

**Cultural and Historical Lacunae in Translation: The Context of “The Crying Steppe”**

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### Abstract

This study investigates the translation of cultural lacunae in *The Crying Steppe* (Kunarova, 2020) film's English subtitles to enhance audiovisual translation (AVT) for preserving Kazakh cultural identity. Addressing research questions aimed at identifying lacunae types and evaluating translation strategies' impact, the research employs a product-based qualitative study, analyzing 51 cultural lacunae in the film's subtitles. The scope focuses on Kazakh-specific terms lacking direct English equivalents. Through translation analysis, five lacunae categories were identified: idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae. Results revealed dominant translation strategies, including generalization, functional analogue, omission, explication, calque, and transliteration. Generalization and omission often simplified meanings for accessibility and comprehension of the target audience, but diluted cultural nuances and historical weight, while explication and transliteration preserved some authenticity. The study concludes that these translation choices only partially conveyed the film's Kazakh heritage and Soviet-era context, highlighting challenges in balancing comprehension with fidelity. Recommendations include using annotations, glosses, and culturally informed teams to retain cultural specificity in AVT translation. These findings have practical implications for AVT practitioners, translators, and filmmakers, offering strategies to improve translations of Kazakh films. By addressing lacunae translation challenges, the research contributes to authentic cultural representation, ensuring global audiences' appreciation of *The Crying Steppe*'s rich historical and cultural depiction.

*Keywords: lacunae, Kazakh lacunae, translation strategies, audiovisual translation, cultural translation, The Crying Steppe.*

## Андатпа

Бұл зерттеу «Ұлы Дара Зары» (Кунарова, 2020) фильмінің ағылшын тіліндегі субтитрлеріндегі мәдени лакуналарды аударуды зерттейді және қазақ мәдениетінің тілдік ерекшелігін сақтаудағы аудиовизуалды аударма (АВА) сапасын арттыруды мақсат етеді. Зерттеу сұрақтары аудармадағы лакуналар түрлерін анықтауға және аударма стратегияларының әсерін бағалауға бағытталған. Зерттеу өнімге негізделген сапалық зерттеу әдісті қолдана отырып, тарихи фильм субтитрлерінен табылған 51 мәдени лакунаны талдайды. Зерттеу ауқымы тікелей ағылшынша баламасы жоқ қазақ тіліне тән терминдерге бағытталған. Аударма талдауы барысында бес лакуна санаты анықталды: идиомалар, мәдени экспрессиялар, мәдениетке қатысты объектілер, салт-дәстүрлер және тарихи лакуналар. Негізгі аударма стратегиялары ретінде жалпылау, функционалды ұқсастық, аудармау, сипаттап аудару, калькалау және транслитерация қолданылғаны анықталды. Зерттеу аударма тәсілдері фильмнің қазақ халқының ұлттық мұрасы мен кеңестік дәуір контекстін толық жеткізе алмағанын көрсетіп, екі мәдениеттің арасында кездеспейтін тілдік және сөздік ерекшеліктердің аудармасын айқындады. Ұсыныстарға аннотациялар, түсіндірмелер және мәдени тұрғыдан хабардар топтарды шақыру жатады. Бұл зерттеу нәтижелері АВА саласындағы аудармашылар мен фильм саласындағы мамандарға қазақ фильмдердің аудармасын жақсарту бойынша практикалық ұсыныстар береді. Лакуналарды аудару мәселесін қарастыра отырып, бұл зерттеу шынайы мәдени аударма саласына үлес қосады және жаһандық аудиторияның «Ұлы Дала Зары» фильміндегі тарихи және мәдени байлықты бағалауына мүмкіндік береді.

*Түйін сөздер: лакуналар, Қазақ лакуналары, аударма стратегиялары, аудиовизуалды аударма, мәдени аударма, Ұлы Дара Зары*

### Аннотация

Данное исследование посвящено переводу лакун в английских субтитрах к фильму «Плач великой степи» (Кунарова, 2020) с целью повышения качества аудиовизуального перевода (АВП) и сохранения казахской культурной идентичности. В рамках исследования рассматриваются вопросы, связанные с классификацией лакун и оценкой эффективности переводческих стратегий. Методологически работа опирается на качественный анализ продукта и охватывает 51 вербальную лауну в субтитрах фильма. Исследование сосредоточено на казахских терминах, не имеющих прямых аналогов в английском языке. В результате анализа были выделены пять категорий лакун: идиомы, культурные выражения, предметы культуры, обычаи и исторические лакуны. Были выявлены доминирующие переводческие стратегии, включая генерализацию, функциональный аналог, опущение, описание (экспликацию), калькирование и транслитерацию. Исследование показывает, что такие стратегии лишь частично передают казахское культурное наследие и советский контекст фильма, подчеркивая сложности баланса между достижением понимания и соответствием оригиналу. В числе рекомендаций - использование аннотаций, глосс и привлечение культурно информированных команд. Полученные результаты имеют практическую значимость для переводчиков, специалистов АВП и кинематографистов, предлагая пути улучшения перевода казахских фильмов. Рассматривая проблему перевода лакун, исследование способствует аутентичному культурному представлению и обеспечивает международную аудиторию возможностью оценить богатое историческое и культурное содержание «Плача Великой Степи».

*Ключевые слова: лакуны, казахские лакуны, переводческие стратегии, аудиовизуальный перевод, культурный перевод, Плач великой степи.*

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## Introduction

The present chapter lays the foundation for a study focusing on how the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe* (Kunarova, 2020), a Kazakhstani historical film, preserve its cultural and historical depth through the translation of ‘culturally specific words’ named lacunae. First, it begins with the background information about the research topic, followed by a problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of this study.

## Background Information

The issue of translating cultural gaps can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when translation theorists and practitioners first began to systematically address the challenges in translation posed by cultural differences. This period is known as the early development of *equivalence theory* (Panou, 2013). Early contributions can be seen in the work of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), who, in their comparative stylistics of French and English, introduced the concepts of *direct* and *oblique* translation, offering strategies such as borrowing, calque, literal translation, equivalence, and adaptation to manage linguistic and cultural discrepancies. Their model highlighted that maintaining communicative efficacy frequently required cultural adaptation to achieve equivalency. Following him, Eugene Nida (1964) developed this area with his formal and dynamic equivalence theory. Recognizing the difficulties of translating biblical texts into culturally distant languages, Nida suggested that translators should favor dynamic equivalence, focusing on the cultural context of the recipient so that the target audience would perceive the message in the same way as the source audience. His approach has firmly placed the cultural aspect at the center of translation activities. In 1959, Roman Jakobson contributed to this notion by presenting three types of translation: intralingual (rewording within one language), interlingual (translating between languages), and intersemiotic (translating between media). He emphasized that

meaning is not simply transferred between languages, but is often recreated, especially when dealing with cultural concepts that have no direct equivalents. Catford (1965) further explored the linguistic aspects of translation through his concepts of *textual equivalence* and *formal correspondence*, arguing that translation involves a transition between two different language systems, but can aim to achieve equivalence at different language levels. After that, Werner Koller (1979) refined the concept of equivalence by dividing it into five types: *denotative* (matching literal meaning), *connotative* (capturing implied emotional or cultural meaning), *textual-normative* (adhering to target language text conventions), *pragmatic* (achieving the same communicative effect), and *formal equivalence* (preserving source text's stylistic and/or structural features). Koller's system emphasized that equivalence should not be understood as a single, uniform concept, but as a multifaceted phenomenon depending on various aspects of meaning and communicative purpose. Later, Juliana House (1977, revised 1997) developed a functional-pragmatic model of translation evaluation, distinguishing *overt* and *covert* translation strategies. House argued that cultural gaps often require different approaches to translation, depending on whether the source culture needs to be made comprehensible to the target audience or whether the text needs to be fully adapted to the norms of the target culture. The issue of translating cultural gaps is strongly tied to these foundational theories and highlights the fact that equivalency is not merely a mechanical process but rather has a profound interaction with cultural context.

Translation studies as a discipline often faces the challenges of transferring meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries, where equivalency gaps frequently appear. The concept of "lacunae" describes these gaps that occur when a phrase, idea, or phenomenon that is used in one culture has no exact equivalent in another. The Soviet linguists S. Vlahov and S. Florin (1980) were the first to use the term "lacuna" in translation theory. They focused on the translation specificity of *realia*, which are words and expressions that are firmly ingrained

in a particular people's daily life, traditions, and historical experience. Following Vlahov's and Florin's foundational work, scholars such as Peter Newmark (1988) further addressed the problem of cultural gaps, proposing strategies such as cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and componential analysis, which are discussed in the Literature Review section in detail.

Recently, the demand for translation of the content related to Kazakh culture, especially documentary in Kazakhtani media, has increased, gathering attention from major media industries and the audience. Various documentary films such as *Zhauzhurek Myn Bala* (“Жаужүрек мың бала”, “Myn Bala: Warriors of the Steppe”), *The Crying Steppe* (“Ұлы Дала Зары”, 2020), *Uly dala tany* (“Ұлы Дала таңы” were officially nominated by Kazakhstan for Oscars, demonstrating the rise in popularity of cultural and historical content not only in the domestic arena but internationally. Moreover, other films, including *Tulpan* (“Тюльпан”, 2008), *Shal* (“The Old Man”, 2012), *Tomiris* (The Legend of Tomiris, 2019), and the Kazakh horror movie *Dastur* (“Дәстүр”, 2023), have been translated into English, which showcases the growing popularity and demand for translation of cultural and historical films.

Translation problems concerning culturally and historically specific contexts have been a significant focus of investigation among researchers, namely the problems of translation of geographical street names (Akzhigitova & Zharkynbekova, 2014), folklore texts (Ryspaeva, 2020), stories of great writers such as M. Auezov (Jumabekova & Amanbayeva, 2019), Aitmatova (Bermakhanbetova, 2014), and Esenberlin (Mukhtarova, 2019). In recent years, attention has also been paid to a deeper analysis of cultural and historical aspects that can influence the choice of translation methods, which is especially important when conveying meanings specific to cultural contexts. It is important to note that the correct choice of translation strategy requires taking into account both lexical and

pragmatic characteristics of the original language and a profound understanding of both cultures.

### **Problem Statement**

The growing global demand for cross-cultural media exchange highlighted the critical need for high-quality translation of the audiovisual content, especially for Kazakhstani media products that are increasingly entering the international arena, such as the Kazakh historical film, *The Crying Steppe* (2020). However, the process of translating culturally and historically rich content presents unique challenges, especially in preserving the cultural identity and historical significance. The topic of untranslatability has been explored through multiple studies (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Proshina, 2008). In the current film industry of Kazakhstan, insufficient attention is devoted to accurate translation, which can lead to works that fail to meet high-quality standards. Thus, the research problem is driven by the urgent need for audiovisual translation (AVT) to adopt efficient strategies to preserve cultural and historical authenticity in a cultural context. Evidence suggests that the culturally specific words - lacunae are not preserved in their original specificity; instead, they are often expanded into broad, generalized expressions. This study seeks to address this critical gap by analyzing translation methods used in *The Crying Steppe* and examining how accurately the original message was conveyed in its English translation.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of the research is to examine the current state of cultural and historical lacunae translations from Kazakh to English, to assess how linguistic methods preserve Kazakh cultural identity amid globalization, using the example of *The Crying Steppe* film. By analyzing translations of culturally specific elements, the research aims to identify effective strategies and propose the most efficient approaches based on findings to maintain the Kazakh language's richness in global media contexts.

## Research Questions

For the purpose of this study following research questions were developed:

1. What kind of lacunae are most frequently present in the translation of *The Crying Steppe*?
2. What translational strategies in lacunae were used to translate Kazakh historical documentary film “*The Crying Steppe*” into English to preserve cultural and historical meanings?

## Significance of the Research

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of challenges in translating cultural lacunae by analyzing current practices in the translation of films and the most effective methods for preserving cultural authenticity in audiovisual translation. The findings offer practical insights to a wide range of professionals, including translators, filmmakers, researchers studying cross-linguistic processes, and representatives of communities interested in protecting their heritage. Furthermore, the study offers empirically based recommendations for future translation projects, calling for methods oriented towards the preservation of cultural identity and promoting culturally sensitive approaches, enhancing the global representation of minority cultures like Kazakhstan’s.

## Summary

The introduction of this study highlights the increasing urgency of the problem of cultural and historical lacunae in the translation of Kazakhstani films and the need for accurate and culturally sensitive translation practices. The chapter provides background information with definitions of key terms, reveals the main problem, clearly articulates the aims and research questions, and explains the significance of the study in the broader context of cultural preservation and translation studies.

## Literature review

The main goal of this study is to investigate the translation of cultural gaps from Kazakh to English in the context of a historical film, *The Crying Steppe*, therefore, this literature review starts with the descriptions of key terms, particularly the meaning and the concept of “lacunae”. In the second section of this chapter, I will provide an overview of cultural and historical lacunae, delve into the major issues of untranslatability in the process of cultural translation. Finally, I will also provide the information on the strategies used for the translation of lacunae, followed by a brief summary of the literature review. The following chapter focuses on exploring, analyzing, comparing, and summarizing studies conducted by notable researchers to provide an overview of the topic of cultural and historical lacunae in translation.

