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Research article

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## TRANSLATION OF DOCUMENTARY NOVELS: GENERAL INFORMATION

**Abstract.** This article examines the features of translating a documentary novel. This topic is raising as the number of publications, materials, articles, and films of the documentary genre has been growing. A documentary novel belongs to a special literary genre, based on real events. Translating a documentary novel is a complex work, where the translator needs knowledge of not only the original language and the target language, but also deep knowledge of historical data and the ability to convey this data in simple words without distortion. The research is aimed at studying the features of the reflection of historical reality and national and cultural specifics in the translation into English of M. Shayakhmetov's documentary novel "The Silent Steppe". Translation of such texts into other languages, in particular into Russian and English, is a complex task associated with the need to preserve historical authenticity, convey cultural specificity, as well as stylistic and emotional features of the original. It is important not only to convey the factual content, but also to adapt nationally specific realities, terms and images in such a way that they become understandable to representatives of another culture, without losing their authentic sound.

**Keywords:** documentary novel, history, Interlingua transmission, linguistic identity, adaptation of reality.

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## Introduction

Nowadays, the importance of translating historical materials, documentary stories, and films based on real events has increased. Examples of such phenomena are films such as “Mukagali”, “Baurzhan Momyshuly”, “Secrets and Fates of the Great Kazakhs”, “The Last Sentence”, which tells the novel about Akhmet Baitursynov, a Kazakh educator, the founder of the Kazakh alphabet based on Arabic script, and a political figure. Kazakhstani TV channels broadcast films about the Kazakh intelligentsia based on documentary facts.

The tradition of translating different registers of literature into the Kazakh language has deep roots. The founder of the Russian Kazakh translation is the famous Kazakh writer and educator Ybyrai Altynsarin, who published translations of the fables of I.A. Krylov and stories of L.N. Tolstoy in 1879. During the Soviet era, almost all world literature and the literature of the peoples of the USSR was translated into Kazakh from the intermediary language (Amalbekova, 2021).

We also know that, in addition to films, interest among readers is also growing in documentary stories. For example, the documentary novel “The Silent Steppe” by M. Shayakhmetov, based on real events from the life of the author himself, is in great demand among readers. The documentary novel “The Silent Steppe” is the author’s own memoirs, where he talks about his life at the age of 10 years old. The novel describes the life of the Kazakh people during the reign of Stalin and Goloshchekin. The book describes in detail the persecution and forced collectivization that the Soviet government conducted against the Kazakh people. Kazakhs, who disagreed with the new Soviet policy, were forced to leave their native land and scattered around the world in various countries of Asia and Europe, including China, Mongolia, Iran, Afghanistan, Türkiye, Germany, etc.

Reading the book, we can see through the eyes of the author how steadfastly the Kazakh people fought against hunger in the 1930s. The author, having preserved in his memory all the horror he experienced, decided to put it down on paper in his declining years.

Both stories of this author, “The Silent Steppe” and “Fate”, are connected by one theme, the theme of hunger, collectivization and mass repression during the years of Soviet rule. Both books touched upon human destinies and experiences and have the task of preserving the historical memory of the people. In “Fate”, the author touches upon his individual experiences, describes his fate, and it is an autobiography. This work was initially set out in the author’s diaries; later, he published it as a documentary novel.

“The Silent Steppe” also describes human destinies, but in a broader context. That is, in this book, the author reveals the political regime of that time, describes how senselessly the policy of repression was carried out, as a result, many people were isolated from society, and the people simply died of hunger. Hence, the title of the book “silent”, that is, the word “silence” characterizes the steppe, which was dying of hunger.

From the content of the novel, we can understand that the author was a bright and optimistic person and did not lose hope for a bright future for the Kazakh people. His fate was difficult, but he lived a worthy life.

Such documentary novels play a significant role in literature, because through them we study our history. It is for this reason that we must know what a documentary novel is and what role they play in a person’s life.

