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Transformation and Semantic Changes of Metaphors in the Translation Process: A Comparative Study of English and Uzbek

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Abstract: Metaphor constitutes one of the most challenging units in translation due to its deep embedding in culture, cognition and national worldview. This study investigates the transformation and semantic shifts that metaphors undergo in English–Uzbek literary translation. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), cultural variation theory (Kövecses, 2005), and the translation strategies proposed by Newmark (1988) and Baker (1992/2018), the paper identifies eight recurrent problem areas and evaluates corresponding solutions. The analysis is based on a qualitatively selected corpus of metaphorical expressions from English literary texts and their Uzbek renderings, supplemented by culturally specific Uzbek metaphors. Results indicate that full formal equivalence is rarely achievable; successful translation typically requires analogical substitution, adaptation or explanatory amplification in order to preserve communicative effect and cultural resonance. The study argues that translators must operate not merely as linguistic mediators but as cultural interpreters, and that clearer pedagogical distinction between metaphor and simile remains necessary in translator training.
Keywords: metaphor translation; semantic shift; cultural equivalence; conceptual metaphor; English–Uzbek translation; translation strategies

1. Introduction

Since Uzbekistan's independence, an extensive body of world literature has been translated into Uzbek. Translation is an inherently complex activity that places high demands on the translator's linguistic, cultural and cognitive competence. While some translated works remain largely unread, many have entered the literary consciousness of Uzbek readers.

During the translation process, translators frequently encounter expressions that lack direct equivalents or that are culturally bound. In such cases the translator must locate a substitute capable of preserving both propositional content and expressive force. Metaphorical language poses a particular challenge because its meaning is often non-compositional and historically or culturally motivated.

Scholarly discussion of metaphor translation has crystallised around three principal positions:

a) Metaphors are essentially untranslatable (Nida; Vinay & Darbelnet; Dagut);

b) Metaphors are fully translatable in the same way as other linguistic units (Kloepfer; Mason);

c) Metaphors are translatable, yet the resulting meaning is rarely identical to that of the source (Broeck; Toury; Newmark; Snell-Hornby; Schäffner).

Contemporary scholarship largely endorses the third position. As Schäffner (2004) notes, a cognitive approach to metaphor reveals that what is transferred is not a linguistic expression but a conceptual mapping, and that such mappings are subject to cultural variation.[1]

[1] Schäffner, C. (2004). Metaphor and translation: Some implications of a cognitive approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36(7), 1253–1269.

The present paper focuses on the English–Uzbek language pair. Uzbek metaphors are frequently grounded in oral folklore, pastoral life, Islamic cultural references and collective values, whereas English metaphors more often reflect Western, urban and individualistic experience. This cultural asymmetry generates systematic difficulties that the study seeks to describe and address.

2. Methods

The study adopts a qualitative comparative-linguistic design informed by descriptive translation studies (Toury, 2012).[2] The material comprises two complementary sets of data: (1) metaphorical expressions extracted from English literary texts (primarily canonical and contemporary prose) together with their published or proposed Uzbek translations; and (2) culturally specific Uzbek metaphors that pose reverse-translation difficulties. Approximately forty metaphorical units were examined in detail.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each source metaphor was classified according to its conceptual domain and degree of cultural specificity. Second, the corresponding target-language rendering (or set of possible renderings) was evaluated with respect to three parameters: semantic equivalence, preservation of imagery, and cultural acceptability for an Uzbek readership. Third, the observed translation solutions were mapped onto Newmark's (1988) typology of metaphor-translation procedures and Baker's (1992/2018) strategies for dealing with non-equivalence.

Theoretical scaffolding is provided by conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), Kövecses's (2005) account of the cultural variation of metaphor, and the practical frameworks of Newmark and Baker. Local scholarship (Xudoyberganova, 2015; Yoqubov, 2019) is drawn upon for insights into the linguoculturological profile of Uzbek metaphorical units.

3. Results

Eight recurrent problem areas were identified. For each area, representative examples, observed or recommended solutions, and communicative outcomes are presented.