The topic of diverse cultural and linguistic characteristics that give rise to culture-specific terms in translation studies has been explored by numerous researchers in the field (Newmark, 1988; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Sorokin & Markovina, 1987; Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Vinogradov, 2007; Wierzbicka, 1977). Juriy Sorokin and Irina Markovina (1987) initially defined the concept of lacunae in the context of translation studies and ethnolinguistics in the 1980s as part of their Lacuna Theory. Their seminal work, notably “The experience of classifying lacunae as one of the ways to describe the national specificity of cultures” (1987), described lacunae as absences found between source and target languages. Drawing on this theoretical framework, my study analyses lacunae in the translation from Kazakh to English based on the historical film named *The Crying Steppe*, with a particular focus on cultural and historical lacunae. These lacunae, such as visual representations of Kazakh rituals or nomadic practices, pose unique challenges in audiovisual translation, requiring strategies to preserve their cultural and historical significance. Numerous researchers have proposed strategies to address these gaps, offering a wide range

of methods to overcome missing elements and ensure that cultural and historical meaning is preserved in translation (Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Aixela, 1996; Vinogradov, 2007; Zhakypov, 2004; Proshina, 2008). This demonstrates the importance of exploring this topic further and provides a theoretical foundation for this research.

### **The Meaning and Concept of “Lacunae”**

The translation of unique cultural terms has gained significant attention from researchers in translation studies, as these expressions encompass a culture’s identity and historical context, which often results in the absence of direct equivalence across languages (Bassnett, 2018). Therefore, the study of these cultural terms, usually referred to as “lacunae”, is crucial in understanding how cultural and linguistic gaps affect the translation barrier.

As Lyubymova et al. (2018) highlights, various terms can be used to refer to these expressions: exoticisma (Suprun, 1958), blank spots on the semantic maps of language (Stepanov, 1965), lacunae (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958; Muraviev, 1975); non-equivalent lexemes (Markovina, 1982), unfindable words (Newmark, 1988), zero lexemes (Sternin, 1989), and limits of culture and identity markers that resist translation (Pym, 1993). All these terms describe the same phenomenon, however, the most appropriate and most commonly used is *lacuna*.

In English dictionaries, the term *lacuna* is described as “hole”, “pit”, or metaphorically as a “gap”, “void”, originating from the Latin *lacuna* (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], 2023; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023; Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). In the *Dictionary of Translation Studies*, the term is demonstrated as “Voids” (or Semantic Voids), “Lacunes”, “Blank Spaces”, and “Gaps” (Shuttleworth & Moira Cowie, 1997). Dagut (1978) defines voids as the “non-existence in one language of a one-word equivalent for a designatory term found in another” (p. 45). He identifies four types of voids: environmental

voids (e.g., Arabic *wadi*, Russian *tundra*), for which transcription is considered the ideal strategy; cultural voids (both religious and secular) illustrated by examples such as Hebrew *bar mitzvah*, English *cream tea*, and Russian *samovar*, where transcription, if necessary, addition of a footnote are the most effective strategies; the lexical void (German *gemütlich* or Russian *toska*); and syntactical voids, such as the Russian *podruga* as “girlfriend”).

As Akai (2020) noted, Jean and Darbelnet were the first to use the term lacuna in comparative stylistic analysis of French and English. Thanks to Franco-Canadian researchers' pioneering work and contribution, lacunology, as a young scientific discipline, gained international recognition (Alymova, 2022). Anokhina (2015) states that after French Canadian school, *lacunology* gained significant recognition in Russia: Yuriy Sorokin explored numerous studies on *lacunology*, while Iryne Markovina focused on its ethno-psychological aspects. After that outbreak, research on lacunae has been conducted in a number of disciplines, including cultural studies (Zhelvis, 1979), linguistics (Bykova, 1999), translation studies (Newmark, 1988; Nida, 2003; Pym, 1993), ethno-linguistics (Markovina, 2004), advertising research (Grodzki, 2003), and contrastive linguistics (Sternin, 2004). In translation studies, lacunae are described as “gaps or absences that occur when the specific words, expressions, or phrases of the source language do not exist in the target language (Sorokin & Markovina, 1982). These gaps arise from differences between cultural, historical, and linguistic elements. Similarly, Bykova et al. (2006) claimed that lacunae arise from language comparison, which compares a term's presence in one language to its absence in another. For example, there is no single English term that expresses the same idea as the Russian word “*сутки*” (“*sutki*”), which refers to a 24-hour period, therefore indicating a lacuna in English.

As previously discussed, multiple terms are used referring to lacunae. For instance, cultural gaps were figuratively described by Stepanov (1965) as blank spots in the semantic

maps of language. This phrase emphasizes how some ideas, which are fully formed and significant to one language and culture, are either missing or ignored in another, leaving translators with difficult semantic gaps. As Markovina (1982) states, “non-equivalent lexemes” are lexical items in a source language that have no direct equivalents in the target language. Newmark (1988) demonstrates the term ‘unfindable words’ in his “Textbook of Translation”. He described these terms as phrases or expressions in the source language that are difficult to translate because of their cultural distinctiveness. These terms might not have an identical equivalent in the target language, necessitating innovative or flexible translation techniques.

According to Sorokin (2003), cultural variations in conventions, values, or perceptions can also result in “white spaces” in mutual understanding during cross-cultural contacts, lacunae in nonverbal communication and behavior. In translation studies, these gaps, whether linguistic or behavioral, are important because they call for innovative ways to close the linguistic-cultural divide (Sorokin, 2003). Pym (1993) named cultural gaps as “limits of culture” or “identity markers that resist translation.” He emphasized the cultural and social significance of specific terminology, implying that some words are ingrained in their cultural context, and that translating them could cause them to lose important cultural meaning or identity. Similarly, according to Lyubymova et al. (2018), lacunae or cultural gaps refer to language, text, or cultural things partially or fully unintelligible in another culture.

In translation studies, the concept of lacunae also coexists closely with the term *realia*, often referring to the related phenomena but differing in scope. *Realia*, as defined by Vlahov and Florin (1980), are specific terms or expressions encompassing culturally specific elements such as objects, customs, or concepts that are unique to the source culture and often have no direct equivalents in the target language. In contrast, lacunae cover a wide range of

lexical, cultural, or pragmatic gaps that lack direct equivalents, including words, concepts, or non-verbal cues (Sorokin & Markovina, 1987), thus covering a wider scope of culturally specific expressions. Both of these terms are closely related to each other; therefore, are often used in conjunction when referring to terms unique to a specific culture.

As Denisova-Schmidt (2023) states, lacuna theory is not limited to translation studies but has the potential for film studies. For instance, to recreate places similar to Soviet Russia, filmmakers often use visually similar locations in other countries - Finland or Lithuania, for example - to substitute a Russian setting. However, even well-made productions can contain cultural inaccuracies, such as serving vodka at breakfast (“The Queen’s Gambit”, 2020) or unrealistic prison conditions (“The Americans”, 2013–2018).

All authors try to define and conceptualize the meaning of lacunae. Understanding these gaps, as proposed by Sorokina and Markovina (1987), is the basis of my dissertation work. According to them, gaps arise due to cultural, linguistic, and conceptual differences. These “gaps” are not only lexical, but also cognitive and cultural, because they indicate that one culture exists in one culture but is absent in another.

### **Classification of Lacunae in Translation Studies**

The field of translation studies employs several types of lacunae and realia. Newmark (1988) suggests a minimum of eighteen types of unfindable words in a source language text. Sternin and Bykova (2006) provide a unique approach to the definition of lacunae by categorizing lacunae into interlingual and intralingual types. Interlingual happens when the gaps are identified between two languages. For instance, the absence of a term for “weekend” in Russian compared to English. Whereas, intralingual lacunae occur in a single language and often manifest as the absence of specific lexical items, such as a lack of the defining word for “speaking the truth” in Russian, despite the presence of numerous terms for lying (Bykova et al., 2006). Vlahov and Florin (1980) classified realia into three major categories: 1)

geographical realia, 2) ethnographical lacunae, and 3) socio-political realia (Vlahov & Florin, 1980, p. 51). As Zhakypov (2008) notes, Sarsenbayev (1975, pp. 43-55) differentiates realia between four types: first are words related to nature and ethnographic words such as *ayran*, *sekseuil*, *tayga*, *zhut*, *bayge* in Kazakh. Second is folklore realia words, which include terms such as *azireyil*, *zhym*, *sure*, *dombra*, and *kobyz*. Third are realia related to household, examples could be *shanyrak*, *izba*, *sandyk*, *torsyk*, *shapan*, *tymak*, *kymyz*. Finally, the fourth type is public and historical realia. In this dissertation, the main focus of analysis will be on cultural and historical lacunae since it is centered around a Kazakh historical drama.

### **Cultural Translation: Cultural and Historical lacunae**

Language is a significant aspect of culture. It is of utmost importance to accurately convey the linguistic meaning, and especially the cultural context. For Venuti (1995), culture in translation studies refers to the “not only language of the given society but also broader, social, historical and ideological frameworks that inform how texts are produced, transmitted, and received”. Newmark (1988) defines culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”. Newmark (1988) highlights the concept of “*cultural focus*” to define when the speech communities pay attention to a specific topic; they generate different unique vocabulary and terminology, where community’s emphasis on a specific domain generates specialized terminology, such as English *cricket terms*, French *wine* and *cheese* vocabulary, German *sausage terms*, Spaniards *bull-fighting* lexicon, Arabic *camel-oriented* words, Eskimos on *snow* terminology (Newmark, 1988). This often reflects community values, interests, and views of life. Thus, this creates challenges for translators as these specialized terminologies are lacking in the target culture due to the cultural gap and distance. In this sense, if there is a cultural focus, there is a translation problem too.

In translation studies, Nida (1993) categorized cultures into five: social culture, ecological, and geographical culture, material culture, religious and historical culture. Adopting Nida, Newmark (1988) divided cultural categories into ecology, the material and social, organizations, customs, activities, procedures, and concepts; and finally, gestures and habits.

Markovina and Sorokin (2011) presents a classification system of lacunae, distinguishing between linguistic and cultural types. According to their classification, linguistic lacunas are divided into those related to language and those related to speech. On the other hand, cultural lacunas are classified into 1) ethno-psychological lacunae, 2) lacunae in communicative activity, and 3) lacunae in cultural space.

Tomahin (1988) defines historical lacunae as the names of significant historical periods, events, and documents in a nation's history; documentary elements; the names of political and religious groups and individuals involved in those events; historicisms; culturally relevant items that were once widely familiar to the speakers of that language and culture, as well as historicisms that have lost their relevance.

Vlahov and Florin (1980) pay special attention to the classification of realia in their book “Непереводимое в переводе” (translated as “The Untranslatable in Translation”). They divided realia into four major categories: division by subject, territorial, time, and translational. The authors further separate the division by time into modern and historical realia. Some terms become historical realia over time, usually due to the change or disappearance of the referent itself. Thus, words like *samalet (plane)*, *sauna (sauna)*, *sputnik (satellite)*, *legion (legion)*, *shlem (helmet)*, *brigadir (foreman)*. However, the reverse process is also possible: when new objects, subjects, or phenomena appear, old names often return to them. Similarly, according to Tomakhin (1988), some historical realia still retain their significance in the collective consciousness, acting as cultural symbols or continuing to

appear in everyday language. On the contrary, others have lost their relevance and are now considered historical terms in the strict sense of the word - rarely used and recognized mainly by specialists or within historical discourse. For instance, examples such as the *Triangle Fire*, *the Stamp Act*, *the Minute Men*, and *the American Revolution*.

Furthermore, Vlahov and Florin (1980) divide realia into four categories, one of which is a territorial classification based on national and linguistic affiliation. This category is further subdivided into realia within a single language and between a pair of languages. Regional realia are categorized as foreign realia. Referring to Suprun and Kostomarov, the authors define regional realia as those that have gone beyond the boundaries of one country, often not even geographically neighboring, and together with the denoted object have become part of the lexicon of several languages. Regional realia also include *Sovietisms*, as they have entered the lexicon not only of the peoples of the USSR, but also of many socialist countries. Terms such as *Bolshevik*, *Soviet*, *raysovet*, *udarnik*, and *agitpunkt* were transcribed or translated into other languages.

### **Issues of Untranslatability**

The notion of untranslatability has attracted renewed scholarly interest, especially since the publication of the *Dictionary of the Untranslatable*, edited by Barbara Cassin (Baker & Sulbaha, 2020). *The Dictionary of the Untranslatable* explores how philosophical terms have been translated into various European languages, emphasizing the ongoing difficulties and fluid nature of translation. The dictionary defines untranslatability “not as an absolute impossibility but as a continuous process of imperfect translation”. Apter sees this as a critique of globalization and its assumption that everything can be translated, while Venuti criticizes the dictionary and Apter’s point for imposing the idea of mistranslation and for belittling translation as a legitimate form of interpretation of the original (Baker & Sulbaha, 2020).

The translation is generally acknowledged as a possible and achievable process, but linguistic elements pose significant challenges, a phenomenon commonly referred to as untranslatability. Though incomplete or veiled, untranslatable words offer methods of thinking, acting, and being in the society they originate from (Lomos, 2018). Untranslatable words pose a ‘challenge’ as evidence that words and phrases cannot be transferred from one language into another (Cassin et al., 2014). For instance, in the north-west region of Galicia, Spain, there are 70 distinct words to describe the concept of the word ‘rain’ (Carabana & Abad, 2016), while the Irish Language features 32 different words for the term ‘field’ (Magan, 2020).

On the other hand, as Munday (2022) describes, linguistic relativity or determinism proposes that variations between languages influence an individual’s conceptualization of the word. This idea is widely known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. Whorf (1956) argued that the Native American Hopi language lacked the specific vocabulary and grammatical structures to express the concept of time. One more claim is that Eskimos have a large number of terms for ‘snow’ as they perceive and understand it. Pinker (1994) argued that linguistic determinism in that language vocabulary reflects the practical needs of an individual’s life. The lack of specific terms does not mean the concept is unperceivable. For example, someone from a hot climate can still distinguish between slush and snow. Pullum (1991) dismisses examples like the many Eskimo words for snow as uninteresting and unimportant. However, Wierzbicka (1997) argues that these examples show a real connection between language and cultural focus. Even if these languages seem simple, they help understand how languages reflect culture.