A documentary novel is a genre in literature that explores historical events and phenomena of social life by analyzing documentary materials reproduced in whole, in part, or in exposition (Ellis, 2021).

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A documentary novel can be presented as a combination of elements of a documentary and fiction novel. In this type of genre, the author presents real events and facts, and uses description, dialogue, and personal experiences to convey the feelings of the characters or the emotional load of the author and events in the novel. A documentary novel can be a work that presents real events, the words of witnesses of war, revolution and other historical events.

There are several reasons why we need to study the features of translating a documentary novel.

Firstly, the translation of documentary novels allows us to expand our audience of readers; that is, thanks to the translation, we can convey to representatives of another culture historical facts and events that can be a source of pride for us. Thanks to the translation, people from different countries will have the opportunity to be acquainted with our culture, since they do not have the opportunity to read it in the original.

Secondly, the translation of such documentary stories, which describe military actions, famine or other historical events, helps the future generation to preserve these events in memory. Thanks to the translation of historical events, we do not forget the past; this means that a people who know their own and other people's history can confidently make plans for the future generation.

Another important aspect for the translation of documentary stories is that the translation itself is very important for the research work of students or young scientists. That is, the translation expands access to historical values and enriches the culture of a particular people. We live in a world where there is a lot of "fake" news around; often, people get tired of this lie and strive to study the truth through the prism of documentary stories and films. In documentaries and films, people strive to see real events, not fiction, which is why they attract high attention from readers and moviegoers.

This is a reason that recently there has been a rapid increase in the number of programs and printed materials and interest in translating these materials into other languages while observing the norms of translation transformation.

We need to distinguish documentary material from fiction in order to find out the reason for this trend. In the book review "Fiction as Research Practice: Short Stories, Novellas, and Novels," the author Patricia Leavy argues that a documentary novel is based on real events, often relates to the history of a particular country, names and names of cities and countries are mentioned, while fiction is the author's fantasy, giving aesthetics to the work. In fiction, the author uses fictitious names, etc., and creates an image of a society that pleases him (Patricia Leavy, 2016). Documentary literature (which can also include stories) is a memoir novel, a documentary narrative about a certain period in the life of the author-hero, travel books, research stories about heroes and events (Patricia Leavy, 2016). Among literary scholars, there are scholars who believe that the line between documentary and fiction is thin. For example, philologists and literary scholars claim that fiction is based on the analysis of documentary materials; that is, the basis of fiction is documentary facts, materials, etc.

### **Methods and Materials**

The materials of the study were examples from the documentary novel "The Silent Steppe" by Mukhamet Shayakhmetov. Many scientists, both linguists and scholars of related disciplines, such as history and ethnography, have studied documentary stories.

- Comparative and contrastive study - study of the original text and its translations into Russian and English, identifying correspondences and discrepancies.

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- Contextual study - study of the historical and cultural background necessary for the correct understanding and transmission of realities.

- Linguistic stylistic study - analysis of the linguistic means used by the author and the methods of conveying them in translation.

- Method of component analysis - study of the meanings of national and cultural terms and their equivalence in the target languages.

- Method of expert assessment - analysis of the perception of the translation by native speakers of the target language.

- Modern research. Today, many scientists are engaged in the study of historical facts, geographical names, climate change, and the ecosystem, comparing the current state of the climate and ecology through the prism of documentary materials and memoirs. Such documentary materials contain information about the living conditions, culture, political regime, and circumstances that could affect the lives of nomadic people.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study will allow us to better understand the specifics of translating documentary, historical and artistic works, identify the most effective strategies for conveying national identity, and offer recommendations for further work in this area.

In Kazakhstan, scholars such as Sanzhar Asfendiyarov, M. Auezov and others studied historical and artistic works. If we dwell on their works, S. Asfendiyarov is the author of such historical books as “The History of Kazakhstan from Ancient Times,” Kazakh Regional Publishing House in 1935, “The National Liberation Uprising of 1916 in Kazakhstan,” 1936. S. Asfendiyarov is the author of numerous articles on national issues, history and the reasons that prompted the national liberation uprising in 1916.