3.1. Inadequate Rendering of National-Cultural Metaphors

National-cultural metaphors encode concepts that are tightly bound to a community's history, values and material culture. Maintaining cognitive and imagistic equivalence across languages is therefore difficult.

The Uzbek expression ko'ngli daryo (literally "whose heart is a river") conveys generosity and spiritual breadth. English near-equivalents such as "broad-minded" or "open-hearted" capture the evaluative meaning but lose the river image, producing a semantic and imagistic shift. Similarly, Ra'noning ko'ngli oppoq edi ("Ra'no's heart was white") signals moral purity. A literal English rendering ("her soul was white") risks unwanted racial associations; hence a non-literal solution is required.

Recommended solution: Analogical translation (Newmark's "replacement by a standard target-language metaphor"). Preferred renderings include "He has a pure heart" or "She is kind-hearted."

Outcome: Communicative intent and positive evaluation are preserved; cultural imagery is patially sacrificed but the text remains natural for the target reader.

3.2. Divergent Instantiations of Universal Conceptual Metaphors

Certain conceptual metaphors are near-universal, yet their concrete linguistic realisations differ. The English metaphor TIME IS MONEY ("Time is money") yields a flat literal translation in Uzbek (Vaqt puldir). Uzbek culture more readily maps time onto gold or life itself (Vaqt oltindir). Likewise, while LIFE IS A JOURNEY is readily understood when rendered as "Hayot – bir safar," the aesthetic charge is weaker than in the source.

[2]Toury, G. (2012). *Descriptive Translation Studies – and Beyond* (Rev. ed.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphor structures thought itself; consequently, the translator's task is less to reproduce a linguistic form than to locate an equivalent conceptual model within the target culture.[3]

Recommended solution: Adaptation – selection of a culturally natural poetic variant that retains the underlying conceptual mapping.

Outcome: Both conceptual coherence and stylistic naturalness are maintained.

3.3. Loss of Metaphorical Imagery

Translators sometimes replace a dense metaphor with a plain paraphrase in the interest of clarity, thereby sacrificing aesthetic effect. The English expression heart of oak (a person of steadfast courage) has no ready Uzbek counterpart and is frequently reduced to the non-metaphorical "ishonchli odam." Conversely, an explanatory rendering that retains the image ("eman daraxtining yuragidek mustahkam") preserves more of the original force.

Recommended solution: Explanatory translation (retention of the metaphor plus a brief gloss) or conversion into a culturally parallel simile when necessary.

Outcome: Imagery and emotional impact are largely retained; readability remains acceptable.

3.4. Culture-Specific Constraints and Opaque Allusions

Some metaphors are intelligible only to members of the source culture because they encode historical practices or culture-specific symbols. English examples include spill the beans (to reveal a secret – historically linked to voting with beans) and red tape (bureaucratic obstruction – from the red tape once used to bind official documents). Uzbek counterparts such as tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda ("when a camel's tail touches the ground" = never) are routinely replaced by the English "when pigs fly," and ko'zimning oqu-qorasi becomes "the apple of my eye."

Kövecses (2005) emphasises that the translator's primary obligation is to preserve the conceptual core while conveying as much national colouring as the target system permits. Xudoyberganova (2015) and Yoqubov (2019) similarly stress the risk of erasing nationally distinctive imagery.[4][5][6]

Recommended solution: Substitution by a culturally closer target-language metaphor, or, where no parallel exists, a combination of paraphrase and minimal explanation.

3.5. Distortion or Flattening of Imagery

When translation remains at the purely linguistic level, both image and affective charge may be lost. Shakespeare's "All the world's a stage" rendered simply as "Dunyo – sahna" is propositionally accurate yet philosophically and aesthetically impoverished. Restoring a more elaborate formulation ("Butun dunyo – bir sahna, insonlar esa undagi aktyorlar") partially recovers the original resonance.