Due to the fact that untranslatable cases affect both linguistic structure and the relationship between language and culture, they are frequently separated into two categories: linguistic and cultural (Baker & Saldanha, 2020). One translation studies scholar who raised

the untranslatability issue was J.C. Catford (1965), who claimed that linguistic and cultural factors are two categories of the untranslatability phenomenon. Due to the structural differences between the two target languages (hereinafter TL) and source languages (hereinafter SL), linguistic untranslatability arises when the target language lacks a corresponding lexical or syntactical equivalent in the source language. He uses as a key example the Russian verb *npuy̆mu*, which translates as “*come/arrive on foot*”. The absence of an exact equivalence does not create difficulties in translation in most cases; however, in some occasional situations, the specific meaning of *npuy̆mu* may become contextually important or even be a part of a pun.

Cui (2012) discusses cultural untranslatability and shows gaps that occur while translating cultural terms. First, untranslatability results from cultural gaps; material culture is the worldview of others for the same thing; traditional culture is the belief that people living in a community form their own customs and traditions, and religious culture is the difference between people’s beliefs and historical culture naming it as the evidence of social development. Untranslatability occurs from cultural conflict, described when some words in a specific language cause a negative meaning in the second language. For example, the Chinese word ‘白象’ is the name of a famous battery brand, with its literal translation to English ‘blue elephant. In Chinese, it symbolizes fortune and good luck. However, for English-speaking consumers, it is an idiom referring to something costly and useless (Cui, 2012). In turn, cultural untranslatability occurs when the situational element of the source language culture is absent in the target language culture (Catford, 1965). Catford (1965) uses examples like the Finnish *sauna* and Japanese *yukata* to highlight cultural untranslatability, where translation into English as ‘bath’ or ‘bathrobe’ fails to capture the cultural context. These translations

can result in unusual collocations, like someone wearing a bathrobe to a café, creating a sense of “cultural or collocational shock (Catford, 1965).

Translation of a culture is not an easy task. To avoid ambiguity in terms and concepts, it is essential to translate them properly. Smit (2024) tried translating the German word *Volk* using the classification of semantic void by Menachem Dagut who defines the semantic void as “the absence of an equivalent word in another language”, and he believes that there is no equivalent single word in the target language to convey the meaning of a source text. However, the author provides suggestions by pointing out that it can be translated by more than one lexical word, specifically by phrases (Smit, 2024). For instance, Smit (2024) analyzed common features in translating a specific word, *Volk*. She used different dictionaries to find out the meaning in a specific context, so she suggested writing and adding a full range of context, both in general and specific dictionaries.

Cui (2012) and Wang (2014) both investigated the untranslatability between Chinese and English languages and tried to give strategies for the loss of meaning. Similarly, scholars explore and propose numerous methods for translating such lacunae, the most common of which is the provision of a translator’s note for lacuna by adding extra information to unknown cultural words.

However, in the context of Kazakh language, the issue of untranslatability remains largely unexplored, thus this study attempts to contribute to this research field by examining lacunae translation in popular media.

### **Translation Strategies for Lacunae**

Alongside general translation studies, there is a wide range of lacunae translation procedures proposed by different scholars (Newmark, 1988; Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Aixelá 1996; Vinogradov, 2007; Proshina, 2008, Zhakypov, 2008). In order to effectively translate

cultural-specific items (hereinafter CSI), Newmark (1988) proposed several strategies for conveying the meaning of the source language into a target language. They are transference (loan word, transcription), cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, and componential analysis. Transference retains the source term unchanged; meanwhile, cultural equivalent substitutes a target culture term. Functional equivalent uses a neutral, general term for explanation. A descriptive equivalent explains the source term's meaning. Finally, componential analysis breaks down the term's meaning into components.

According to Vlahov and Florin's (1980) classification, the techniques of transferring realia in translation are divided into two main types: transcription and translation (substitutions). By translation, they mean not only literal transfer, but also various strategies aimed at adapting the realia to the cultural context of the target language. The structure of their classification is as follows:

I. Transcription.

II. Translation (substitutions), which is divided into three:

1. Neologism (calque, semi-calque, assimilation (adaptation), semantic neologism).
2. Approximate translation (generalization, functional analogue, description, explication, interpretation).
3. Contextual translation.

Aixelá (1996) developed a classification of translation strategies for culturally specific units, dividing them into two main groups: Conservation (or source-oriented strategies), Substitution (or target-oriented strategies). Conservation includes repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic translation, extratextual gloss, intratextual gloss and substitution which includes synonymy, limited universalization, absolute universalization, naturalization, deletion, autonomous creation.

In translation studies, a variety of strategies are available and used to overcome culturally specific lacunae. The main strategies of delivering realia in the target language are variously considered by authors. For instance, V. S. Vinogradov (2006) divides realia translation of words in the following way: 1) transcription or transliteration (retaining source term phonetically), 2) hypo-hyperonymic translation (using broader or narrower terms); 3) assimilation (adopting target culture equivalent); 4) periphrastic translation (describing term's meaning); 5) calque translation (literal word-for-word translation) (Vinogradov, 2006, p. 119). Similarly, in the work "Theory of Translation" of Proshina (2008), the author identifies the main strategies of transferring realia, such as transcription, transliteration, and calque translation. In addition, she considers such translation methods as explicatory translation (explication), lexical substitutions, and reduction. An explicatory translation explains the source term's meaning through description. Lexical substitutions replace the source term with a target language equivalent. Reduction omits non-essential elements of the source term.

Zhakypov (2004) proposed a slightly different set of strategies for translating realia, recommending the use of fundamental techniques proven by many translators. 1) transcription or transliteration (retaining source term phonetically); 2) approximate translation (using similar target term); 3) lacuna compensation (adding explanatory context); 4) descriptive translation (explaining term's meaning); 5) calque translation (literal word-for-word translation); 6) preservation of functional similarity (maintaining communicative purpose); 7) translation comments.

Venuti (1995) introduced the concepts of domestication and foreignization to describe translation strategies that either adapt the text to the target culture or retain its foreign elements. According to Venuti (1995), domestication is a target-oriented translation strategy that makes the text more understandable and accessible to the target audience, adapting to their language and cultural norms, while foreignization, as a source-oriented strategy,

preserves elements of the original culture, to emphasize the original context of the text and preserve its cultural identity. According to Yonamine (2022), earlier studies conducted between 2004 and 2009 primarily adopted domestication strategies in subtitling, whereas research from 2010 onward shows a growing preference for foreignization approaches.

As can be noted, the numerous attempts aimed at narrowing the gap between lacunae and their translation led to the emergence of various methods. There are, however, strategies that are commonly proposed and agreed upon as efficient by the majority of researchers, which are compiled in the table below based on the conducted literature review.

**Table 1**

*The Realia Translation Strategies in Literature.*

<b>Vlahov &amp; Florin (1980)</b>	<b>Aixela (1996)</b>	<b>Zhakypov (2004)</b>	<b>Vinogradov (2006)</b>	<b>Proshina (2008)</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Transcription/ Transliteration</b>	Repetition / Orthographic adaptation	Transcription/ Transliteration	Transcription/ Transliteration	Transcription / Transliteration	The conversion of different alphabets
<b>Calque/Semi-calque</b>	Calque	Calque	Calque	Calque	Borrowing by literal translation
<b>Semantic neologism/ Assimilation</b>	Autonomous creation	-	Neologism	-	Creating a new word or a phrase

<b>Vlahov &amp; Florin (1980)</b>	<b>Aixela (1996)</b>	<b>Zhakypov (2004)</b>	<b>Vinogradov (2006)</b>	<b>Proshina (2008)</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Generalization</b>	Absolute universalization	Generalization	Generalization	Generalization	Translation of a specific term into a broader one
<b>Functional analogue</b>	Cultural substitution	Functional analogue	-	-	Replacing realia with a functionally the same word in a target culture
<b>Description/ Explanation</b>	Extratextual/ Intratextual gloss	Descriptive translation	Periphrastic (descriptive, explicative translation)	Explicatory translation (Explication)	Description of a term
<b>Contextual translation</b>	-	-	Contextual substitution	Contextual adaptation	Translation of a term according to a specific context.
<b>Omission</b>	Deletion	-	Omission	Reduction	Omission of a specific element from the text

*Note:* The strategies are widely used among translators. This table is a brief overview of the translation methods used for the realia translation.

For the purposes of this study, the main focus of analysis is devoted to the translation strategies such as generalization, description (explication), functional analogue, transliteration, and omission as a result of the conducted analysis of *The Crying Steppe* subtitles.

### **Empirical Studies on The Translation of Lacunae**

This section explores empirical studies on translation strategies used for addressing lacunae, as presented in the theoretical framework above, and provides a general understanding of their practical implementation in various linguistic and cultural contexts. These studies emphasize the use of strategies such as generalization, pure borrowing, literal translation, descriptive translation, content explication, and explanatory annotations due to their common implementation and efficacy.

Among these methods, qualitative analysis of Alymova (2022) revealed that generalization was the most frequently used translation strategy to fill lexical gaps among Russian and Spanish translators, particularly in movie subtitles. However, the author also points out that high frequency does not indicate its superior effectiveness, as quality is not necessarily represented by use frequency but rather through the ability to maintain cultural fidelity. The prevalence of generalization strategy in subtitle translation is probably related to the context of the corpus data, i.e., movie subtitles, which are subject to character limits, thus encouraging the selection of more concise solutions (Alymova, 2022). Similarly, Zhabayeva (2023) also confirmed the role of generalization in the translation of realia in Kazakh media, alongside other strategies such as content explication and semantic translation.

The strategy of pure borrowing, including transliteration, is another prevalent method. Firdaus and Naully (2022) observed that pure borrowing was the most frequently used method for translating cultural terms, followed by literal translation, since they retain the authenticity of the source language. Ahmetoglu (2022) similarly identified transcription (transliteration) as the dominant method, especially for proper nouns or other culturally loaded terms. Mukhtarova et al. (2019) emphasized that transliteration remains the primary approach when translating ethnographic realia into Russian, highlighting its effectiveness in preserving cultural identity, though it may challenge the target audience's comprehension of the content without additional context.

Literal translation, while less common than borrowing, still plays an important role. Firdaus and Naully (2022) ranked literal translation as the second most used strategy after pure borrowing, noting its direct approach to the interpretation. Zhao (2025) reported that audiences often appreciate literal translation for preserving cultural context. However, it can also risk awkwardness or misunderstanding in translation due to linguistic differences, requiring careful application, thus making it not widely applicable.

Descriptive translation and content explication, on the other hand, are critical strategies for cultural translation. Zhabayeva (2023) and Yerbulatova et al. (2017) underlined the important role of descriptive translation, particularly in the process of translating Kazakh realia and other complex concepts into other languages. Content explication, as noted by Zhabayeva (2023), provides contextual details to bridge lacunae, thus enhancing audience understanding in AVT.

Similarly, adding explanations through annotations or footnotes is a widely recommended practice for addressing lacunae. Robingah (2021) pointed out that explanatory notes are one of the most frequent strategies used in non-AVT contexts, enhancing cultural understanding. However, adding to the issue of character limits in subtitles, the reliance of AVT on subtitles can restrict the implementation of more effective strategies, such as providing annotations.

Both Le (2024) and Liu (2024) highlighted that the successful translation of lacunae often requires consultation with native speakers or cultural informants. To support this, Venuti (2019) especially advocates a collaborative approach by utilizing culturally informed teams for AVT translations, as it holds the greatest potential for covering all aspects of translation to ensure the accurate and engaging representation of the source material.

Overall, these studies emphasize the need to balance source language content with target audience comprehension in translation. Strategies such as generalization and

transliteration dominate due to subtitling constraints; however, descriptive and explicatory methods provide better preservation of cultural and historical authenticity. These findings inform the analysis of lacunae translation efficacy, highlighting the significance of a comprehensive approach.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework synthesizes the discussed literature on lacunae translation to provide the basis for the analysis of cultural and historical lacunae in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe* film. It demonstrates the relevance of translation issues and strategies, summarizes key concepts, and provides a structured lens for addressing the research questions. Each research question is addressed with relevant ideas from the literature, ensuring a systematic approach to the research topic.

#### ***Research Question 1: What kind of lacunae are most frequently present in the translation of The Crying Steppe?***

The explored definitions and understanding of lacunae shape RQ1's analysis by providing a foundation to identify and classify cultural and historical gaps in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe*. Based on the literature, lacunae are defined as lexical, cultural, or pragmatic absences in the target language where source language terms lack direct equivalents, encompassing realia (culture-specific objects or customs) and broader conceptual gaps (Sorokin & Markovina, 1987; Vlahov & Florin, 1980). This description, drawn from Sorokin and Markovina (1987), informs the identification of lacunae, and Vlahov and Florin's (1980) typology (e.g., ethnographical, socio-political realia) and Tomahin's (1988) focus on historical lacunae provide a basis for a categorization framework during analysis. This allows to frame RQ1 by focusing the analysis on identifying and categorizing lacunae in the subtitles, assessing their frequency and type to understand translation challenges in preserving Kazakh cultural identity.