A number of translators who sought to convey the content of the text without distortion and at the same time preserve the author’s style, which is an important factor in translation, translated historical works by M. Auezov. For example, translators such as Nikolai Anov and A. Gomov translated M. Auezov’s story “Shot at the Pass” into Russian in the 1930s. The main requirements for the translation of M. Auezov’s historical works included conveying the content of the original without distortion, while preserving the dialectical form of the text.

All the above-mentioned historical works describe the national character of the Kazakh people as a reflection of national self-awareness. There are stable signs of national behavior that cannot be changed or remade under the influence of various alien ideologies, political beliefs, etc. These signs have the ability to pass on from generation to generation. The ability to fight and withstand the difficulties and trials of fate, to overcome hunger and mass genocide, colonization, this is the national spirit of the Kazakh people. The spirit that can be observed in the current generation, which is proud to be the descendants of such people. These features of national behavior are reflected in documentary works, “Genocide or not? The 1931-1933 famine in the collective memories of Kazakhstan’s post-independent generations” (Dukeyev, 2025). When translating documentary material or a novel, the key factor is the study and understanding of the topic of translation. Translation begins with the study of all documentary facts and terms given in the original text for an accurate translation into the language of translation. An important aspect in translation is determining the form of presentation of the material. In documentary stories, the text can be conveyed in different ways, since the author and the hero of the novel can be the same person. The text of a documentary novel is based on the author’s diary notes and memoirs. A striking example of this fact is the diary entries of Mukhamet Shay-

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akhmetov, which were later published in the author's memoirs "Fate". In this novel, the author describes the real life of one of his compatriots, his experiences and historical events from his life. From this novel, we learned what important cultural, social and historical events influenced the personal life of the main character. This novel raises questions about national memory, the struggle for survival, hunger, etc. The main character of this novel is looking for the meaning of life, despite the difficulties and trials that have befallen him. The author notes that important historical events and personal experiences of a person are intertwined in the fate of any person. When translating such historical documentary works, it is necessary to take into account such important aspects as the accuracy and correctness of the facts; any distortions of the facts regarding dates, names and geographical data are unacceptable. The translator must decide for what audience he is translating the text, as for the average person, he must use more accessible and understandable terms.

As with any text, the text of a documentary novel must be adapted to the reader for more comfortable reading of the material. When adapting, it is necessary to take into account the cultural values of the recipient of information, without losing the value of the original language. The translation of any text is subject to translation transformations, since preserving the content of the text is impossible without changes. Often, the translator encounters realities or words with no equivalent, which present certain difficulties in the translation process. In such cases, the main task of the translator is to correctly transcribe the text. In documentary stories, there are often names, surnames or names of places. In the translation, each translator tries to adhere to the grammar rules of their native language, while distortions of these rules in the original language are permissible. Often, the authors of documentary stories are journalists themselves, who visit various exotic places, while they indicate geographical names of places with distortion. A striking example of this can be the works of journalist D. Farrier, who is a New Zealander by birth and speaks English. During his travels, he thoroughly studied the local culture and learned the pronunciation of a particular area from native speakers, after he adapted it to the English language and presented it in his works. This option is one of the ways to solve problems associated with the distortion of names of geographical places (Dan'kovskaya, n.d.).

An important aspect in translating documentary works is the choice of translation method, which includes domestication and foreignization.

Using the domestication method, the translator tries to adapt the foreign-language text to the reader as much as possible and at the same time observes the peculiarities of translating realities in different cultures, reflecting the mentality of the people. In this situation, the text becomes convenient for the reader and he does not feel that the original describes the culture of another country and the world.

