

The Theory of Equivalence and its Application in Japanese-Uzbek Literary Translation

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Abstract. *The theory of equivalence in translation studies, encompassing formal and dynamic approaches, serves as a foundational framework for bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. This article examines its application in the niche field of Japanese-Uzbek literary translation, where cultural disparities and structural differences pose unique challenges. Drawing on examples from translated works like Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* and Kobo Abe's *Woman in the Sand*, it analyzes strategies such as substitution, paraphrasing, and cultural adaptation to achieve equivalence. The study highlights the tension between fidelity to the source text and naturalness in the target language, emphasizing the need for pragmatic and cultural competence. Findings underscore equivalence's adaptability in non-Western translation pairs, contributing to cross-cultural literary exchange.*

Key words: *Japanese-Uzbek translation, equivalence theory, formal equivalence, dynamic equivalence, literary translation, cultural adaptation, idiomatic expressions, politeness strategies, cross-cultural communication, translation strategies.*

Introduction. Translation equivalence refers to the degree of similarity between source and target texts in terms of meaning, function, and effect. Pioneered by scholars like Eugene Nida and Roman Jakobson, it has evolved from a prescriptive ideal to a descriptive tool in translation studies. In literary translation, equivalence ensures that narrative, stylistic, and cultural elements are preserved or adapted effectively. Japanese-Uzbek literary translation represents a rare but growing area, influenced by Uzbekistan's interest in East Asian literature amid globalization. Japanese works, rich in subtlety, politeness, and cultural references, contrast with Uzbek's Turkic roots and Islamic influences, complicating equivalence. This article explores equivalence theory's application, focusing on idioms, politeness, and culture-specific terms, to illuminate strategies for achieving meaningful translations.

Literature review and methodology. The theory of equivalence has been central to translation studies since the mid-20th century. Nida (1964) distinguished between formal equivalence (word-for-word fidelity) and dynamic equivalence (effect-oriented adaptation), arguing for the latter in cross-cultural contexts to evoke similar responses in readers. Jakobson (1959) viewed translation as recoding equivalent messages across codes, acknowledging interlingual challenges.

Critics like House (1997) and Pym (2010) have debated equivalence's feasibility, labeling it a "myth" due to cultural asymmetries, yet it remains practical for translators. In non-Indo-European pairs, such as Japanese-English, equivalence often involves pragmatic adjustments for honorifics and implicit meanings.

For Japanese-Uzbek, limited scholarship focuses on idiomatic and cultural translation. Studies on idioms reveal the need for dynamic equivalence to handle non-equivalents, while politeness

translation requires adapting Japanese keigo to Uzbek's contextual cues. Equivalence here extends to pragmatic levels, ensuring communicative intent is maintained.

Application in Japanese-Uzbek Literary Translation. In applying equivalence theory, translators balance formal structures with dynamic effects. Japanese literature's minimalist style and cultural allusions demand adaptive strategies in Uzbek.

Examples from Translated Works. A prominent example is the Uzbek translation of Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* (translated as *Yovvoyi qo'y ovlash*). The novel's politeness markers, such as honorific verbs, pose challenges. Formal equivalence might retain literal forms, but dynamic equivalence adapts them to Uzbek's suffix-based respect indicators, preserving interpersonal dynamics without alienating readers. For instance, Japanese "desu/masu" forms are rendered with **Uzbek polite particles like "-siz" to achieve functional equivalence**. Another case is Kobo Abe's *Woman in the Sand* (*Qumdagi ayol*). Culture-specific terms like "suna" (sand) symbolizing existential isolation require dynamic equivalence. Translators use Uzbek metaphors evoking desert imagery, common in Central Asian folklore, to evoke similar emotional responses. Idioms exemplify equivalence's application. In Japanese fiction, phrases like "hana yori dango" (dumplings over flowers, prioritizing practicality) lack direct Uzbek equivalents. Translators employ substitution with "guldan ko'ra non" or paraphrasing to maintain proverbial wisdom.

Aspect	Formal Equivalence	Dynamic Equivalence	Example in Japanese-Uzbek Translation
Politeness	Literal honorifics	Adapted contextual cues	Keigo in <i>A Wild Sheep Chase</i> → Uzbek suffixes
Idioms	Word-for-word	Substitution/paraphrase	"Hana yori dango" → Practicality metaphor
Cultural Terms	Direct borrowing	Domestication	Existential symbols in <i>Woman in the Sand</i> → Local imagery

Challenges and Strategies. Challenges include linguistic asymmetry: Japanese's topic-comment structure vs. Uzbek's subject-object-verb order, and cultural gaps like Shinto references absent in Uzbek Islamic contexts. Idioms often resist formal equivalence, leading to semantic loss.

Strategies draw from Newmark's procedures: cultural substitution for non-equivalents, descriptive explanation for footnotes in literary editions, and modulation for shifting perspectives. In Uzbek translations, hybrid approaches combine formal fidelity for stylistic elements with dynamic adaptation for readability.

Discussion. The application of equivalence theory in Japanese–Uzbek literary translation highlights the interplay between linguistic accuracy and cultural accessibility. The examples drawn from *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Woman in the Sand* demonstrate that a rigid, formal equivalence approach often fails to convey the nuanced politeness, cultural metaphors, and symbolic imagery inherent in Japanese prose. Conversely, dynamic equivalence strategies allow translators to bridge cultural gaps, but they require deep cultural literacy in both languages to avoid over-domestication.

The adaptation of honorifics into Uzbek polite forms, substitution of idioms with culturally resonant expressions, and domestication of existential symbols reveal that equivalence is not a static formula but a continuum of decision-making. These decisions are shaped by genre, target audience, and the translator's interpretation of the source text's communicative intent. Furthermore, the Japanese–Uzbek pairing, as a non-Western translation axis, challenges Eurocentric models of equivalence by foregrounding unique linguistic typologies—such as Japanese topic–comment structures and Uzbek agglutinative morphology—which influence translation outcomes.

The tension between preserving foreignness and ensuring readability remains a core challenge. Excessive domestication risks erasing the source culture's uniqueness, while excessive literalism risks alienating the target audience. Successful translations therefore emerge from a balanced application of formal and dynamic equivalence, underpinned by a nuanced understanding of cultural semiotics, metaphor systems, and socio-pragmatic norms.

Conclusion. The theory of equivalence remains a vital conceptual tool in navigating the complexities of Japanese–Uzbek literary translation. While its early formulations were rooted in Western language pairs, the Japanese–Uzbek context demonstrates its adaptability and relevance for non-Indo-European translation studies. The interplay of formal and dynamic equivalence allows translators to maintain fidelity to the source text while making necessary cultural and pragmatic adjustments for target audiences.

Examples from Murakami’s and Abe’s works illustrate that equivalence in this context extends beyond lexical and syntactic matching to encompass cultural symbolism, politeness systems, and idiomatic creativity. The findings suggest that dynamic equivalence, supported by cultural substitution, paraphrasing, and contextual adaptation, is particularly effective for literary genres. However, maintaining elements of formal equivalence for stylistic and aesthetic fidelity is equally important to preserve the “literary fingerprint” of Japanese authors.

Future research should expand into empirical corpus-based studies of Japanese–Uzbek translations to measure equivalence strategies quantitatively. Moreover, translator training programs in Uzbekistan would benefit from integrating comparative linguistic and cultural modules on Japanese, ensuring future practitioners are equipped to mediate between these two distinct literary worlds. In doing so, equivalence theory not only serves as a technical framework but also as a bridge for cross-cultural understanding and literary appreciation.

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