***Research Question 2: What translational strategies in lacunae were used to translate the Kazakh historical documentary film, *The Crying Steppe*, into English to preserve cultural and historical meanings?***

This question is explored following the key ideas described above. First, Newmark's (1988) view of translation strategies (e.g., transference, descriptive equivalent) and further classification explored by authors (Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Aixela, 1996; Zhakypov, 2004; Vinogradov, 2006; Proshina, 2008) is important as it provides a comprehensive framework to code strategies used in subtitles, such as generalization. Second, Koller's (1979) concept of cultural fidelity, highlighting connotative and pragmatic equivalence, offers a basis to evaluate whether translations preserve Kazakh cultural fidelity, guiding qualitative comparisons between source dialogue and English subtitles. These findings shape a two-step analysis: coding subtitles for strategies and assessing their efficacy at carrying historical and cultural significance. This framework, rooted in empirical findings (e.g., Alymova, 2022; Zhabayeva, 2023), ensures a thorough evaluation of translation efficacy in *The Crying Steppe*.

Overall, this conceptual framework utilizes the literature to structure the analysis of lacunae and translation strategies in *The Crying Steppe*, ensuring a rigorous assessment of cultural preservation in AVT. It provides a foundation for addressing the research questions and aim, and informing culturally sensitive translation practices.

**Summary**

The purpose of this Literature Review was to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing subtitle translations, including cultural and historical lacunae from Kazakh to English in the context of *The Crying Steppe*. As previously discussed, the section began with defining lacunae as cultural and linguistic gaps, exploring their classifications (Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Sorokin & Markovina, 1987). Next, I examined issues of

untranslatability, highlighting linguistic and cultural challenges in AVT (Catford, 1965; Cui, 2012). Then, the translation strategies proposed by scholars were reviewed (e.g., Newmark, 1988; Vinogradov, 2006; Zhakypov, 2004; Proshina, 2008), including transcription, generalization, and explication, and their practical application in empirical studies (e.g., Alymova, 2022; Zhabayeva, 2023). Finally, the conceptual framework was provided, shaping the analytical structure for identifying lacunae and evaluating translation strategies' cultural fidelity. These findings and the conceptual framework formed the basis of the methodological instruments and design developed for this study, which will be described in detail in the next chapter.

## **Methodology**

This section is presented to demonstrate the research methodology used to address the research questions about lacunae used in *The Crying Steppe* film and strategies implemented during its translation to preserve the original meaning. It provides an overview of the methodology of this study, which includes research design, sampling, research method, data analysis approach, and ethical implications. Since the purpose of the research is to evaluate the translation of lacunae in the historical and cultural context and identify the challenges faced by the translators during translation from Kazakh to English, I will justify and describe the reasons behind choosing a product-oriented qualitative approach to this study to address the objective of this study.

In the first section, I will describe and justify my research approach and choices. After that, I will provide a description of the sample used for this research. In the third section, the full details of research methods and instruments will be provided, followed by the Data Analysis Approach reporting management, organization, and analysis of data and findings. Finally, I will present ethical considerations relevant to this study.

### **Research Design**

In this section, I will provide a detailed description of the research design, including an explanation and justification of the research approach, as well as a brief description of the whole research process, including the establishment of research questions, data collection, and analysis.

The main goal of the study is to determine how the cultural and historical lacunae influence the translation and interpretation of information in the context of *The Crying Steppe* film. Therefore, it is important to recognize the significance of accurately translating lacunae in order to convey the content effectively to international audiences. Likewise, the study explores the challenges and strategies of translating cultural words that lack equivalents in other languages. To address these challenges and answer research questions, the study utilizes a qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a qualitative approach is equipped to provide detailed and contextual insights to address complex and nuanced topics such as the translation of cultural lacunae, which is directly tied to cultural identity and historical significance. In contrast to the quantitative approach that focuses on numerical data and generalizations, the qualitative method allows better interpretation of non-numerical data (Creswell and Poth, 2017), which in the case of this study is *The Crying Steppe* film and its subtitles. Thus, given that this approach allows for detailed exploration of how these cultural terms are translated and preserve cultural and historical significance, it directly supports the study's aim of evaluating translation efficacy by enabling detailed analysis and holistic understanding of how translation carries the authenticity of Kazakh culture and history.

Additionally, due to direct relevance to the objectives of this study, a product-based study was chosen as a main research method since it allows for focusing on the analysis of the final translation output – the English subtitles of “*The Crying Steppe*”. By examining the film and its subtitles as “product”, I can conduct a precise assessment of how Kazakh lacunae are adapted into English, identifying the implemented strategies and their impact on the original message (Olohan, 2020). Moreover, in AVT studies, a product-oriented approach is quite common since subtitles are the primary tool for the translation and evaluation of cultural fidelity (Cintas & Remael, 2020). Thus, by centering the analysis around *The Crying Steppe* film and its subtitles, the study effectively addresses translation challenges, provides

an in-depth exploration of translation nuances of Kazakh cultural words using specific case analysis, and identifies implemented strategies.

First, to address the objective of this study, I established two research questions that allow for a detailed insight into the translation of Kazakh lacunae into English and its challenges. *The Crying Steppe* and its English subtitles were chosen as a study product due to their rich historical and cultural context and international recognition. Then, this film was thoroughly explored and all of the English subtitle text was considered, with priority given to segments where lacunae are prominent. Each segment containing lacunae was then recorded in written form and formatted in the table, providing direct comparison between the original text and the translated one. Finally, the translation methods used in the subtitles were identified, and the accuracy was evaluated against the original intended message to the audience.

### **Sample**

This section focuses on the description of the sample used for this research. As this is a product-based study, no participants were involved. For the sample of this study, the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe* were selected for several reasons. First, *The Crying Steppe* is a Kazakh historical drama with a rich depiction of cultural and historical context, making it especially suitable for the purposes of studying translation of lacunae in Kazakh. The film was directed by Marina Kuranova and portrays Kazakhstan during the Soviet-era Great Famine (1930-1933). Filled with a thorough representation of Kazakh daily life, encompassing religious rituals, verdant pastures, and vibrant attire, the film provides an illustrative example of the culture of the Kazakh people and their long history. Thus, it is of the utmost importance to convey a comprehensive historical narrative without any distortion to foreign audiences, especially considering the recognition of this film on an international scale. *The Crying Steppe* was submitted for consideration as Kazakhstan's entry to the

Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film and was widely recognized among international audience as it was translated into several languages.

This sample is justified for its direct alignment with research objectives: assessing how translation strategies preserve or dilute cultural authenticity and identifying challenges in Kazakh-to-English subtitling. The choice of a single film allows an in-depth analysis of a culturally significant text, which is a common approach in AVT case studies (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). The English subtitles for this film are the main data source used to identify and evaluate lacunae as well as translation accuracy. Purposive sampling was utilized to select specific subtitle segments containing cultural lacunae, such as dialogue scenes rich in Kazakh historical and cultural references.

### **Research Methods**

This section provides a description and justification of the research method used in this study. In order to collect and analyze data for assessing the lacunae in translation in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe*, the textual analysis was utilized as a primary qualitative research method. Textual analysis is a systematic method for the interpretation of text's meaning, structure, as well as cultural significance, which is directly applicable for examining film's subtitles (Bauer, 2000). This method is especially suitable for product-oriented study since it allows for direct examination of subtitles to identify Kazakh lacunae and assess translation strategies that were employed. Thus, in this case, subtitles are analyzed as texts for the evaluation of cultural and historical fidelity.

The textual data – the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe* was accessed via the YouTube platform, where the official channel “Ұлы Дала Зары - *The Crying Steppe*” for this film posted the English version. The original Kazakh dialogue was also collected and transcribed from the film's audio to identify lacunae. The entire subtitle text and original audio were reviewed, with priority given to segments with prominent lacunae to achieve

comprehensive coverage.

### **Data Analysis**

In the sections above, I described the research design and methods applied to this study. Therefore, in this section, I will explain how the collected data was managed, organized, and analyzed, leading to the findings. As mentioned before, the product-based qualitative approach was implemented for this research. Before starting the textual analysis, the identification of lacunae included four phases: initial viewing, preliminary lacunae identification, detailed analysis, and verification.

First, I watched *The Crying Steppe* film from the beginning till the end to get closely familiar with its narrative, historical, and cultural context during the Great Famine. No data was collected at this stage. The initial viewing provided a general understanding of the film's dialogue and English subtitles as a cohesive text as well as their interplay with visual elements representing Kazakh culture (e.g., nomadic traditions) and historical references (e.g., Soviet oppression).

Second, during a repeated viewing of *The Crying Steppe*, I focused on noting prominent lacunae, with special attention devoted to those with evident mismatches or oversimplifications in translation. This stage resulted in the initial draft for the analysis, where the most prominent lacunae and their translation into subtitles were written.

The third stage is the most important one since it involved multiple targeted viewings of the film with frequent pauses and rewatches to ensure identification of all historically and culturally specific terms and their translation. The original Kazakh dialogue was transcribed from the film's audio (as scripts were not available) and cross-referenced with English subtitles to evaluate accuracy and then recorded.

Finally, the final viewing was conducted to verify all noted lacunae with translation issues and ensure that no relevant terms were overlooked. With notes of all identified

lacunae, I then proceeded with the data analysis, during which the following steps were undertaken:

1. All terms identified in the viewing stages were organized in the table using Microsoft Word. Each lacuna extracted from the original dialogue was written in the first column alongside its translation in English subtitles, highlighting specific words in the dialogue that had mismatches in translation with a bold font.
2. The third column was created where the original meaning in the film's context is explained, pointing out specific cultural and historical nuances that were omitted in subtitles.
3. In the "Translation Strategy" column, I analyzed each lacuna with its translation and identified strategies that were implemented by translators of *The Crying Steppe*. This analysis revealed the following translation methods: generalization, functional analogue (cultural substitution), description (explication), transliteration, and omission.
4. The collected data was also categorized based on lacunae's context, revealing five groups of lacunae: cultural objects, cultural expressions, idioms, customs, and historical lacunae. Such categorization allows for a general overview of the types of lacunae present in this film, identifying translation patterns as well as evaluating the impact of translation on specific contexts and various aspects of the cultural and historical representation. The categorizations were established based on lacunae categorization examples provided by Newmark (1988), with additional adjustments adapted to the content of *The Crying Steppe* specifically.
5. The final stage of analysis focuses on the interpretation of how the implemented translation strategies affect the cultural and historical authenticity of the film, thus addressing this study's primary objective. The translation accuracy is evaluated based

on three criteria: fidelity (does the subtitle preserve the original meaning?), cultural (does it convey Kazakh identity accurately?), and/or historical weight (does it reflect historical events accurately?). This analysis will be described in detail in the Discussion section.

This data analysis approach allows for direct addressing of the study's objectives, including evaluation of translation efficacy and identification of challenges. By categorizing lacunae based on the context and identifying their meaning in the original context, the analysis assesses how well subtitles preserve lacunae's meaning. Meanwhile, identification of translation strategies reveals challenges like frequent generalization or omission, which dilute authenticity. Such an approach ensures a deep, context-specific analysis of *The Crying Steppe*, contributing to the research on the translation of lacunae.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study does not involve the participation of humans, but some ethical principles were observed in its conduct. The primary material consists of publicly available subtitles of a Kazakh film translated into English. Still, ethical responsibility in textual analysis requires a respectful and accurate representation of cultural content, particularly when addressing culturally specific items and potentially sensitive historical or sociopolitical references.

The study aims to critically examine how Kazakh cultural concepts are conveyed in English without distorting or oversimplifying the source culture. The research ensured that cultural realia was approached with respect and scholarly neutrality, avoiding ethnocentric judgments. Proper acknowledgement of the original audiovisual material and the subtitle translations has been maintained, and all secondary sources are cited according to academic standards. Furthermore, the research considers the broader ethical dimension of cross-cultural representation. Since translation, especially of audiovisual materials, plays a significant role in shaping international perceptions of culture, this study strives to highlight and preserve the

cultural specificity of the source text while critically evaluating the translation strategies applied in the translated text.

### **Summary**

The methodology of this study establishes a framework for evaluating the translation of cultural lacunae in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe*, directly addressing the research objectives of assessing translation accuracy and identifying challenges in preserving historical and cultural authenticity. With a product-based qualitative approach, the study focuses on subtitles as the primary data source, allowing textual analysis to examine the subtitle text to ensure nuanced cultural and historical lacunae exploration. The sample consists of purposively selected subtitle segments containing lacunae, which were identified through a four-stage viewing of the film. Data collection involved accessing subtitles and transcribing Kazakh dialogue, while data analysis followed a five-phase textual analysis process, focusing on the identification of original meaning, translation strategies, and categorization based on the context. Ethical considerations involved addressing culturally specific aspects and historical or sociopolitical references with respectful intent and accurate representation. The following Results section presents the findings, detailing the efficacy of translation strategies and the challenges encountered, offering insights into improving cultural fidelity in Kazakh-to-English subtitling.

## **Findings**

The following section demonstrates results based on the conducted textual analysis of the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe* film. As the purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the efficacy of lacunae translation from Kazakh to English, the qualitative product-based approach allows for a nuanced and detailed exploration of lacunae and their translation strategies. Thus, I identified 51 lacunae with translation issues in the film and categorized them into five groups: idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae. These terms and their respective categories are presented below in Table 2, providing a general overview. Next, the implemented translation strategies are demonstrated, providing specific examples from the film's original dialogue and its English subtitle text. As it was mentioned previously, the following strategies were revealed after conducting analysis: generalization, functional analogue (cultural substitution), description (explication), transliteration, calque, and omission.