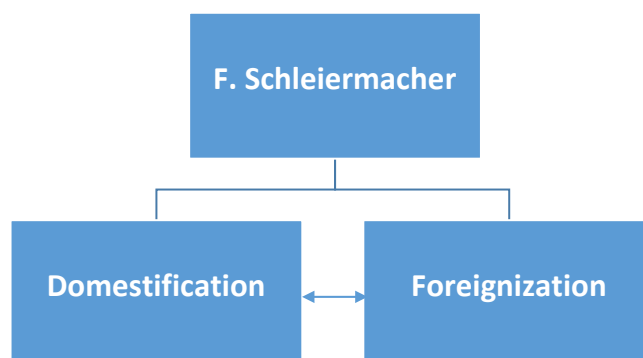
The second method of translation is foreignization. In this case, the translator leaves the features of the original culture in the text, even at the cost of violating the norms of cultural perception. While using this technique, the translator deliberately leaves the cultural realities of the original. This strategy is absolutely opposite to the domestication method. Lawrence Venuti criticizes the first technique, where the translator must adapt the text as much as possible for comfortable reading. The author Mei Tian, in her article 'Research on the Application of domestication and foreignization in literary translation' clearly showed these methods (Tian, 2023).

According to L. Venuti, the translated text should not be dissolved in the host culture and language; otherwise, it will lose its originality. According to this scholar, the translator should consider translation as a process, that is, to convey the meaning of the original text without

distortion and without adaptation, since the reader must thus become acquainted with another culture that exists in the world besides his own. Using the phonetic technique has its advantages, one of them is that the reader mentally “goes abroad”, getting acquainted with another culture and through the text studies another language and the life of another people.

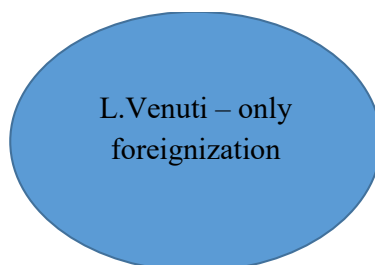
F. Schleiermacher studied and expounded on these two methods of translation in his lectures. He stated that the translator should use only one of them, otherwise the original author and the reader “will lose each other” in his text. There are also scientists who insist that everything depends on the translator himself, on his goal. That is, according to some linguists, both techniques can be used in one text, and there should be a “golden mean” between them.

F. Schleiermacher’s view on choosing one of the translation strategies can be seen below in Diagram 1 (Tian, 2023).



**Diagram 1** - F. Schleiermacher’s view of the translation strategies (Tian, 2023).

Unlike F. Schleiermacher, L. Venuti has a different opinion. His view on the choice of translation strategies can be seen in Diagram 2. In the diagram, we can see how L. Venuti was a supporter of only foreignization (Shelestyuk, Glicenko, 2016).



**Diagram 2** – L. Venuti’s view of the translation strategies (Shelestyuk, Glicenko, 2016).

Recently, documentary stories and films have begun to attract the attention of viewers and readers due to the reality of events and the attractiveness of historical events. Many of them have become cult and popular.

We have analyzed which documentaries and films based on real events have become popular among the youth of Kazakhstan in 2024. In many of the works listed below in the Kazakh language, the authors publish their memoirs, describing part of their lives or the lives of famous politicians of the 20th century.

Cult works tend to influence the mass consciousness and remain relevant among readers for many years. The list of the most popular and cult works is headed by “Kara sozder. Words of edification” by Abai Kunanbayev. This book has been the leader in sales among books over the

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past few years. Although it was written in the 19th century, it is still in demand among Kazakhstani readers due to the content of the book.

Next is Bauyrzhan Momyshuly's book "Ushkan Uya". We know that in the post-war period, the author of this book was actively engaged in creativity and wrote memoirs. This book is no exception; in it, he recalls his carefree childhood.

Then in the list of popular books, is Dinmukhamed Kunayev's book "Aqiqattan attauga bolmaydy" (the author's memoirs). This book is an addition to his previous book "Otti dauren osylay", which is also one of the memoirs-essays, dated 1992. It examines unknown aspects of the lives of Stalin, Malenkov, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov and Gorbachev.

