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THE WORLD BEHIND THE WORD: COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL CODES OF METAPHORICAL TRANSFER IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract. This article investigates the cognitive and linguacultural challenges of translating metaphorical units in English and Uzbek literary texts. Using comparative analysis and Peter Newmark's translation strategies, the study examines anthropocentric and zoomorphic metaphors across unrelated language families. The findings prove that conceptual image adaptation and semantic explication are far more effective than literal translation in preserving national identity and aesthetic value.
Keywords: metaphor translation, literary text, cognitive linguistics, Peter Newmark, cultural code, transposition, linguaculture.

INTRODUCTION

Literary art is a spiritual mirror that reflects the highest artistic manifestations of human culture, thought, and emotional experience. Within this domain, metaphor plays a central role in ensuring the aesthetic impact and figurative power of a literary text. Whereas traditional poetics and stylistics regarded metaphor merely as a decorative or expressive device, modern cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) interprets it as a foundational conceptual mechanism that shapes human thought and enables perception of reality (Newmark, 1988). Translating literary works between English and Uzbek presents distinct linguistic and cultural complexities. English, belonging to the Indo-European language family and rich in analytic structures, differs fundamentally from Uzbek, an agglutinative Turkic language, not only in grammatical organization but also in its national linguocultural worldview.

Because culture-specific realia, ethnocultural symbols, and associative images embedded in metaphors are closely tied to a people's history, geographic environment, and traditions, recreating them adequately in translation demands high professional competence and linguacultural sensitivity. The relevance of this study lies in the growing need, amid intensifying literary ties between English and Uzbek in the era of globalization, to ensure the cognitive equivalence of metaphorical units in literary texts and refine a systematic methodology for translating them. As national scholars in translation studies such as Salomov (1983) and Musayev (2005), as well as international theorists such as Newmark (1988) and Toury (1995), emphasize, translating metaphors literally often leads to a loss of aesthetic value and semantic distortion. This article aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the cognitive-cultural codes of metaphorical transfer in English and Uzbek literary texts and to identify optimal translation strategies for rendering them.

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THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: COGNITIVE AND LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO METAPHOR

Although the phenomenon of metaphor has been studied since antiquity beginning with Aristotle, its scholarly interpretation underwent a fundamental shift toward the late twentieth century. Traditional linguistics viewed metaphor as a figurative meaning of a word and a device for imagery. However, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's seminal work Metaphors We Live By demonstrated empirically that metaphor is not merely a stylistic figure, but a foundation of human cognition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to cognitive theory, people comprehend abstract concepts—such as time, emotion, ideas, and social relations—through physical world experiences and metaphorical models. In accordance with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor is the process of understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another, involving cognitive mapping between a source domain and a target domain. As Muxtorova (2026) notes, through metaphor people understand complex and abstract concepts via concrete images grounded in everyday life experience, with figurative uses of human body parts and natural phenomena playing a prominent role.

In translation theory, metaphorical units are classified into two primary groups based on their conceptual nature: first, universal metaphors grounded in shared human physiological and biological experience (for example, “life is a journey” or “anger is fire”); and second, culture-specific metaphors arising from a particular nation's customs, religious beliefs, history, and geographic environment (Salomov, 1983). For instance, while images such as the tulip (lola), nightingale (bulbul), bow-shaped eyebrows (kamon qosh), and locks of hair (zulf) in Classical Eastern poetry evoke ready aesthetic associations in the Uzbek reader's mind, these symbols require explicit cultural explanation for an English-speaking audience. From this perspective, a translator must identify points of overlap and divergence between the conceptual mappings of both languages in advance.

In A Textbook of Translation, Peter Newmark develops a systematic classification of metaphor translation and proposes six primary strategies: first, reproducing the same image in the translation (same image); second, replacing the source image with a different equivalent image (different image); third, converting the metaphor into a simile (metaphor to simile); fourth, translating the metaphor by its underlying sense (metaphor to sense); fifth, omitting the metaphor (deletion); and sixth, retaining the metaphor together with an explanation (metaphor plus gloss) (Newmark, 1988). Comparative examination of English and Uzbek material shows that, owing to the typological and cultural distance between the two languages, translators frequently need to strike a delicate balance between preserving the image and replacing it with a culturally resonant equivalent (Newmark, 1988; Musayev, 2005).

ANALYSIS OF METAPHORICAL TRANSFER IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS

Comparative analysis of metaphors across both languages in literary translation practice confirms that authorial imagery is often closely bound to a national conceptual space (Toury, 1995; Salomov, 1983). In the course of this research, the translation features of anthropocentric, zoomorphic, and conceptual metaphors selected from English and Uzbek literary texts were analyzed systematically (see Table 1).