### **Identification of Lacunae and Their Types**

To categorize the 51 verbal lacunae in *The Crying Steppe*'s English subtitles, Newmark's (1988) cultural categories were adapted to better reflect the film's Kazakh cultural and historical content. Idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae were used instead of Newmark's ecology, material culture, social culture, organizations/concepts, and gestures/habits to capture specific linguistic nuances and

traditions. Idioms (e.g., “ұзынқұлақ”) and cultural expressions (e.g., “тәй-тәй”) were split from gestures/habits to distinguish figurative and cultural nuances. Material culture was classified as cultural objects (e.g., “қымыз”) for clarity. Social culture was narrowed to customs (e.g., “тұсау кесу”) to emphasize rituals. Organizations/concepts became historical lacunae (e.g., “Қызыл иектер”) to reflect Soviet-era terms. Ecology was omitted due to a lack of relevant terms in the film. These adjustments enhance analysis of lacunae types and translation strategies, supporting cultural identity preservation. Thus, the terms were grouped based on the following descriptions:

**Idioms:** Strictly figurative phrases with non-literal meanings.

**Cultural Expressions:** Single words or phrases with cultural significance but not necessarily figurative.

**Cultural Objects:** Tangible items of Kazakh material culture.

**Customs:** Social rituals or traditions specific to Kazakh culture.

**Historical Lacunae:** Terms linked to historical and/or political events.

The identified lacunae and their categories are presented in the Table below:

**Table 2**

*Lacunae Categories Identified in The Crying Steppe Film*

Category name	Examples
Idioms	<i>Uzynkulak</i> (ұзынқұлақ), <i>kudayi konak</i> (құдайы қонақ), <i>kanymuzty suga agyzu</i> (қанымызды суға ағызу), <i>kolyn kanga malu</i> (қолын қанға малу), <i>zhalgyz tuyaksyn</i> (жалғыз тұяқсың), <i>akennin aty, oty</i> (әкеннің аты, оты), <i>arty taza</i> (арты таза), <i>auyzyna su tamyzu</i> (аузына су тамызу), <i>aramtamak</i> (арамтамақ), <i>tugan zhet</i> (туған жер), <i>kara halyk</i> (қара халық).

Category name	Examples
Cultural expressions	<i>Erkek atynan sadaga ket</i> (Еркек атынан садаға кету), <i>tau-tau</i> .. (тәй-тәй), <i>kulunshagym</i> (құлыншағым), <i>aynalaiyn</i> (айналайын), <i>botakanym</i> (ботақаным), <i>ottama</i> (оттама), <i>onerli bol ainalaiyn</i> (өнерлі бол, айналайын), <i>arzyz</i> (арсыз), <i>namystam zhurdai ekensin</i> (намыстан жұрдай екенсің), <i>erdi zheteleitin namys</i> , <i>erdi zheteleitin namyzs</i> (ерді жетелейтін намыс), <i>uyattan zhurdai boldyk</i> (ұяттан жұрдай болдық), <i>erkek tokty kurbandyk</i> (еркек тоқты құрбандық), <i>sorly bolganym-ai</i> (сорлы болғаным-ай), <i>onkasyn sumyrailar</i> (оңқасын сұмырайлар), <i>azhal</i> (ажал), <i>obal</i> (обал), <i>Әзәзіл</i> (azazil).
Cultural objects	<i>Қумыз</i> (қымыз), <i>kazy-karta</i> , <i>zhaly-zhaya</i> (қазы-қарта, жалы-жая), <i>dastarhan</i> (дастархан), <i>tort-tulik mal</i> (төрт-түлік мал), <i>ak boz ui</i> (ақ боз үй)
Customs	<i>Tusau kesu</i> (тұсау кесу), <i>Nauryz kutty bolsyn</i> (Наурыз құтты болсын!),
Historical lacunae	<i>Alash</i> (Алаш), <i>Sovet</i> (Совет), <i>asharshylyk</i> (ашаршылық), <i>kampeske</i> (кәмпеске), <i>kugyn-surgin kurbandary</i> (қуғын-сүргін құрбандары), <i>palnamash</i> (палнамаш), <i>kuzylдар</i> (қызылдар), <i>bolshevikter</i> (большевиктер), <i>Stalin</i> (Сталин), <i>Alash azamattary</i> (Алаш азаматтары)

Among identified lacunae the most common ones were related to cultural expressions such as *kulunshagym* (құлыншағым), *aynalaiyn* (айналайын), *botakanym* (ботақаным), followed by idioms (*zhalgyz tuyaksyn* (жалғыз тұяқсың)), cultural objects (*ak boz ui* (ақ боз үй)), historical lacunae (*Alash* (Алаш)), and then customs (*Tusau kesu* (тұсау кесу)).

### Translation Strategies Used for Kazakh Lacunae

The conducted analysis revealed the implementation of 6 translation strategies in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe*, including generalization, functional analogue (cultural substitution), description (explication), transliteration, calque, and omission. Below are tables presenting these translation strategies and how they impact the original dialogue. All English subtitles from this and the following tables are taken from the official subtitles from *The Crying Steppe*.

Table 3

## Generalization Strategy

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
Қонақтарға қымыз құйып бер! [Qonaktarga qumyz kuyuyp ber!]	Give our guests some milk!	<i>Kumyz</i> (fermented mare's milk) is a symbolic Kazakh drink served to guests as a sign of respect. Cultural lacuna: <i>Kumyz</i> , as a cultural symbol reduced to milk, loses its traditional meaning. Traditional horsemeat dishes are central to Kazakh cuisine.
<i>Дастарханда бәрі бар. Жалы-жая, қазы-қарта.</i> [Dastarhanda bari bar. Zhaly-zhaya, kazy-karta]	Here on the table, there is plenty of everything - meat, bread, delicacies.	Loses the cultural significance of <i>dastarkhan</i> and the specificity of Kazakh horse-based delicacies.
Құдай қонақтарды қарсы ал! [Kudai konaktardy karsy al!]	Greet your guests!	<i>Kudai konak</i> refers to a sudden guest (often unexpected) who must be treated with the highest hospitality.
Ұзынқұлақ не дейді? [Uzynkulak ne deidy?]	Rumours?	<i>Uzynkulak</i> (lit. "long ears") is a Kazakh idiom used to refer to gossip, hearsay, or unofficial news – like saying "word on the street" or grapevine talk".
<i>Төрт-түлік малдан түкте қалған жоқ.</i> [Tort tulik maldan tukte kalgan zhok]	There are no cattle left at all.	<i>Four types of livestock</i> are generalized with "cattle", making it more familiar and accessible in English.
<i>Алаш қонған ақ боз үй бос қалды ма?</i> [Alash kongan ak boz uy bos kaldy ma?]	Is the ancestral house of people is empty?	It is asking whether the sacred home, once inhabited by the <i>Alash people</i> - Kazakh ancestors or elite- is now empty- evoking loss of cultural identity.

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
<p><i>Кәмпеске, кәмпеске</i> деп ауылдың бәрін тонап бітірді. [Kampeske, kampeske dep auyldyn barin tonap bitirdi.]</p>	<p>They have ransacked entire village with their occupation.</p>	<p>The term <i>kampeske</i> (confiscation) is culturally substituted with the occupation program, emphasizing the historical context of forced collectivization or land redistribution.</p>
<p><i>Туған жеріңді</i> тастап қайда кетпексің? [Tugan zherindi tastap kaida ketpeksin?]</p>	<p>Where do you want to go, once you abandon your home?</p>	<p>It refers to the pain of being forced to leave one's <i>homeland</i>, a common theme in <i>The Crying Steppe</i>.</p>
<p>Күресуге елдің <i>қауқары</i> жоқ! [Kuresuge eldin kaukary zhok]</p>	<p>You know that people are afraid and don't want to fight anymore.</p>	<p>The specific idea of <i>no strength</i> is generalized to fear and unwillingness.</p>
<p><i>Еркек атынан садаға кет!</i> [Erkek atynan sadaga ket]</p>	<p>Coward!</p>	<p>The culturally rich curse is heavily condensed into "Coward!" - a general term that removes the metaphor and ritualistic weight.</p>
<p><i>Құлынишағым!</i> <i>Ботақаным!</i> <i>Айналайын!</i></p>	<p>Sweetheart!</p>	<p>The term <i>kulynshagym</i> conveys deep affection, especially from a parent to a child. <i>Botakanym</i> is a tender term likening a child to a camel calf. <i>Ainalaiyn</i> expresses heartfelt love and protection, and it is commonly used by elders.</p>
<p>Сонда менің бала-шағамның <i>обалы</i> кімге? [Sonda menin bala-shagamnyn obaly kimge]</p>	<p>What about my family?</p>	<p>The concept is reduced to a general concern, removing the moral/ethical dilemma embedded in the original.</p>
<p><i>Советке қарсы шығамыз ба?</i> [Sovetke karsy shygamyz ba]</p>	<p>Are they saying, they are going to rebel against the <i>rulers</i>?</p>	<p>The whole phrase literally means "Are we going to rise against the Soviets?". This directly refers to the Soviet Union and carries strong historical connotation. The translation neutralizes it as "the rulers"</p>

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
1920-1939 жылдары Ашаршылық пен саяси қуғын-сүргін құрбандары болған ата- бабаларымыздың рухтарына бағыштаймыз!	Dedicated to the <i>victims</i> of the <i>Holodomor Famine</i> in Kazakhstan.	The phrase "Asharshylyk and sayasi kugyn-surgin kurbandary" refers to the victims of two tragic events in Kazakhstan's history: the famine (asharshylyk) of the early 1930s and the political repression (kugyn-surgin) experienced under Stalin's regime.

As mentioned in the Literature Review, the generalization method in translation refers to the translation of a specific term into a broader one. In the case of *The Crying Steppe*, a total of 20 lacunae were translated using this method. For instance, as shown in the Table, the word “қымыз” (“*qymyz*”) is translated into English as “*milk*”, which generalizes a term referring specifically to the mare’s milk – a traditional Kazakh drink with deep cultural and historical significance – to a very broad term “*milk*”. With 11 lacunae in this table having a cultural context, the excerpt “Алаш қонған ақ боз үй бос қалды ма?” (“*Alash kongan ak boz uy bos kaldy ma?*”) contains a historically loaded term “Алаш” (“*Alash*”) which is attributed to a specific political movement in Kazakhstan; however, the generalization strategy used a broad “*people*” to address it, thus removing a significant historical context.

**Table 4**

*Functional Analogue Strategy (Cultural Substitution)*

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
Жазықсыз қара халықты не үшін қырып жатырсыңдар? [Zhazyksyz kara halykty ne ushin kyryp zhatyrsyndar?]	What are our people suffering for? Why do you hate us so much?	“ <i>Kara halyk</i> ” (lit. Black people) refers to common, poor people in Kazakh history. The sentence expresses pain during mass repression.

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
<p>Әзәзілге сендің бе, айтқанына көндің бе? [Azazilge sendin be, aitkanyna kondin be?]</p>	<p>Would you believe the devil succumbed to persuasion?</p>	<p><i>Әзәзіл</i> refers to a devilish figure in Islamic and Kazakh folklore, representing evil or temptation. The sentence accuses someone of being deceived by evil.</p>
<p>Алаш қонған ақ боз үй бос қалды ма? [Alash kongan ak boz uy bos kaldy ma?]</p>	<p>Is the ancestral house of people are empty?</p>	<p>Refers to a symbolic white yurt (“<i>ақ боз үй</i>”), traditionally tied to Kazakh heritage and Alash nation.</p>
<p><i>Оттама!</i> Менің бұл дос болғаным емес, болмайды да! [Ottama! Menin bul dos bolganym emes, bolmaidy da!]</p>	<p>Cut it out! I have no friend and never will have.</p>	<p>“Ottama!” is a strong Kazakh idiom</p>
<p><i>Қанымызды суга ағызғанда</i> қайда болдың? [Kanymysdy suga agyzganda kaida boldyn?]</p>	<p>Where were you when we were being <b>butchered</b>.</p>	<p>Literally: "Where were you when our blood was poured into the water?" – a vivid metaphor expressing mass killing, suffering, and betrayal during a time of historical trauma (e.g., famine, repression).</p>
<p><i>Өнерлі бол, айналайын!</i> [Onerli bol,ainalayin!]</p>	<p>Well done, dear!</p>	<p>The original is a wish/blessing for future talent, but it was rendered as praise for present success ("Well done"), making it more accessible and familiar to English-speaking audiences.</p>
<p>Қай бетімен бізді көрсетіп тұрсын, <i>арсыз!</i> [Kai betimen bizdi korsetip tursyn, arsyz!]</p>	<p>Shame on you!</p>	<p>The term is rendered as a functionally equivalent English expression that preserves the accusatory tone, but not the directness or intensity of "<i>Арсыз!</i>"</p>
<p>Мәден, Тұрар <i>қолын қанға</i> <i>малымайтынын</i> білесің!</p>	<p>Maden, you know that Turar is not a murderer.</p>	<p>A vivid Kazakh metaphor is replaced with a more neutral, literal expression.</p>

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
[Maden, Turar kolyn kanga malymaitynyn bilesin!]		The poetic imagery is lost, but the basic idea is retained.
<i>Намыстан жұрдай екенсің!</i> [Namystan zhurdai ekensin]	Shame on you!	A deeply cultural concept of “namys” (honor/pride) is replaced with a more general emotional reaction familiar to English speakers. The specific cultural weight is lost.
Ерді жетелейтін <i>намыс</i> қой, балам. [Erdi zheteleitin namys koi, balam ]	A man is driven by his honor, my son.	The translation retains the core meaning but loses some nuance of the original driving force, which is more culturally specific in the Kazakh version.
<i>Намыс адамға қайрат</i> береді. [Namys adamga kairat beredi.]	Honour gives him perseverance.	The word “қайрат” (strength, energy, courage) is generalized as “perseverance”. This shifts the focus from the broader concept of strength to a more specific interpretation of perseverance.
<i>Ұяттан жұрдай болдық!</i> [Uyattan zhurdai boldyk!]	We lost all shame!	The phrase “жұрдай болдық” (deprived of) is generalized into “lost”, simplifying the expression and removing some of the nuance about being deprived of shame.
Аштықтан өлсем де, саған томақ болмаспын! [Ashtyktan olsem de, sagan tomak bolmaspyn!]	I’d rather be dying of hunger than be your bed-warmer!	In the context of the film, it reflects a woman's refusal to submit herself to exploitation or compromise her honor, even in the face of extreme hunger.
<i>Палнамашты</i> бекер өлтірдің! [Palnamashty beker oldirdin!]	You shouldn’t have to kill the <i>commissioner</i> .	<i>Palnamash</i> is translated to the role “ <i>commissioner</i> ”, which is more accessible to

Original Dialogue	English Subtitle	Meaning in a Context
		a target audience unfamiliar with the character's significance.