Another book that was sold in large quantities in 2024 is Dulat Isabekov's book "Gauhar tas". The author of this book first heard the song of the same name performed by Bibigul Tulegenova in 1975, and this song made him yearn for his native village and his beloved girl. As a result, he wrote a work - a memoir of his village, where he describes his life and his village in detail.

Another bestseller among documentary works is the work of Sanzhar Kerimbay and Abzal Kuspan, "Beysen zhane bolmys". In this book, the authors analyze the personality of the well-known journalist Beysen Kuranbek (Kerimbai, Kuspan, 2023).

Documentaries were also another powerful tool for conveying events about our history. Many directors filmed documentaries, which also took a worthy place among viewers. In documentary works, we often observe historical events that the author conveys to our generation through books. In the case of films, the directors also tried to show and convey to the current generation the heritage and cultural values of our people.

Below is a report from Rentrak and distributors for 2022-2024, the box office revenue for fact-based documentaries looks like this:

"Mirzhakyp. Oyan, Kazakh!" - 908,942,700 tenge

"Dos - Mukasan" - 486,410,050 tenge

"Kazakh Alemi" - 796,233,589 tenge

These films based on real events, became box office hits in 2024, although their number is very small today. For commercial purposes, it is more profitable for directors to shoot comedy and light films; however, historical films have recently been in demand among young people (Kinopoisk, n.d.).

## Conclusion

In the documentary novel by Mukhamet Shayakhmetov, the main character is the author himself at the age of 10. The novel is based on real events that took place in the life of the author himself. This novel describes the tragedy of the Kazakh people, their experiences, and their state of mind. The author, describing the hard life of the main character, conveys the full weight of the fate of an entire nation. The main character tries to survive in the conditions of a cruel reality, faces injustice, because of which people lost their loved ones.

The author of the novel shows us how the fate of children changed in those difficult years of testing. As a result, the children matured early, and they were deprived of a carefree childhood. Many children's fathers were deported and recognized as enemies of the people; as a result, the children became food providers, helping mothers feed younger children. Despite all the cruelty, the children did not lose hope of getting an education. The hero of this novel managed to study at school, which in his later life paved the way for his creativity. In this novel, we observe the senseless policy of collectivization, as a result of which there were many victims. The author successfully showed the state's indifference to innocent people in his novel. M. Shayakhmetov

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very delicately described all the events of that time, without reproaching anyone, without accusing anyone of anything, leaving the reader with space for reflection. This once again shows that people, at the cost of their own lives, went this way and did not become callous, did not become cruel. The author wrote this novel in his declining years, and sometimes we see sarcasm.

The author himself, over the years, assessed his work from the position of life experience and work. In maturity, the author understood the importance of his work, which was evidence of a historical event, as the “memory of the people”. Thanks to such documentary stories, the “memory of the people” will always live, which will allow the facts to be passed on to the next generation.

Thanks to the documentary novel “The Silent Steppe” Kazakh history and national culture were preserved. Through the author’s “voice,” we heard the experiences and felt the suffering of the Kazakh people who lived in the years of famine and colonization, as the author tried to convey the fullness of the tragedy.

The author made an important contribution to the preservation of national identity. This is the reason and the importance of the translation of documentary stories. Through the translation of such works, future generations can immerse themselves in the atmosphere of that period and feel the experiences and sufferings of the people. It is necessary to emphasize the importance of researching the translation of documentary stories. We observe a limited number of dissertations on this topic; the main sources are published articles that raise the specifics of translating documentary works, but these articles do not reveal the whole essence of the problems, touching on them only partially (Yemelyanova, 2021).

An important and key factor in the successful translation of documentary material is a high professionalism of the translator as a conductor of information. In addition to professionalism, dictionaries play an important role while working with documentary and fiction works. Many dictionaries have limited ability to translate special terms, and even if the dictionary provides the translation of non-equivalent terms, it may not reveal the semantic meaning of that term. Successful translation of literary works depends on whether a translator has the knowledge to convey the meaning of the word, its artistry, effect and outlook by using lexical and semantic techniques. The ability to find semantic equivalence in order to convey these concepts to the recipient requires much research (Kozhakhmetova, Tazhibayeva, Abeshova, Ibragimova, 2024).

