



CULTURAL KEYWORDS AND FALSE EQUIVALENCE AS COGNITIVE AND LINGUOCULTURAL PHENOMENA IN LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines cultural keywords as a critical, yet methodologically challenging, area of Russian vocabulary teaching in Uzbekistan. The central problem is “false equivalence”: learners identify a Russian word with an apparently matching Uzbek translation, but the cultural script, evaluative component, and pragmatic boundaries do not coincide. As a result, students produce grammatically correct utterances that sound culturally inappropriate or semantically reduced. The paper proposes a corpus-informed and classroom-validated model for teaching cultural keywords through contrastive cultural scripting, collocational profiling, and discourse-function annotation. A staged procedure is presented: selecting keywords from course texts, verifying lexicographic meanings, extracting typical contexts, modelling cultural scenarios, designing micro-tasks for learner discovery, and refining explanations using diagnostic feedback. The paper argues that systematic work with cultural keywords improves reading interpretation, pragmatic accuracy, and intercultural competence, particularly in academic and media discourse.

In bilingual educational contexts, vocabulary instruction often encounters a paradox: translation is both necessary and dangerous. It is necessary because learners need an initial bridge between languages, but it becomes dangerous when translation creates an illusion of full semantic and cultural identity. In Uzbek–Russian learning, this illusion frequently emerges with cultural keywords—lexical items that encode culturally salient meanings and conventional ways of interpreting experience. Such words may have a “dictionary equivalent” in another language, yet their evaluative nuances, cultural scripts, and pragmatic conditions diverge in systematic ways. When teachers treat these items as straightforward equivalents, learners may develop stable but inaccurate semantic habits. This phenomenon can be described as **false equivalence**, and it represents a central challenge for linguoculturology-oriented vocabulary teaching [1], [2].

Cultural keywords have been discussed in intercultural semantics as words that reveal culture-specific conceptualization and value orientations. They tend to be frequent, socially meaningful, and difficult to translate without loss because they package cultural experience

into compact lexical forms [3]. In Russian, examples often include words with dense emotional and evaluative profiles, such as those expressing moral judgment, interpersonal relations, or culturally typical attitudes. In Uzbek, similar density can be found in words connected with community relations, respect, and social harmony. The teaching problem is not that learners cannot memorize such words; rather, they often memorize them “incorrectly” by reducing them to a single translation. As a result, learners may understand texts superficially, misread irony or evaluation, and produce speech that is pragmatically mismatched.

False equivalence typically appears in three forms. First, **scenario mismatch**: the Uzbek equivalent activates a different social situation than the Russian word. Second, **evaluation mismatch**: the emotional or moral valence differs; a word that is neutral in one language may be strongly evaluative in another. Third, **pragmatic boundary mismatch**: usage restrictions differ by register, politeness level, and genre. These mismatches are especially visible in academic writing and media discourse, where lexical choice signals stance and social positioning [4]. Therefore, cultural keywords should be addressed through a method that explicitly connects meaning with usage conditions and cultural scripts.

A linguoculturological approach suggests that the meaning of a cultural keyword is best understood as a layered structure: denotation (what it refers to), connotation (associations), evaluation (positive/negative tendency), and a cultural script (a conventional scenario of interpretation and behavior). The key methodological question is how to teach this layered structure without turning language classes into broad cultural lectures. A productive answer is to implement a compact, evidence-based teaching model that combines three elements: **contrastive cultural scripting**, **collocational profiling**, and **discourse-function annotation**. This model is compatible with corpus linguistics, which helps make implicit patterns visible and reduces reliance on intuition [5], [6].

The first element, contrastive cultural scripting, means describing the typical scenario of the keyword in Russian and then comparing it with the nearest Uzbek candidate, emphasizing partial overlap and boundary differences rather than claiming equivalence. The goal is not to replace translation, but to discipline it: translation becomes an entry point, while the script explains what translation hides. Cultural scripting is most effective when formulated in simple, action-oriented statements: “who uses it”, “in what situation”, “with what implication”, and “what a listener expects.” Such scripting aligns with the broader idea that learning a language includes learning culturally shaped norms of interpretation and behavior [2].