A functional analogue was utilized for the translation of 14 lacunae, with 2 of them having a historical context (“*палнамаи*” as a “*commissioner*” and “*қара халық*” as “*people*”). Functional analogue usually refers to replacing realia with a functionally similar word in a target culture (Vlahov & Florin, 1980; Zhakypov, 2004). In the case of *The Crying Steppe*, this strategy was implemented the most, including successful examples such as the translation of “*Әзәзілге сендің бе, айтқанына көндің бе?*” (“*Azazilge sendin be, aitkanуна kondin be?*”) into “*Would you believe the devil succumbed to persuasion?*”, in which “*Әзәзіл*” - a devilish figure in Islamic and Kazakh folklore - was changed to the “*Devil*”, thus applying a substitution that keeps the original meaning and tone. Although this strategy seems to be used frequently due to its efficacy at maintaining the original message without overcomplicating subtitles, some cases, such as “*Қанымызды суға ағызғанда қайда болдың?*” (“*Kanymysdy suga agyzganda kaida boldyn?*”) translated to “*Where were you when we were being butchered?*”, reducing a vivid metaphor expressing a blood being poured into water during a time of historical trauma to a simpler “*butchered*”, show some limits of this method.

### Table 5

*Description (Explication) Strategy*

Original dialogue	English subtitles	Meaning in a context
ЖАЛҒЫЗ <i>тұяқсың!</i> [Zhalgyz tuyaksyn!]	You are the last one in our family.	“Zhalgyz tuyak” (lit. Single hoof) is a cultural idiom meaning the last male heir or only descendant.

Original dialogue	English subtitles	Meaning in a context
Әкеннің <i>аты</i> қоса өшеді, әкеңнің <i>оты</i> . [Akennin aty kosa oshedi, akennin oty.]	If you die, your father's line will die out, do you understand.	Symbolic expression: "father's name and fire" refers to lineage, legacy, and home in Kazakh culture.  This kazakh proverb metaphorically compares brave man to a sacrificial ram, meaning a man must be ready to sacrifice himself for a greater cause - a widely understood idea in Kazakh culture.
<i>Еркек тоқты құрбандық деген.</i> [Erkek tokty kurbandyk degen]	A good man will give his life for the people.	Literally: "Whose backside is clean?" – A Kazakh idiom meaning nobody is innocent, we all have flaws.
Кімнің <i>арты таза</i> дейсің? [Kimnin arty taza deisin]	Who is without sin?	The figurative and culturally rich expression " <i>giving water</i> " is substituted with the more direct and neutral phrase " <i>who has he helped?</i> " to fit the English-speaking audience.
Кімнің ауызына су тамызыпты. [Kimnin auzyna su tamyzypty]	He lives on eagle hunting. But who has he helped?	The line conveys deep sadness and remorse. Literally translated, it means: 'My dear Aikunim, I left you as prey for wild animals'. In the context of the film, this phrase reflects the character's grief over the loss of a loved one who died unprotected.
Айкүнім, ит-құсқа жем қылып тастап кеткенім. [Aikunim, it-kuska zhem kylyp tastap ketkenim]	Aikunim, how can I walk this earth now? I left you to be eaten by the beasts...	

A total of 6 lacunae with cultural context were translated using the Description (Explication) strategy, in which the lacuna is interpreted by explanation of the term (Vlahov & Florin, 1980). The common feature among these identified terms is that they are used for symbolic expressions, idioms, and metaphors, which explains the method choice by the film's translators, as such expressions lack direct or similar equivalents. For instance, the

expression in “*Кімнің ауызына су тамызып*” (“*Kimnin auzyna su tamuzypty*”), if translated literally, becomes “Whose mouth was watered?”, thus translators used an idiom description in the subtitles “*But who has he helped?*” to convey the intended message. Due to the direct approach to the translation of this method, the original meaning remains intact, but may dismiss some cultural aspects within the expressions to ensure comprehension of the target audience.

**Table 6**

*Calque Strategy*

<b>Original dialogue</b>	<b>English subtitles</b>	<b>Meaning in a context</b>
Қарғыс атсын, <i>қызыл иектер!</i> [Kargys atsyn, kyzyl iekter!]	Damn you, red swine!	Political insult to Bolsheviks (literal: red guts)
<i>Қызылдар</i> іздеп жатыр деп айт. [Kyzylдар izdep zhatyr dep ait]	Tell him the Reds are searching for him.	The historically loaded term is kept as is, which is appropriate since "the Reds" is also recognized in English to refer to Bolsheviks.

Calque, otherwise known as literal word-for-word translation (Vinogradov, 2006), was used to translate two lacunae. One of them is a political insult, “*иектер*” (“red swine”), and the other is a reference to Bolsheviks as the Reds (“*қызылдар*”), maintaining a direct approach to interpretation.

**Table 7**

*Transliteration Strategy*

<b>Original dialogue</b>	<b>English subtitles</b>	<b>Meaning in a context</b>
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Большевиктерге жанымды  
жаншытып қоймаймыз.  
[Bolshevikterge zhanymdy  
zhanshytyp koimaimyz]

No, I don't want bolsheviks  
torture us anymore?

For Kazakhs, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the term 'Bolsheviks' is largely associated with the trauma of forced collectivization, political repression, and a devastating famine (asharshylyk) that killed over a million people.

The transliteration strategy was implemented once in the film, when the term “Большевиктер” (“Bolsheviks”) was brought up, since "Bolsheviks" is a proper noun, referring to a specific political group in Russian history, making this strategy applicable.

**Table 8**

*Omission Strategy*

Original dialogue	English subtitles	Meaning in a context
Арамтамақ қызылдарға еліңді саттың! [Aramtamak kyzyldarga elindi sattyn!]	You sold yourself for the piece of bread.	"Арамтамақ" = parasite, someone who eats without earning. "Қызылдарға" = to the <i>Reds</i> , i.e., Bolsheviks. The line accuses someone of betraying their homeland to the Soviets out of selfishness or for survival. The historical-political charge is weakened in translation.
Тәй-тәй, тәй-тәй... [Тay-tay, tay-tay]	(Not translated)	The phrase "Тәй-тәй, Тәй-тәй" is an example of an expression often used in Kazakh to mimic or describe the action of a child taking its first steps. The phrase itself doesn't have a direct translation, but evokes the sound or concept of a child's early walking stages.
Әз-Наурыз, құтты болсын! Ақ мол болсын!	(Not translated)	"Әз Наурыз құтты болсын! Ақ мол болсын" is a traditional Kazakh greeting. While "Әз

Original dialogue	English subtitles	Meaning in a context
[Az-Nauryz kutty bolsyn! Ak mol bolsyn!]		Наурыз құтты болсын" could be translated directly as "Happy Nauryz!"
Қазір тұсауын кеседі. [Kazir tusauyn kesedi]	(Not translated)	The Kazakh phrase "Қазір тұсауын кеседі.." translates literally to "Now (they) will cut the child's tether." It refers to the traditional Kazakh ceremony called <i>tusau kesu</i> , when a child takes their first steps, their legs are symbolically "untied" by cutting a string tied around them. It's a meaningful rite of passage symbolizing independence and growth.
Сорлы болғаным-ай! Сорлы болғаным-ай!.. [Sorly bolganym-ai]	I let him alone.	The expression of regret or lamentation in the Kazakh is omitted and replaced with "I let him alone", which shifts the emotional focus and meaning.
Онқасын сұмырайлар! [Onkasyn sumyrailar!]	(Not translated)	This is a strong insult, often translated as "scoundrels" or "villains" in English, implying people of low moral character.
Тұрар сені ажалдан аман алып қалды ғой. [Turar, seni azhaldan amn alyp kaldy goi]	Turar saved your life.	The metaphorical, culturally deep term "azhal" (death personified) is generalized and rephrased more neutrally.
Сталиннің қуғын- сүргініне ұшыраған 25 мыңнан астам Алаш азаматтары түрмеге тоғытылып, ату-асу жазасына кесілді	(Not translated)	The phrase refers to Stalin's political repressions, during which over 25,000 members of the Alash movement were imprisoned and executed.

The omission strategy, or simply removing the original term from the translation, was used 8 times. In most cases, lacunae were dismissed when their context relied more on audio-visual context rather than a textual one. "Тәй-мәй, мәй-мәй..." ("Tay-tay, tay-tay"), for instance, is an expression often used in Kazakh to mimic or describe the action of a child taking its first steps. Therefore, there is no direct equivalent for it in English, and it relies on

audio-visual elements to convey the meaning. However, there are also cases where the dismissal of certain expressions can affect the cultural significance. Thus, the absence of translation in the scenes mentioning significant traditional elements such as “Tusau kesu” and “Nauryz holiday” reduces the immersion in Kazakh culture.

### **Translation Patterns Based on Categories**

Following the identification of lacunae categories and implemented translation methods, distinct translation patterns for each category could be traced. For instance, idioms, such as “*жалғыз түйяқ*” and “*ұзынқұлақ*,” were primarily translated using description (explication) (e.g., “*жалғыз түйяқ*” to “*last one in our family*”) with occasional use of generalization (e.g., “*ұзынқұлақ*” to “*rumours*”). Cultural expressions such as “*құлынишағым*”, were mainly generalized (e.g., “*құлынишағым*” to “*sweetheart*”) or used functional analogues (e.g., “*әзәзіл*” to “*devil*”). Cultural objects, including “*қымыз*” and “*дастархан*”, were predominantly generalized (e.g., “*қымыз*” to “*milk*”; “*дастархан*” to “*table*”), with some functional analogues (e.g., “*ақ боз үй*” to “*ancestral house*”). Customs, such as “*Тұсау кесу*” and “*Наурыз*”, were mainly omitted (e.g., “*тұсау кесу*” untranslated). Finally, historical lacunae including “*Большевиктер*” and “*Қызылдар*” favored transliteration (e.g., “*Большевиктер*” to “*Bolsheviks*”) or calques (e.g., “*Қызылдар*” to “*the Reds*”), with occasional generalization (e.g., “*совет*” to “*rulers*”). These patterns highlight the varied approaches to translating specific types of Kazakh lacunae.

### **Additional Findings**

#### ***Non-Verbal Lacunae***

During the analysis of the untranslatable cultural and historical lacunae in the film, additional findings were revealed, particularly several gaps that were visually represented

rather than verbally expressed, which are known as “non-verbal lacunae”. These elements are noticeable from the first scenes, which vividly depict the rich cultural tradition of the Kazakh people of the steppe. The communities shown performed traditional folk dances, participated in traditional games, consumed traditional drinks such as *kymyz*, and wore traditional clothing. There was an atmosphere of general joy in the aul, and significant cultural practices, such as the “*tusau kesu*” ritual, were demonstrated. Accordingly, I systematized all the identified lacunae and uncovered their specific features, highlighting their contribution to the interpretation of the film. These non-verbal lacunae identified in the film will be categorized into ecology, material, and social culture, organizations, customs, activities, concepts, gestures, and habits by Newmark (1988) instead of adjusted categories that were utilized for the main findings, since it fits a broader range of identified non-verbal lacunae.

**Table 9**

*Cultural Category by Newmark (1988)*

Cultural category	Number of lacunae	Examples
Ecology	4	<i>Village</i> (aul), <i>Zhaylau</i> (“Жайлау”), <i>Kystau</i> (“Қыстау”)
Material culture	31	<p><b>Housing:</b> <i>kiiz ui</i> (киіз үй), <i>kerege</i> (кереге), <i>shanyrak</i> (шаңырақ), <i>sandyk</i> (сандық), <i>bosaga</i> (босаға), <i>tor</i> (төр), <i>kazan</i> (қазан), <i>besik</i> (бесік), <i>kese</i> (кесе), <i>oshau</i> (ожау), <i>dastarhan</i> (дастархан), <i>altybakan</i> (алтыбақан), <i>dombyra</i> (домбыра), <i>ak-ala zhip</i> (ақ ала жіп), <i>kamshy</i> (қамшы), <i>ertokym</i> (ертоқым)</p> <p><b>Clothing:</b> <i>tymak</i> (тымақ), <i>shapan</i> (шапан), <i>saukele</i> (сәукеле), <i>oramal</i> (орамал), <i>ak zhaulyk</i> (ақ жаулық), <i>takiya</i> (такия), <i>etik</i> (етік), <i>belbeu</i> (белбеу)</p> <p><b>Food:</b> <i>et asu</i> (ет асу), <i>kurt</i> (күрт), <i>tary</i> (тары), <i>kymyz</i> (қымыз), <i>kazy-karta</i>, <i>zhal-zhaya</i> (қазы-қарта, жал-жая)</p> <p><b>Transport:</b> <i>zhylky</i> (жылқы)</p>

Social culture	1	Sayatshylyk (саятшылық)
Organizations, customs, activities, concepts	5	<b>Customs:</b> ормек току (өрмек тоқу), shashu (шашу), tusau keserde aytylatyn bata (бата), zheti kazyna (жеті қазына), куй (күй)
Gestures and habits	1	<b>Habits:</b> The life of a nomadic people is linked to the livestock of four animals.

