assessors.

Uzbek scholarship provides culturally specific insight. Pirnazarova (2025) shows that students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University instinctively replace English metaphors of “iceberg” problems with the Uzbek idiom *muz tog‘ining uchi*, maintaining conceptual integrity while localising imagery. These micro-decisions exemplify mediation: translators carry over not only meaning but evaluative stance, refracting foreign life narratives through local conceptual lenses.

Digital corpora increasingly aid this work. Automated concordances spotlight competing renderings of core cultural terms, allowing translators to gauge community norms before finalising choices. Yet corpus evidence alone cannot predict when personal history will override statistical frequency. A 2024 interview with Suzanne Jill Levine underscores that intuitive “ear” refined by decades of bilingual living still outranks machine suggestions in resolving memoir idiosyncrasies (Levine, 2024).

Pedagogical interventions therefore focus on cultivating self-awareness. Workshops in Tashkent pair phenomenological interviews with back-translation tasks: trainees first articulate their biographical resonances, then compare how those resonances surface in their drafts. Survey data indicate that such reflective practice reduces unconscious domestication by 18 percent while preserving narrative voice – figures consistent with European training pilots reported in *Meanings and Messages* (Zethsen, 2006).

Ethical frameworks are evolving accordingly. Professional codes now invite translators to append brief positionality statements, aligning with reader demand for transparency. Nurminen’s survey of patent professionals, though outside literary translation, reveals that



paratextual disclosures raise client trust, suggesting similar benefits for memoir readerships (Nurminen, 2019). In the Uzbek context, Maxamatxo'jaeva (2025) argues for culturally sensitive glossaries that respect both source nuance and target intelligibility, a stance directly relevant to memoirs rife with political neologisms.

In sum, translators function as cultural mediators precisely because their lifeworlds cannot be divorced from the semantic act. Rather than striving for sterile neutrality, contemporary scholarship advocates a managed subjectivity: translators embrace their experiential filters while maintaining critical awareness of potential distortions. Such a phenomenological orientation not only enriches memoir translation but models intercultural empathy in a fractured world.

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