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THE UNTRANSLATABILITY OF CULTURAL METAPHOR: CHALLENGES IN LITERARY TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: This article examines the phenomenon of cultural metaphor untranslatability in the context of literary translation from English into Uzbek. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory as developed by Lakoff and Johnson, as well as on Venuti's domestication and foreignization framework, the study investigates how culturally embedded metaphorical expressions in Anglophone literary texts resist equivalent rendering in Uzbek. Through close analysis of selected passages from Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner and Toni Morrison's Beloved, the article identifies three principal categories of translational difficulty: cognitive domain mismatch, cultural-conceptual lacunae, and pragmatic loss of connotative meaning. The findings suggest that translators working between English and Uzbek must deploy a combination of compensatory and explanatory strategies to preserve the cognitive and emotional functions of the source metaphors, and that neither pure domestication nor pure foreignization constitutes a universally adequate solution. The article contributes to ongoing debates in translation studies concerning the limits of equivalence and the ethical responsibilities of the literary translator.

Keywords: cultural metaphor, untranslatability, literary translation, English–Uzbek translation, conceptual metaphor theory, domestication, foreignization, equivalence

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation has long been regarded as one of the most intellectually demanding forms of linguistic and cultural mediation. Among the numerous challenges that confront the literary translator, the rendering of culturally embedded metaphor occupies a particularly prominent place. Unlike lexical gaps or syntactic divergences, which can often be addressed through direct substitution or structural adjustment, cultural metaphors present the translator with a far more complex problem: the source expression is not merely linguistically opaque but cognitively and culturally specific, deriving its meaning from a network of associations, values, and experiential frameworks that may have no direct parallel in the target language or culture.

This challenge is especially pronounced in the case of translation from English into Uzbek. The two languages belong to entirely different typological families English to the Germanic branch of Indo-European and Uzbek to the Turkic family , and they are embedded in cultural traditions that diverge significantly in terms of historical experience, social organization, religious framework, and collective memory. When a literary translator must render a metaphorical expression rooted in the Anglo-American cultural imagination into a language shaped by Central Asian, Islamic, and Soviet-era cultural traditions, the potential for semantic and pragmatic loss is substantial.

The present article investigates this problem through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as elaborated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their foundational work Metaphors We Live By (1980), and through the translation theoretical frameworks of Lawrence Venuti, whose concepts of domestication and foreignization continue to shape scholarly debate about the ethics and aesthetics of literary translation. The primary literary texts selected for

analysis are Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner (2003) and Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), both of which are rich in culturally specific metaphorical language and both of which have been the subjects of translation into Uzbek, providing concrete material for comparative analysis.

The central research question addressed by this article is: what categories of difficulty arise when culturally embedded metaphors in Anglophone literary texts are translated into Uzbek, and what translational strategies can be deployed to address these difficulties without sacrificing the cognitive and aesthetic functions of the original?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological framework of this study combines conceptual metaphor analysis with comparative translation analysis. The primary corpus consists of selected passages from The Kite Runner and Beloved, chosen on the basis of their metaphorical density and cultural specificity. These passages were examined in the original English and in their available Uzbek translations, with particular attention to instances where the translator's choices resulted in semantic narrowing, pragmatic loss, or compensatory elaboration.

The theoretical framework draws on three principal sources. First, Lakoff and Johnson's CMT provides the analytical vocabulary for identifying and classifying source metaphors according to their conceptual structure, distinguishing between orientational, ontological, and structural metaphors and identifying the source and target domains involved in each mapping. Second, Venuti's theoretical opposition between domestication - defined as the reduction of the foreign text to target-cultural norms, and foreignization defined as the retention of source-cultural markers that signal the text's otherness provides a framework for evaluating the translational choices observed in the corpus. Third, Zoltán Kövecses's work on the cultural variability of conceptual metaphor is drawn upon to account for cases where apparently universal metaphorical mappings prove, upon closer examination, to be culturally specific in their entailments and connotations.

The analysis proceeds through three stages: first, the identification of culturally marked metaphors in the source texts; second, the examination of their Uzbek renderings; and third, the classification of translational outcomes according to a typology of equivalence, partial equivalence, compensated loss, and untranslatability.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of the selected corpus reveals three principal categories of translational difficulty in the rendering of cultural metaphor from English into Uzbek.