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Table 1: Cognitive-Cultural Analysis and Translation Strategies for Metaphorical Units in English and Uzbek Literary Texts

Metaphor Category	Source Unit	Adequate Translation Rendering	Applied Strategy (Newmark, 1988)
Anthropocentric (emotional)	"His heart sank as he read the letter."	"Xatni o'qiganda uning yuragi shuv etib ketdi."	Different image (replacement with a national image)
Somatic-cultural concept	"Jigarim / Jigari ezilmoq / Jigarband"	"Blood relative / Heartbreaking / Beloved child"	Metaphor to sense (semantic explication)
Aesthetic-poetic metaphor	"Qoshlari kamon, zulfi ilon" (Cho'lpon)	"Arched eyebrows, flowing dark tresses"	Metaphor to sense (softening negative connotation)
Zoomorphic metaphor	"As brave as a lion" / "Owl" (wisdom)	"Sherdek botir" / "Donishmand qush (izoh bilan)"	Same image (when aligned) / Metaphor plus gloss
Conceptual metaphor	"Their marriage was at a crossroads."	"Ularning turmushi ikki yo'l o'rtasida qolgandi."	Same image (universal "Life is a journey" model)

Analysis of the examples in Table 1 indicates that literal translation of first-category anthropocentric and somatic metaphors sharply impairs the naturalness of the target text (Musayev, 2005). Specifically, rendering the English sentence "His heart sank as he read the letter" literally into Uzbek as "Uning yuragi cho'kib ketdi" sounds unnatural to an Uzbek reader, because the English metaphor of a "sinking" heart expressing emotional dismay and anxiety is effectively transposed in Uzbek through national phraseological expressions such as "yuragi shuv etmoq," "yuragi taka-puka bo'lmoq," or "yuragi orqaga tortib ketmoq." Another vivid illustration of cognitive-anthropological divergence between Uzbek and English is the lexeme jigar (liver). In Uzbek cultural perception, jigar is not merely a somatic organ, but a central metaphorical concept of blood kinship, closeness, affection, and spiritual bond ("jigarim," "jigari ezilmoq," "jigarband," "jigarim yondi"). In English, by contrast, "liver" is used primarily in an anatomical-physiological sense, while this emotional load is distributed across lexemes such as "blood" and "kin" (kinship: blood relative, kith and kin) or "heart" and "guts" (distress: heartbreaking, gut-wrenching). Likewise, whereas the Uzbek lexeme yuz (face) serves as a locus of honor, dignity, and social standing ("yuzi chidamadi," "yuzsiz," "yuzini yerga qaratmoq"), in English these meanings are differentiated through abstract cognitive concepts such as "conscience" or "dignity." Just as mind, heart, and soul converge in the concept of ko'ngil (heart/mind/soul), in the concept of jigar a biological organ and socio-emotional kinship merge into a single cultural concept.

Cultural codes also play a decisive role in translating aesthetic-poetic metaphors. For example, translating the metaphor "qoshlari kamon, zulfi ilon" ("eyebrows like a bow, tresses like a snake"),

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found in Classical Uzbek literature and in Cho‘lpon's poetry, literally into English as “her tresses are snakes” causes serious semantic and aesthetic error, since in Western culture the snake image is predominantly associated with danger, evil, and guile. Accordingly, the translator applies the sense-based strategy recommended by Newmark (1988), culturally softening the image as “her hair is flowing and dark” (Salomov, 1983). In zoomorphic metaphors grounded in the animal world, two distinct linguacultural patterns are observed: in expressions such as “as brave as a lion” (“sherdek botir”) or “as cunning as a fox” (“tulki kabi makkor”), direct equivalents can be used because the zoomorphic images align across both cultural mindsets. However, significant divergences arise with certain birds and creatures. For instance, whereas in English an “owl” symbolizes wisdom and sagacity, in Uzbek oral folklore boyo‘g‘li (owl) is a symbol of grief and desolation. Translating such units requires relying not merely on lexical substitution, but on cognitive context and explanatory rendering (Salomov, 1983).

Analysis of conceptual metaphors confirms that, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue, people frequently conceptualize abstract notions through physical space and motion (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Notably, the “Life is a journey” model rooted in universal human experience operates comparably in both languages. For example, the English sentence “Their marriage was at a crossroads” is adequately rendered into Uzbek as “Ularning nikohi ikki yo‘l o‘rtasida qolgandi,” preserving the structural integrity of the metaphor (Musayev, 2005). Thus, translating metaphors in literary texts cannot stop at mere lexical replacement; it must link the unit to textual context and pragmatic situation in order to reconstruct the author's intended cognitive meaning and artistic purpose in the reader's mind.

CONCLUSION

Translating metaphors in English and Uzbek literary texts is not simply interlingual lexical substitution, but the art of bringing two distinct cultural codes and cognitive worlds into alignment. The analysis conducted here demonstrates that literal translation diminishes the aesthetic force of a literary work and gives rise to cultural misunderstandings (Salomov, 1983). According to Peter Newmark's classification, where cultural and semantic gaps are wide and preserving the exact image is unfeasible, the translator is well advised to rely on selecting an alternative culturally resonant image, converting the metaphor into a simile, or applying semantic explication (Newmark, 1988).

As a general conclusion, a linguacultural approach and a strategy of adaptation to the national mindset should serve as core principles in literary translation practice (Toury, 1995; Musayev, 2005). Only when aspiring translators deeply grasp the cognitive imagery, national sentiment, and artistic thought behind each metaphor can they convey the spirit and aesthetic value of the original work fully to a target-language readership.

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