### Summary

The analysis of 51 lacunae in *The Crying Steppe* English subtitles addressed Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 2 (RQ2), identifying lacunae types and translation strategies. For RQ1, five categories emerged: idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae. For RQ2, six translation strategies were observed: generalization, functional analogue, omission, explication, calque, and transliteration. Generalization and omission simplified meanings for accessibility but reduced cultural nuances. Explication and transliteration retained some authenticity, while functional analogues and calques varied in effectiveness. These findings highlight the range of lacunae in *The Crying Steppe*'s subtitles and the varying success of the strategies in conveying Kazakh cultural and historical elements, providing a foundation for further discussion on improving AVT fidelity.

### Discussion

This section provides the interpretation of the presented findings from the qualitative textual analysis of 51 cultural and historical lacunae in *The Crying Steppe*'s English subtitles, addressing two research questions:

1. What kind of lacunae are most frequently present in *The Crying Steppe*?
2. What translational strategies were used to translate the Kazakh historical documentary film *The Crying Steppe* into English to preserve cultural and historical meanings?

The findings revealed that the content of the film was heavily reliant on lacunae related to Kazakh cultural expressions and idioms in particular. However, the content also included references to Kazakh cultural objects, historical lacunae, and customs. With regards to utilized translation methods, functional analogue and generalization were the most frequent strategies, followed by omission, explication, calque, and transliteration. This discussion argues that in the English subtitles of *The Crying Steppe*, explication and functional analogue better preserve Kazakh identity than generalization and omission, which sacrifice cultural depth for accessibility, however, the translation would benefit from implementing other strategies such as descriptive equivalents, addition of annotation and/or glosses, as well as

involving culturally informed teams, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive audiovisual translation (AVT). The following section connects these results to the literature and problem statement, exploring implications for Kazakh media.

### **Lacunae Types and Translation Patterns**

The study adapted Newmark's (1988) cultural categories to classify 51 lacunae into idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae, reflecting *The Crying Steppe*'s Kazakh and Famine-era context (see Table 2). Gestures/habits were divided into idioms (e.g., “ҰЗЫНҚҰЛАҚ”) and cultural expressions (e.g., “намыс”) to distinguish figurative and cultural nuances. Material culture was changed to the cultural objects (e.g., “қымыз”) for clarity. Social culture was narrowed to customs (e.g., “мұсау кесу”) to emphasize rituals and behaviors. Organizations/concepts became historical lacunae (e.g., “Алаш”) for historical specificity. Such categorization provides an overview of the film's lacunae content and allows for the identification of translation patterns of these categories.

When it comes to the translation of cultural expressions, which make up the majority of identified lacunae, translators of the film primarily relied on generalization method to fit English, likely to ensure immediate comprehension for English audiences unfamiliar with Kazakh terms, as Baker & Saldahana (2020) note simplification is common in AVT to prioritize accessibility. The most prominent example would be an expression “Еркек атынан садаға кет!” (“*Erkek atynan sadaga ket*”), which literally can be translated as “May you be a sacrifice for the name of a man”. In the context of the scene, it implies someone failing to live up to the "name of a man" (i.e., not acting with the expected bravery or honor), however in the subtitles it was expressed as general “coward”, without diving into specifics of how this expression emphasize traditional role of a man in Kazakh culture. Functional analogues were also utilized to preserve the tone of cultural expressions, such as

changing “Өнерлі бол, айналайын!” (“*Onerli bol, ainalayin*”) to “*Well done, dear*”.

“Өнерлі бол”, with its literal meaning being “Be skillful” or “Be talented”, is a phrase used as an encouragement or a blessing to encourage someone to develop skill, thus phrasing is as “Well done” in English provides substitution that keeps the original function of the expression (i.e., to express praise and encouragement).

With the translation of idioms, which drive the film’s dialogue, translators mostly implemented an explication strategy to clarify figurative meanings, as direct equivalents are rare (Newmark, 1988). Explication is often applied to bridge the figurative gap, as Cui (2012) suggests for idioms. For instance, “*жалғыз түйяқ*” (“*jalgyz tuyak*”; literally, “single hoof”), is used to describe a cherished only child, was translated as “*last one in our family*”, ensuring clarity but losing poetic imagery to some degree to ensure the comprehension of the target audience. Generalizations, such as “*ұзынқұлақ*” (“*uzynkulak*” - long-ear) to “*rumours*”, simplified gossip-related phrases for readability, meanwhile functional analogues, such as “*Оттама!*” (“*Ottama!*”) to “*Cut it out!*”, maintained emotional tone in heated exchanges as its direct meaning refers to “Don’t burn” or “Don’t catch fire” in the context of warning someone against reckless or dangerous behavior.

With cultural objects, which anchor the film’s pastoral setting, translators predominantly relied on generalization to make unfamiliar items accessible. For example, “*қымыз*” (“*qumyz*” - fermented mare’s milk), a symbol of hospitality and nomadic heritage, was reduced to “*milk*”. Similarly, “*дастархан*” (“*dastarkhan*”) became “*table*”, although in Kazakh culture it usually encompasses a broader meaning of a spread of food and hospitality. Functional analogues, like “*ақ боз үй*” (“*ak boz uy*” - white yurt) to “*ancestral house*”, conveyed function at the expense of omitting specifics of nomadic heritage,

*The Crying Steppe* also emphasized scenes portraying customs, which embody Kazakh traditions, thus translators mostly resorted to the omission strategy due to the absence

of concise equivalents, as Cui (2012) highlights for untranslatable rituals. For instance, “Тұсау кесу” (“*tusau kesu*” - rope-cutting ceremony), a rite for a child’s first steps, remained untranslated, relying on visuals to convey meaning, a common AVT strategy to maintain pacing (Denisova-Schmidt, 2023). Similarly, “Наурыз” (“*Nauryz*” - holiday celebrating the arrival of spring, or Persian New Year) was omitted, diminishing cultural depth.

Translation of historical lacunae is of significant importance as they play an important role in presenting the history of Kazakhstan during the Soviet regime and particularly the Famine era. Thus, translators favored transliteration or calques to preserve accuracy.

“Большевиктер”, as demonstrated in Table 7, was rendered as “*Bolsheviks*”, maintaining historical fidelity for recognized terms, as Vinogradov (2006) recommends. Calques like “Қызыл иеткер” (“*qyzyl ietker*”) to “*red swine*” retained political tone and literal understanding of political terms. Generalizations utilized in cases such as “Совет” (“*Sovet*”) to “*rulers*”, simplified complex political terms for broad comprehension, as Baker & Saldahana (2020) point out, but neutralized the Soviet context (Venuti, 2019).

The translation patterns for idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae in *The Crying Steppe*’s subtitles reveal a complex interplay of strategies, highlighting AVT’s challenge in balancing cultural fidelity with comprehension, shaped by simplification, accessibility, and technical constraints.

### **Evaluation of Translation Strategies**

Lacunae in the film were translated using mostly target-oriented strategies. The six strategies identified - generalization, functional analogue, explication, transliteration, calque, and omission - varied in effectiveness. To make it accessible to international audiences, translators often adapted cultural references, sometimes at the expense of the original's depth and nuance. Lawrence Venuti (1995) has widely discussed this tendency through his concepts

of domestication and foreignization. As Yonomine (2023) noted, domestication has increasingly become the dominant strategy among translators working for global audiences since 2010. However, in this study, the analysis revealed that the translation was intended for an international audience. The most frequently applied strategies were generalization and functional analogue. Generalization strategy which was used 20 times were particularly evident in the translation of cultural words such as *қымыз* (“*qumyz*” - fermented mare's milk), *қазы-карта, жалы-жая* (“*kazy-karta, zhaly-zhaya*” - traditional horse meat dishes), *құдай қонақ* (“*kudai konak*” - a sacred or unexpected guest), *төрт-түлік мал* (“*tort-tulik mal*” - four types of livestock), *Алаш* (“*Alash*” - intellectual and political elite), *совет* (“*sovet*” - Soviet era policies), *қуғын-сүргін құрбандары* (“*kugyn-surgin kurbandary*” - victims of political repression). For instance, *төрт-түлік мал* (four kinds of livestock) has been translated simply as ‘cattle’, which significantly reduces the cultural depth of the original concept. In American culture, ‘cattle’ usually refers to cows or bulls. In contrast, in Kazakh culture, *төрт-түлік мал* includes sheep, horses, camels, and cattle - each of which has a specific social, economic, and symbolic meaning in the traditional nomadic way of life. Similarly, *қымыз* is a horse milk that Kazakh people make and drink for a long time. A traditional drink is commonly served to the guests as a symbol of respect, hospitality, and well-being. In the English subtitles, the term is broadly translated as “milk,” which does not reflect its cultural significance. Alymova (2022) also found high-frequency usage of the generalization strategy. The author maintains that the number of times a strategy is applied does not inherently demonstrate its effectiveness. Rather, cultural authenticity should be evaluated based on the retention of the original meaning, not on how often the strategy is employed.

The second most frequently used strategy identified in the analysis was the *functional analogue*, which aims to convey culturally and functionally equivalent meanings in the target

culture. Fourteen examples of this strategy were found, primarily used to adapt culturally specific concepts into terms that are more familiar to the target audience. For example, the metaphor "*қанмызды суга ағызғанда қайда болдың?*" ("*kanymyzdy suga agyzyganda kaida boldyn?*") was translated as "*where were you when we were being butchered?*". This translation employs a functional analogue since "being butchered" effectively communicates the idea of mass violence at the same time, preserves the emotional intensity and meaning of the original metaphor for the target audience. Throughout the subtitle analysis, a variety of expressions related to the terms "*намыс*" ("*namys*" - honour) and "*ұят*" ("*uyat*" - shame/modesty) were noted, including phrases such as "*ұяттан жұрдай болдық!*" ("*uyattan jurday boldyk*") and "*намыстан жұрдай екенсің!*" ("*namystan jurday ekensin*"), both of which were translated as "*we lost all shame, shame on you!*". In traditional Kazakh culture, the concept of "намыс" is associated with personal honour and pride, particularly regarding bravery, loyalty, and fulfilling one's responsibilities, especially for men. In contrast, "ұят" acts as an internalized moral compass, guiding behavior based on what is considered socially acceptable.

The third strategy identified in this research is the *descriptive strategy*, which was frequently (8 times) used to translate culturally rich expressions from Kazakh into English. Given the figurative nature of the Kazakh language, many phrases rely on metaphors, idioms, and culturally bound imagery that do not have direct equivalents in English. As a result, descriptive translations are demonstrated as a more appropriate method.

For instance, the phrase "*ауызымызға су тамызыпты*" ("*auzymyzga su tamyzypty*") is a culturally specific expression referring to someone who has provided help or kindness. The subtitles translated it as "Who has he helped?". This translation communicates the core meaning in a form that is accessible and understandable to international viewers. Another example is the proverb "*Еркек тоқты құрбандық*" ("*Erkek toqty qurbandyk*"),

which was subtitled as “*a good man will give his life for the people*”. In Kazakh culture, this metaphor compares a brave man to a sacrificial ram, symbolizing the ideal of self-sacrifice for a greater cause. Similarly, the phrase “*жалғыз тұяқсың*” (“*zhalgыз tuyaqsyn*”) was translated as “*you are the last one of us*”. In Kazakh, this idiom refers to the last surviving heir or descendant. In the scene, a mother sacrifices herself to save her son to preserve the value of heritage through future generations. These examples illustrate how descriptive translation helps maintain the communicative function of cultural phrases. Zhabayeva (2023) and Yerbulatova et al. (2017) emphasized the significance of descriptive translation, especially when it comes to translating Kazakh realia and other intricate concepts into different languages. As highlighted by Zhabayeva (2023), the same strategy offers contextual information that helps fill in gaps, thereby improving the understanding for the audience.

The omission strategy was used in subtitling eight times. This approach is usually used when visual elements or contextual clues are sufficient to convey meaning; however, in some cases, entire phrases are left untranslated.

Most of the omitted items consisted of culturally ingrained expressions or customs-related words. For example, the phrase “*қазір тұсауын кеседі, тәй-тәй...*” (“*kazir tusauin kesedi, tay-tay...*”), which refers to the Kazakh ritual of a child's first steps (tusau kesu), was omitted entirely, even though the cultural context was visually evident in the scene. Similarly, greetings like “*Наурыз құтты болсын*” (“*Naurыз kuttıy bolsyn*” - “Happy Naurыз”) were not translated. Additionally, one example of transliteration strategy was found - “*большевики*” was rendered as “*Bolsheviks*”. However, this method was used only once in my study. Although other researchers, such as Ahmetoglu (2022) and Mukhtarova et al. (2019), highlight the effectiveness of this strategy in translating culturally specific words and ethnographic realia, the results of this study indicate that transliteration was not commonly applied in the English subtitles of the analyzed Kazakh film. There was also the use of the

calque strategy, as seen with "қызыл иектер" ("qyzyl iyekter"), translated literally as "red swine", which preserved the word-for-word meaning.