The first category, cognitive domain mismatch, arises when the source metaphor maps an abstract target domain onto a concrete source domain that has no functional equivalent in the target cultural repertoire. In Morrison's Beloved, the recurring metaphor of memory as a physical haunting - captured in the phrase "rememory" and in descriptions of 124 Bluestone Road as "spiteful" and "full of a baby's venom" — draws on a specifically Anglo-American tradition of Gothic spatial imagination in which houses are understood as repositories of unresolved traumatic history. The Uzbek translator, working within a cultural framework in which the haunted house as a cognitive domain carries different connotations related more closely to Islamic notions of jinn inhabitation than to psychological trauma, is confronted with a mapping that cannot be reproduced without significant alteration of its cognitive and thematic function.

The second category, cultural-conceptual lacunae, involves source metaphors that depend on culturally specific referents for which no equivalent concept exists in Uzbek cultural knowledge. In The Kite Runner, Hosseini's metaphorical use of kite-fighting as a figure for social competition, masculine honour, and ethnic hierarchy activates a cultural script that, while geographically proximate to Central Asia, carries specifically Afghan cultural meanings that may

not be fully accessible to Uzbek readers without explanatory mediation. When this cultural script is further compounded by metaphorical elaboration - as in passages where kite-strings function as figures for the bonds of loyalty and guilt - the translator faces the dual task of conveying both the cultural referent and its figurative extension.

The third category, pragmatic loss of connotative meaning, occurs when a source metaphor can be rendered at the denotative level but loses its associative and evaluative resonance in translation. Morrison's use of blood as "rubies" - a metaphor that simultaneously evokes beauty, value, and the perverse aestheticization of violence -illustrates this problem clearly. A denotatively adequate Uzbek rendering of the image preserves the visual comparison but cannot easily reproduce the ethical tension encoded in the original, which depends on the reader's recognition of a deliberate and disturbing incongruity between the source domain (gems, luxury, beauty) and the target domain (enslaved bodies, violence, death).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the analysis suggest that cultural metaphor untranslatability in the English–Uzbek literary context is not a binary phenomenon - either present or absent - but rather a spectrum of translational adequacy ranging from full conceptual equivalence through partial rendering to near-total pragmatic loss. This spectrum is shaped by three interacting factors: the degree of cultural specificity of the source domain, the cognitive distance between the source and target cultural frameworks, and the translator's willingness to deploy foreignizing strategies that preserve markers of cultural otherness at the cost of immediate accessibility.

Venuti's framework proves useful here but requires qualification. His advocacy for foreignization as an ethically superior strategy because it resists the "domesticating" erasure of cultural difference - is compelling in principle but faces practical limitations when the target readership lacks the cultural competence to interpret source-cultural markers. In the English–Uzbek context, a fully foreignizing translation of Morrison's Gothic spatial metaphors risks producing opacity rather than productive estrangement, as the target reader may lack the cultural schema necessary to interpret the haunted house as a figure for psychological trauma rather than supernatural visitation.

A more productive approach, suggested by the analysis, involves what may be termed strategic compensation: the translator's deliberate use of culturally accessible Uzbek figurative resources to reproduce the cognitive and emotional function of the source metaphor, even when direct correspondence is unavailable. This approach accepts the inevitability of some degree of semantic transformation while prioritizing the preservation of pragmatic effect — the reader's experience of the metaphor as emotionally resonant and thematically coherent.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the translation of cultural metaphor from English into Uzbek presents challenges that cannot be adequately addressed by any single translational strategy. The three categories of difficulty identified — cognitive domain mismatch, cultural-conceptual lacunae, and pragmatic connotative loss — each require a nuanced response that takes account of both the structural properties of the source metaphor and the cultural competence of the target readership. The findings have implications for translator training, for the development of translation commentary practices, and for the broader theoretical debate about equivalence and untranslatability in literary translation studies. Future research should extend the corpus to include other Anglophone literary texts translated into Uzbek and should examine the reception of translated metaphors by Uzbek readers as a means of assessing the pragmatic effectiveness of different translational strategies.

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