3.6. Cross-Cultural Variation in Metaphorical Scope

Baker (1992/2018) observes that the central difficulty in metaphor translation is the frequent absence of cultural equivalence. Even when a metaphor appears universal, its evaluative scope may differ. The English injunction "Don't eat like a pig" primarily targets quantity, whereas in

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[3]Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[4]Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[5]Xudoyberganova, D. (2015). *O'zbek tilida metaforik birliklarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari*. Toshkent: Fan.

[6]Yoqubov, U. (2019). Badiiy tarjimada metaforik obrazlarning o'ziga xosliklari. Toshkent: TDPU ilmiy maqolalar to'plami.

some Central European cultures the same animal metaphor targets disorderliness. Accurate transfer therefore presupposes detailed knowledge of the source culture's metaphorical system.[7]

Recommended solution: A linguoculturological approach that prioritises transfer of the cultural image over literal wording.

3.7. Ambiguity of Metaphorical Intent

A single source-language metaphor may realise different evaluative meanings according to context. The animal "pig," for instance, can designate:

1. a fat person;
2. an ill-tempered person;
3. a disorderly or unclean person.

Without adequate contextual awareness, the translator risks selecting an inappropriate target equivalent and thereby distorting the author's evaluative stance. Full-text comprehension and broad cultural literacy are therefore indispensable.

3.8. Confusion of Metaphor with Simile

Both language learners and, occasionally, practising translators conflate metaphor with simile. In Uzbek, the presence of comparative markers (–dek, –day, kabi, xuddi, misoli) signals simile (tashbeh); their absence signals metaphor (istiora). Parallel distinctions hold in English ("like"/"as" versus direct predication).

Metaphor: Buvijonim – uyimizning quyoshi. ("Grandmother is the sun of our home.")

Simile: Buvijonim misoli quyosh. ("Grandmother is like the sun.")

Metaphor	Simile
Implies identity; no comparative marker	Explicit comparison; marker obligatory
Produces denser, more forceful style	Produces clearer, more analytical style
Susan was a cheetah in today's race.	Susan ran like a cheetah in today's race.

Failure to distinguish the two devices results in stylistic distortion and, in pedagogical contexts, conceptual confusion.

4. Discussion

The findings support the moderate position on metaphor translatability: metaphors can be translated, yet full equivalence of form, image and cultural resonance is exceptional. The English–Uzbek pair is especially revealing because the two languages draw on markedly different experiential and cultural reservoirs. Consequently, a purely linguistic approach consistently underperforms; a linguoculturological orientation is required.

Newmark's six procedures remain a useful heuristic. In the data examined, the most frequently successful strategies were:

1. replacement by a standard target-language metaphor (analogy);
2. adaptation / cultural substitution;
3. explanatory amplification (metaphor + gloss);
4. conversion of metaphor into simile when imagery must be retained but direct predication would sound unnatural.

Direct transfer and outright omission proved least satisfactory except in highly specialised or space-constrained contexts. These observations align with Baker's broader claim that cultural non-

[7]Baker, M. (1992/2018). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.

equivalence is the core obstacle and that translators must often prioritise communicative effect over formal correspondence.[8]

A practical implication concerns translator education. Explicit training in the metaphor–simile distinction, together with systematic exposure to culture-specific metaphorical systems, would reduce avoidable errors and improve the stylistic quality of target texts.

5. Conclusion

Metaphor translation is not the transfer of words but the transfer of thought patterns, emotional colouring, imagery and cultural memory. Because languages differ in their lexical, conceptual and cultural inventories, absolute equivalence is rarely attainable. The translator's task is therefore to negotiate the least damaging compromise among semantic accuracy, imagistic vitality and target-culture acceptability.

The eight problem areas identified in this study—national-cultural opacity, divergent conceptual realisations, loss of imagery, culture-specific allusions, flattening of aesthetic effect, variation in metaphorical scope, ambiguity of intent, and confusion with simile—recur systematically in English–Uzbek literary translation. The most reliable remedies are analogical substitution, cultural adaptation and carefully controlled explanatory amplification.

Future research would benefit from larger, systematically compiled parallel corpora and from reception studies that measure how target-language readers actually process different metaphor-translation strategies. Such work would move the field beyond illustrative case studies toward more robust, evidence-based recommendations.

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