The second element, collocational profiling, is crucial because cultural keywords reveal their semantic and evaluative profile through habitual co-occurrence. A word’s preferred adjectives, verbs, and discourse markers can indicate whether it tends to be ironic, moralizing, affectionate, or official. Corpus-based observation is helpful because it allows teachers to extract repeated patterns and present them as evidence [6]. Even a small set of 25–40 authentic contexts can show stable tendencies: what is “natural” with the keyword and what is rare or marked. For Uzbek learners, collocational profiling supports production: students do not only learn “what it means”, but also “how it is built into speech”.

The third element, discourse-function annotation, connects the keyword with communicative intention. Cultural keywords often function as stance markers: they evaluate,

align, distance, intensify, soften, or appeal to shared norms. In academic and media texts, these functions are prominent because authors rely on culturally recognizable lexical cues to guide interpretation [4]. If learners are unaware of these cues, they may misread the author's position. Therefore, each keyword should be annotated with typical discourse functions and pragmatic boundaries: "mostly informal", "often ironic", "used for moral evaluation", "rare in academic register", and so on.

To operationalize the model, a staged procedure can be used. **Stage 1: Selection.** The teacher selects candidate keywords from course texts and student writing, prioritizing items that repeatedly cause misunderstanding. **Stage 2: Lexicographic verification.** Core meanings and stylistic labels are checked using reliable dictionaries to secure semantic base and prevent uncontrolled interpretations. **Stage 3: Corpus sampling.** Contexts are extracted from corpora or curated text collections, ensuring genre diversity (conversation, media, academic prose). **Stage 4: Collocation analysis.** Recurrent patterns are identified and summarized as collocational frames (common adjective + noun patterns, verb partners, typical modifiers). **Stage 5: Script modelling.** A concise cultural script is written, focusing on scenario and evaluation. **Stage 6: Task design.** Micro-tasks are created for learner discovery: context selection, paraphrasing with register control, identifying evaluation, and comparing Uzbek and Russian scripts. **Stage 7: Classroom validation.** The teacher collects diagnostic feedback (errors, confusion points) and revises the script and tasks accordingly. This final stage is essential because the quality of a script is measured by learning outcomes, not by theoretical elegance [1].

In Uzbek higher education, an important application of this approach is academic discourse. Students often need to write in Russian in a manner that follows conventions of academic stance: cautious claims, structured evaluation, and controlled expressiveness. Cultural keywords, however, can push writing toward conversational moralizing or excessive emotionality if used without pragmatic awareness. Therefore, teaching cultural keywords should include explicit register training: learners must know which words are acceptable in academic prose and which are better reserved for everyday interaction. Research on academic discourse highlights that lexical resources strongly influence perceived professionalism and authorial credibility [4]. Accordingly, vocabulary instruction that includes discourse-function annotation supports not only language accuracy but also academic literacy.

Digital tools can make this approach more transparent. In a learning management system, each cultural keyword can be linked to a micro-corpus (a short list of contexts), a collocation table, and a short cultural script. Learners can click and explore evidence, then complete tasks that force them to justify choices by context. Such data-driven learning reduces passive memorization and supports pattern recognition [6]. Importantly, digital format also allows iterative improvement: if teachers notice persistent errors, they can update scripts and tasks quickly.

A frequent concern is whether contrastive scripting risks essentializing cultures. This risk exists if teachers present cultural scripts as rigid stereotypes. To avoid this, scripts must be framed as tendencies supported by typical contexts, not absolute rules. Corpus evidence helps: it shows variation, and teachers can explicitly note exceptions and genre differences. In

this way, learners develop a realistic understanding: cultural keywords are conventional, but not mechanically fixed. Such balanced instruction supports intercultural competence rather than simplistic cultural labeling.

In conclusion, cultural keywords represent a high-impact area of Russian vocabulary teaching in Uzbekistan because they strongly influence interpretation and pragmatic success. False equivalence is a predictable learning obstacle that cannot be resolved by translation alone. A corpus-informed and classroom-validated model—combining contrastive cultural scripting, collocational profiling, and discourse-function annotation—offers a practical solution. By treating cultural keywords as layered units of meaning-in-use, teachers can improve learners' reading comprehension, pragmatic accuracy, and academic discourse competence. Over time, systematic work with such vocabulary strengthens bilingual communicative competence and reduces hidden misunderstandings that remain invisible in purely grammatical assessment

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