### **Impact of Translation on Cultural and Historical Fidelity**

The translation strategies and patterns in *The Crying Steppe*'s English subtitles profoundly shaped the film's historical and cultural weight, often compromising fidelity to its Kazakh identity. Generalization of certain cultural expressions tends to omit cultural nuances, such as "Еркек атынан садаға кет!" ("Erkek atynan sadaga ket!") to "coward", erasing nuances of masculine honor, thus diluting the portrayal of traditional gender roles. Cultural objects such as "қымыз" ("qumyz") reduced to "milk" stripped away the target audience from hospitality symbolism, weakening the portrayal of pastoral settings, as Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2021) point out material culture losses in AVT. Omission of customs, such as "тұсау кесу" ("tusau kesu"), removed rituals tied to Kazakh identity, aligning with Robingah's (2021) critique of ritual loss in non-Western films. Historical lacunae, like "Большевиктер" transliterated as "Bolsheviks", on the other hand, preserved Soviet-era context, but generalizations like "Совет" ("Sovet") to "rulers" neutralized political weight, which can risk understanding of the English audience of nuances in historical contexts (Baker & Saldahana, 2020). Explication of idioms like "жалғыз тұяқ" ("zhalgyz tuyak") to "last one in our family" clarified meanings, making it easily understandable for the target audience at the expense of losing cultural nuances embedded in these idioms (Cui, 2012). Collectively, these translation choices likely prioritized accessibility, with the main focus being on producing subtitles that convey the overall narrative and understanding of the impact of historical events on people in Kazakhstan, but only partially capture the film's rich Kazakh cultural heritage and historical gravity.

Maintaining fidelity and historical and/or cultural weight is critical for a film like *The Crying Steppe*, which portrays Kazakh resilience against Soviet oppression and torture of the

Famine, a narrative rooted in cultural traditions and historical struggles (Zhabayeva, 2023). For more accurate translations, it is important to ensure that global audiences grasp the significance of customs like “тұсай кесу” (“tusau kesu”), which symbolize familial milestones, fostering cultural appreciation. Fidelity to historical lacunae, such as “Алаш” (“*Alash*”), preserves the legacy of Kazakh resistance, crucial for historical integrity and viewer understanding of Soviet-era impacts. Losses in nuance - honor in “Еркек атынан садаға кет!” (“*Erkek atynan sadaga ket!*”) ritual in “Наурыз” (“*Nauryz*”), specificity in “дастархан” (“*dastarkhan*”) - cumulatively can undermine the film’s emotional and cultural depth and authenticity, limiting its ability to convey Kazakh identity, as Venuti (2019) warns of domestication’s effects. Faithful translations can enhance audience connection to themes of survival and heritage, vital for a film aiming to represent an underrepresented culture on an international scale (Robingah, 2021). The subtitles’ focus on ensuring comprehension of the target audience and accessibility, driven especially by strategies such as generalization and omission, shows their limitation when it comes to accurate and reflective representation of cultural richness and historical weight, highlighting the need for AVT strategies that prioritize source culture integrity to honor *The Crying Steppe*’s narrative significance.

### **The Role of Non-Verbal Lacunae**

During the analysis, 51 lacunae were identified, including several unexpected *visual lacunae* - elements embedded in the visual narrative that carry culturally specific meanings but cannot be translated through language alone. These nonverbal lacunae, such as culturally symbolic gestures, objects, or rituals, present a significant challenge in intercultural communication. Since they are not explicitly verbalized, they often remain unnoticed or misunderstood by target audiences unfamiliar with the source culture. Recent research has increasingly acknowledged the complexity of such phenomena. As Denisova-Schmidt (2023)

emphasizes, cultural norms deeply influence visual storytelling. While these norms are readily interpreted within the source culture, they may become opaque or entirely unintelligible in the target culture. At the film's beginning, viewers are introduced to the rich cultural landscape that highlights the Kazakhs' traditional nomadic lifestyle, where four types of livestock serve as their primary sources of food and clothing. From the very first scenes, essential cultural elements are showcased. For instance, the *kuiz yū* (“*kiiz üi*”) (a portable dome-shaped dwelling typical among Kazakhs and other Central Asian peoples) is featured prominently. These traditional dwellings provide warmth in the winter and ventilation in the summer. The *yurt* is a round structure characterized by a wooden lattice wall, known as the *kerege*, dome-shaped poles called *uyk*, and a central crown called the *shanyrak*. This design creates a strong yet flexible frame. The layout adheres to strict traditions, with designated areas for sleeping, eating, and storage. In the center of the yurt, there was a place for the hearth (*oshak*), honored by the Kazakhs as a holy place of their dwelling. Behind the *oshak*, right opposite the entrance, there was an honorable place (*tor*) covered by the best felt and woven carpets. Behind it, along the *kerege*, there were old chests (*sandyk*) with clothes put on wooden supports, which were covered by carpets, blankets, pillows, etc., gathered in the form of a hill. The space near the door was called *bosaga*. The yurt's space was well-structured, with each corner having a specific cultural and functional purpose. One of the scenes in the film shows the celebration of Nauryz, an important traditional holiday of the Kazakh people, celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox, when day and night are equal. On this day, Kazakhs organised folk festivities, played national games, danced, and rode on altybakan (traditional swings). The film also showed the ritual of tusau kesu, a symbolic ritual of cutting the wounds of a child taking its first steps. The main character was engaged in Sayatshylyk - traditional hunting with birds of prey, such as golden eagles, with the help of a horse and a tazy. It was thanks to these skills that he was able to survive the famine. The film

also mentions the Kazakh concept of ‘Zheti kazyna’ - ‘Seven Treasures’, which includes important elements of Kazakh culture. The Zheti kazyna traditionally includes: er zhigit (a real man), sulu ayel (a beautiful woman), akyl (reason, wisdom), zhuirik at (a fast horse), kumai tazy (a tazy hunting dog), burkit (a golden eagle), kundy kazyna (a valuable treasure). In addition, the role of cultural activity is also highlighted in film studies. In the present film, several lacunae of activity were found.

For instance, Kazakh culture traditionally attaches great importance to the role of the man in the family. A powerful scene illustrates this when Turar’s wife is forced to flee from the wolves chasing them. The family had left their yurt during the winter in search of food, and travelling in the harsh winter conditions was extremely difficult, especially running. Struggling to escape with her two children, she makes the heartbreaking decision to leave her daughter behind and flee with her son. This moment emphasizes the son as the main heir and protector of the family heritage in Kazakh society. This reflects the historical prioritization of the male line, where sons were seen as the bearers of the family name, traditions, and responsibilities of the family, ensuring the continuity of the nation’s heritage. Similarly, in one of the film's key scenes, Turar is imprisoned and forced to sing a song to the main body. He begins to sing an improvised *суырын-салма өлең* (*improvised song*) with dombra, a genre of Kazakh oral poetry characterized by free form and the expression of actual thoughts at the moment of performance. In his song, Turar alludes to betrayal by a close one and moves on to a sharp social critique. When the meaning of his words becomes too direct and uncomfortable for a traitor, he interrupts the performance and starts shouting, demanding to be taken away. This scene demonstrates the power of Kazakh oral tradition as a form of resistance and emotional expression in the face of pressure and injustice. Therefore, the theory of lacunae has significant potential in film studies, especially when exploring the cultural and historical gaps that emerge during translation.

### Alternative Methods for Enhanced Fidelity

As pointed out in the beginning, translating lacunae accurately while maintaining their fidelity remains a relevant issue in translation studies. The analysis conducted on *The Crying Steppe* is a primary example of the complexity of this issue. However, literature on this topic constantly attempts to provide solutions, offering strategies to enhance authenticity while maintaining accessibility. Therefore, following these recommendations may help address the shortcomings of each lacunae category identified in this study.

Newmark (1988), for instance, advocates for descriptive equivalents, especially in the cases such as idioms, where instead of rendering “*жалғыз түйәк*” (“*zhalgyz tuyak*”) as “*last one in our family*”, a subtitle such as “*sole cherished offspring*” could clarify both figurative meaning and retain imagery. Supplementing this strategy with a subtitle note explaining cultural nuances could enhance the comprehension even further, as explanatory notes are known for their effectiveness in enhancing understanding of the nuances (Robingah, 2021). However, in practice, as Alymova (2022) points out, the addition of such notes faces the issue of character limits, making reliance on AVT on subtitles potentially lose the benefits of other effective strategies, such as including annotations. A similar solution is offered by Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2021), particularly using explication with glosses when translating cultural objects such as “*қымыз*” (“*qymyz*”). Translators could use direct interpretation, such as “fermented mare’s milk” with a note (e.g., “traditional hospitality drink”), countering the loss of symbolism in generalizations. Transliteration, used effectively for “*Большевиктер*” as “*Bolsheviks*”, remains suitable but could be paired with glosses for less familiar terms like “*Алаш*” (“*Alash*”).

The most reliable method for AVT translation, and lacunae in particular, however, involves a comprehensive approach to ensure that all aspects of translation, ranging from

linguistic to cultural nuances, are taken into consideration. This could be achieved by utilizing culturally informed parties, as Le (2024) and Liu (2024) point out that the successful translation of lacunae often requires consultation with native speakers or cultural informants. Venuti (2019) highly supports this approach as it allows for covering all aspects of translation to ensure the accurate and engaging representation of the source material. This would be particularly beneficial when it comes to the translation of culturally loaded expressions such as “Дастарханда бәрі бар. Жалы-жая, қазы-қарта..” involving names of specific dishes and idioms such as “Еркек атынан садаға кет!” (“May you be a sacrifice for the name of a man” or “Coward!”).

These strategies - descriptive equivalents, addition of annotations and/or glosses- offer practical alternatives to enhance fidelity, as Zhabayeva (2023) urges for Kazakh AVT. By prioritizing cultural and historical nuances, they ensure *The Crying Steppe*'s subtitles convey Kazakhstan's heritage, supporting global appreciation of its narrative.

### **Summary**

Overall, this study's focus on the accuracy of translation of lacunae in *The Crying Steppe*'s subtitles offers critical insights for Kazakh audiovisual translation. By categorizing verbal lacunae and analyzing strategies that were used for their translation, the research reveals how the simplification of cultural terms or complete omission can risk the dilution of Kazakh identity in the film, affecting the portrayal of cultural significance for the international audience. These findings highlight the need for strategies that emphasize not only conveying the general narrative of the content but ensuring its fidelity and accurate representation. Such fidelity is of particular importance for Kazakh cinema, where films like *The Crying Steppe* convey cultural heritage and resilience to oppressive regimes to global

audiences. Thus, this work underlines the importance of nuanced AVT to honor Kazakh narratives, paving the way for culturally authentic translations in non-Western cinema.

### **Conclusion**

This study addressed the critical challenge of preserving Kazakh cultural identity through audiovisual translation (AVT) in *The Crying Steppe*'s English subtitles, contributing to the need for effective translation of culturally specific elements in translation studies. Following research questions aimed at identifying lacunae and their types in *The Crying Steppe* film and evaluating translation strategies' impact on the film comprehension, the research employed a product-based qualitative study, analyzing 51 verbal lacunae. The conducted analysis revealed five lacunae categories present in subtitles: idioms, cultural expressions, cultural objects, customs, and historical lacunae. The comparison of the original script with English subtitles pointed out six common translation strategies utilized by translators of the film: generalization, functional analogue (cultural substitution), description (explication), transliteration, calque, and omission. The Discussion section highlighted that while explication and transliteration preserved some meanings, simplification often diluted Kazakh nuances, and omissions weakened traditional identity. These losses compromised the film's historical and cultural weight, limiting its ability to fully convey Kazakh resilience against Soviet oppression. The study's significance lies in exposing these translation

challenges, providing a foundation for improving AVT practices to authentically represent Kazakh heritage globally.

The research offers practical implications for AVT practitioners, filmmakers, and streaming platforms handling Kazakh and non-Western films. By identifying how certain implemented strategies risk reducing cultural and historical fidelity of the content, the study advocates for strategies such as descriptive equivalents and the addition of annotations and/or glosses. These solutions can enhance viewer understanding and cultural appreciation by emphasizing the importance of linguistic and cultural nuances. The findings also point out that in order to achieve comprehensive translation covering both linguistic and cultural nuances, it is important to utilize culturally aware teams. As the Kazakhstani film industry actively enters the international arena, it is important to ensure that *The Crying Steppe* and similar films carrying significant cultural and historical weight resonate with global audiences, honoring their cultural narratives. This study's emphasis on the implementation of these recommendations aims to foster translations that combat cultural marginalization and ensure international audiences engage authentically with Kazakh cinema, preserving its cultural richness amidst globalization.

Despite provided insights, it is also important to address limitations of this research, including its single-case design, which may limit generalizability. These constraints mean conclusions are specific to *The Crying Steppe*'s English subtitles; therefore, they may not be applicable to a wider scale of the Kazakh lacunae translation, though they are still reliable for its context. Additionally, this analysis relied strictly on English subtitles for evaluation of translation quality. However, audience perception of translation is crucial for such assessment, thus making the findings of this study have limited reflections on the comprehension of subtitles. Future research could examine multiple Kazakh films and focus on a larger scope of Kazakh lacunae in translation to broaden applicability. Exploring viewer

comprehension of translated lacunae could further refine AVT strategies. Pursuing these directions can facilitate the advancement of AVT and could transform Kazakh cinema's global impact, ensuring cultural and historical narratives are fully conveyed, thus preserving its unique identity.

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