To summarize, a translator in any type of activity, no matter whether it is the translation of historical materials, technical documentation or documentary works, must be psychologically prepared for translation, must have intercultural knowledge, have socio-cultural skills, and have a good memory. Thanks to high-quality translations of documentary stories, the “memory of the people” will never be erased; history will be preserved in the same form in which the authors of such books tried to convey it.

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The research paper contains no conflicts of interest.

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### Деректі повесті аудару: жалпы ақпарат

**Андатпа.** Бұл мақалада деректі повесті аударудың ерекшеліктері қарастырылады. Деректі жанрдағы жарияланымдар, материалдар, мақалалар мен фильмдер саны артқан сайын бұл тақырып көтерілуде. Деректі повесті нақты оқиғаларға негізделген ерекше әдеби жанрға жатады. Деректі повесті аудару – аудармашыға тек түпнұсқа тіл мен аударылатын тілді білу ғана емес, сонымен қатар тарихи деректерді терең білу және бұл деректерді қарапайым сөзбен бұрмаламай жеткізуді қажет ететін күрделі жұмыс. Зерттеу тақырыбы аудармашының деректі повестімен жұмыс істеу процесінде қолдануы тиіс аударма әдістеріне назар аударады. Зерттеу жұмысы М. Шаяхметовтың «Үнсіз дала» деректі повестін ағылшын тіліне аударудағы тарихи шындық пен ұлттық-мәдени ерекшеліктердің бейнелену ерекшеліктерін зерттеуге бағытталған. «Үнсіз дала» деректі повесті адам тағдырын сипаттайды, бірақ кеңірек мазмұнда. Мұндай мәтіндерді басқа тілдерге, атап айтқанда, орыс және ағылшын тілдеріне аудару – тарихи түпнұсқалығын сақтау және мәдени ерекшелігін, сондай-ақ стильдік және эмоционалдық ерекшеліктерін жеткізу қажеттілігімен байланысты күрделі міндет. Тек фактілік мазмұнды жеткізіп қана қоймай, ұлттық ерекше шындықтарды, терминдер мен образдарды өзге мәдениет өкілдеріне шынайы үнін жоғалтпай түсінікті етіп бейімдеу маңызды.

**Түйін сөздер:** деректі повесть, тарих, тіларалық трансляция, тілдік тұлға, шындықты бейімдеу.

### Перевод документальной повести: общая информация

**Аннотация.** В данной статье рассматриваются особенности перевода документальной повести. Данная тема актуальна в связи с ростом числа публикаций, материалов, статей и фильмов документального жанра. Документальная повесть относится к особому литературному жанру, основанному на реальных событиях. Перевод документальной повести — сложная работа, где от переводчика требуется знание не только языка оригинала и языка перевода, но и глубокое знание исторических данных и умение передать эти данные простыми словами без искажений. Тема исследования посвящена переводческим приемам, которые должен использовать переводчик в процессе работы над документальной повестью. Исследование направлено на изучение особенностей отражения исторической действительности и национально-культурной специфики при переводе на английский язык документальной повести М. Шаяхметова «Безмолвная степь». Перевод подобных текстов на другие языки, в частности на русский и английский, — сложная задача, связанная с необходимостью сохранения исторической достоверности, передачи культурной специфики, а также стилистических и эмоциональных особенностей оригинала. Важно не только передать фактическое содержание, но и адаптировать национально-специфические реалии, термины и образы таким образом, чтобы они стали понятны представителям другой культуры, не теряя при этом своего аутентичного звучания.

**Ключевые слова:** документальная повесть, история, интерлингва-трансляция, языковая идентичность, адаптация реалий.

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