VOLUME-4, ISSUE-9

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP STATUS TERMS IN UZBEK–ENGLISH DIPLOMATIC TRANSLATION: NEUTRALIZATION, CALQUING AND VARIATION

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Abstract. When two states upgrade their relationship, the new status is announced through a fixed term such as *strategic partnership* or *comprehensive strategic partnership*. These terms are negotiated names rather than free descriptions, so a change in a single modifier can make a relationship look closer or more distant than the parties agreed. This paper examines how Uzbek status terms are rendered in English, with Russian used as a third point of comparison. The material comes from official Uzbek, English and Russian reports on Uzbekistan's relations with the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, Kazakhstan and China published between 2019 and 2024. Comparative, componential and translation analysis reveals four recurring problems: two Uzbek modifiers (*keng qamrovli* and *har tomonlama*) merge into the single English *comprehensive*; the calque *all-weather* is rendered descriptively in Uzbek but kept in Russian; the term *ittifoqchilik munosabatlari* has two competing English forms; and the polysemy of *alohida* creates a risk of mistranslation in reverse. The verbal phrases announcing a change of status are similarly unstable.

Keywords: diplomatic terminology; strategic partnership; status term; translation equivalence; neutralization; calque; terminological variation.

1. Introduction

Over the past several years Uzbekistan has formalized the status of many of its bilateral relationships. Summit meetings usually end with a joint statement or declaration recording the level the relationship has reached: *strategic partnership*, *comprehensive strategic partnership*, *special strategic partnership* or, at the top, *allied relations*. Taken together, these labels form a ladder. Each step up signals a wider scope of cooperation and a higher degree of trust, and each one is meaningful only in relation to the others.

Because such documents are released at the same time in Uzbek, English and Russian, the status term is one of the places where translation carries real diplomatic weight. A translator who picks a weaker or a stronger modifier does more than produce an imprecise phrase: the choice changes the publicly stated position of the relationship on that ladder. The study reported here asks two questions. How are Uzbek strategic partnership status terms rendered in official English texts? And what problems arise in moving between the two languages, given that the Russian versions of the same texts often keep distinctions that English loses?

2. Theoretical background

A term differs from an ordinary word in that its meaning is fixed by its place within the conceptual system of a field. Cabré (1999) argues that terms should be studied not as isolated lexical items but as units of such a system. Diplomatic status terms fit this description closely. *Comprehensive strategic partnership* means something only against *strategic partnership* below it and *allied relations* above it; take one step out of the ladder and the value of the others shifts.

In translation theory the choice of an equivalent is usually discussed in terms of levels of equivalence. Komissarov (Комиссаров, 1990) describes a hierarchy of such levels in which the shared communicative purpose and the identity of the situation described play the central role. Status terms add a further constraint. Their equivalents are not chosen freely by the translator; they are fixed, in effect, when the two governments agree on the wording of a joint document. The translator's task is therefore closer to retrieving an agreed name than to finding the best dictionary match. Two more notions are used in the analysis. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) classify the calque as a type of direct translation in which the structure of a foreign expression is borrowed and filled with native material. Baker (2018) shows that equivalence must also be sought above the level of the single word, in collocations and fixed expressions. This is relevant to the verbal phrases through which a change of status is announced.

3. Material and methods

The material consists of official reports on Uzbekistan's relations with the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, Kazakhstan and China published between 2019 and 2024 on President.uz, UzA, Kun.uz, Anhor.uz and China Daily. For each status term, the Uzbek, English and Russian forms were taken from reports on the same event, so that they could be compared directly rather than through a dictionary.

Russian was included as a third point of reference. Many Uzbek diplomatic terms developed alongside their Russian counterparts, and the Russian version helps to show whether a distinction missing in English is present elsewhere in the trilingual set. Each term was divided into its head (*partnership*, *relations*) and its modifiers, and these components were compared across the three languages using comparative, componential and translation analysis.

4. Results.

The status terms examined and their equivalents are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Strategic partnership status terms in Uzbek, English and Russian

Partner state, year	Uzbek term	English equivalent	Russian equivalent
Republic of Korea, 2019	*alohida strategik sheriklik*	*special strategic partnership*	*особое стратегическое партнерство*

Partner state, year	Uzbek term	English equivalent	Russian equivalent
Türkiye, 2022	*keng qamrovli strategik sheriklik*	*comprehensive strategic partnership*	*всеобъемлющее стратегическое партнерство*
Kazakhstan, 2021–2022	*ittifoqchilik munosabatlari*	*allied relations*; *alliance relations*	*союзнические отношения*
China, 2024	*barcha sharoitlarda har tomonlama strategik sheriklik*	*all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership*	*всепогодное всестороннее стратегическое партнерство*

Source: compiled by the author from President.uz (2019, 2022, 2024), UzA (2021), Kun.uz (2021, 2024), Anhor.uz (2022) and China Daily (2024).

4.1. One English form for two Uzbek terms

The English modifier *comprehensive* corresponds to two different Uzbek units. In relations with Türkiye the Uzbek text uses *keng qamrovli*, while in relations with China it uses *har tomonlama* (President.uz, 2022, 2024). The Russian texts keep exactly the same split: *всеобъемлющее* for Türkiye and *всестороннее* for China. The Uzbek pair thus mirrors the Russian pair, whereas English neutralizes the distinction.

The consequences run in both directions. Translated from Uzbek into English, the two terms merge into one. Translated from English into Uzbek, *comprehensive* gives no hint as to which form is required, and the translator cannot recover it from the English text alone. In everyday Uzbek the two modifiers are near-synonyms, and using one for the other would hardly be noticed. In a joint declaration, however, each is part of a name agreed with a particular partner, and the only reliable guide is the Uzbek text of the document signed with that partner.

4.2. Calque or descriptive rendering

In 2024 relations with China were named an *all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership* (China Daily, 2024). The English *all-weather* is a word-for-word rendering, that is, a calque, of the official Chinese term. The Russian text keeps the calque (*всепогодное*), while the Uzbek text uses the descriptive phrase *barcha sharoitlarda* ‘in all circumstances’ (President.uz, 2024), which conveys the sense of the metaphor instead of its image. For an Uzbek reader the descriptive version is easier to understand. The cost is that the term loses its formal unity across the three languages, and a reader comparing the versions may not immediately see that they name the same status. One term, in other words, reaches three languages by two different routes.

4.3. Competing English forms

The Uzbek term *ittifoqchilik munosabatlari*, which names the relationship with Kazakhstan (UzA, 2021), appears in English in two forms: *Treaty on Allied Relations* in 2021 (Kun.uz, 2021) and *treaty on alliance relations* in 2024 (Kun.uz, 2024). Both are grammatical. In terminology, however, the coexistence of several forms for one concept is regarded as a defect to be removed (Cabré, 1999). The two forms also differ in connotation. In English *alliance* is strongly associated with military alliances, whereas *allied relations* sounds more neutral and arguably fits the political character of the Uzbek–Kazakh treaty better.

4.4. A polysemous modifier

Relations with the Republic of Korea were raised in 2019 to the level of *special strategic partnership*; the Russian text has *особое стратегическое партнерство* (President.uz, 2019). The Uzbek modifier *alohida* means 'special', but it also means 'separate, apart'. In the Uzbek–English direction this causes no difficulty as long as the agreed English form is at hand. The risk appears when a text is translated back, or when a translator works without the reference document: a rendering such as *separate strategic partnership* would turn a mark of privilege into a mark of distance.

4.5. Verbal frames of a status change

Status terms rarely appear on their own; they are introduced by verbal phrases that report the change. In the Korean case the Uzbek text says the relations *alohida strategik sheriklik maqomiga ko'tarildi*, the English text that they were *elevated to the rank of special strategic partnership*, and the Russian text that they were *возведены в ранг особого стратегического партнерства* (President.uz, 2019). In the report on Türkiye, the Uzbek *yangi darajaga – keng qamrovli strategik sheriklik bosqichiga olib chiqish* corresponds to the English *raise bilateral relations to a new level* (President.uz, 2022).

Uzbek thus alternates between *maqom* 'status', *daraja* 'level' and *bosqich* 'stage', and English between *rank*, *level* and *status*. These words are not terms in their own right, but they frame the term and tell the reader how the relationship has changed. Treating them as fixed collocations in Baker's (2018) sense and pairing them consistently across the two languages would make official texts more coherent.

5. Discussion

The four problems differ in kind, yet they have a common cause: status terms tend to be translated as if they were ordinary descriptive phrases, when in fact they are agreed names. A general dictionary will offer *comprehensive* for both *keng qamrovli* and *har tomonlama*, and *special* or *separate* for *alohida*, without any means of telling which choice preserves the agreed status. What the translator needs is knowledge of the term's place in the system and of the document in which it was fixed, not lexical knowledge alone.

The data also say something about direction. Translation from Uzbek into English mostly loses information, as in the case of neutralization, while translation from English into Uzbek mostly creates uncertainty: which of two forms should be used, and which sense of a polysemous word is meant? In every case examined here the Russian versions keep

the distinctions present in Uzbek, which suggests that Uzbek status terminology has developed in close parallel with Russian. The material does not reveal the direction of influence, and this question deserves a separate study.

On this basis, the following practices can be recommended:

(1) for each partner state, use the form fixed in the official text of the joint document;

(2) compile a trilingual Uzbek–English–Russian reference list of status terms and keep it up to date;

(3) fix one English form for each Uzbek term, for example *ittifoqchilik munosabatlari* – *allied relations*;

(4) when choosing between a calque and a descriptive rendering, follow the norms of the Uzbek literary language.

6. Conclusion

Strategic partnership status terms form a small but tightly ordered system within diplomatic terminology. The analysis of trilingual official texts showed that the Uzbek *keng qamrovli* and *har tomonlama* merge into a single English *comprehensive*; that the calque *all-weather* is rendered descriptively in Uzbek but preserved in Russian; that *ittifoqchilik munosabatlari* has two competing English forms; and that the polysemy of *alohida* creates a risk in reverse translation. The verbal phrases announcing a change of status are unstable in both languages as well. These findings point to the need for a multilingual terminological database built on official texts. Further research will extend the analysis to documents signed with other partner states.

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