



TRANSLATING MENTALITY-BEARING METAPHORS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A LEXICO-STYLISTIC AND EQUIVALENCE-BASED STUDY

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Abstract

This article investigates the translation of metaphors whose meaning is bound up with national mentality, on the material of English and Uzbek. Starting from the cognitive premise that metaphor is a mechanism of thought rather than an ornament of speech, the study asks what happens to a metaphor when it must cross between two typologically and culturally distant languages. Metaphorical units were collected from Betty Smith's "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" and Utkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning ishlari", reconstructed at the conceptual level, and examined for their lexico-stylistic features and their behaviour under translation. Four translation outcomes are identified — direct transfer, conceptual transfer with substituted realisation, dual (literal-plus-interpretive) rendering, and compensation or explanation — and each is linked to the degree of overlap between the two mentalities. The article argues that translation adequacy for such metaphors depends less on lexical correspondence than on whether the receiving mentality supplies the association the source metaphor presupposes, and it draws practical conclusions for translator training and bilingual lexicography.

Keywords: Metaphor translation, mentality, equivalence, lexico-stylistic features, conceptual metaphor, English, Uzbek, literary translation.

1. Introduction

Translation has always been a privileged site for observing what is language-specific about meaning, and metaphor has always been among its hardest problems. Under the traditional view of metaphor as ornament, the difficulty of



translating a metaphor was understood as a stylistic matter: how to reproduce an effect. The cognitive turn in metaphor studies reframes the problem. If metaphor is a mapping between conceptual domains rather than a mere figure of speech, then translating a metaphor is not simply a question of substituting words but of deciding whether the target language and its speakers command the same mapping — and, crucially, the same associations and evaluations attached to it. These associations and evaluations are, in large part, a matter of mentality. By mentality we mean the settled dispositions of perception and value that characterise a speech community, distinct from culture understood as the sum of its institutions and practices. A metaphor may rely for its force on an association that one community takes for granted and another does not command at all. When such a metaphor is translated, the translator confronts a gap not of vocabulary but of mentality, and the strategies available for bridging that gap are the subject of this article.

The stakes of this problem extend well beyond literary translation. Metaphor pervades ordinary language, and much of what looks like literal vocabulary is in fact sedimented metaphor — dead metaphor whose figurative origin is no longer felt. A translator who handles such material word by word, without recognising the mappings beneath it, will reproduce forms while losing sense, or will revive images the source community no longer perceives. The problem of metaphor is thus not a marginal difficulty confined to poetry but a structural feature of translation between any two languages, and it becomes acute precisely where the two communities differ most in mentality.

The choice of English and Uzbek sharpens the problem. The two languages are unrelated, and the communities that speak them differ in religious tradition, historical experience and habitual imagery. Where their metaphorical systems coincide, translation is nearly automatic; where they diverge, the translator must make decisions that reveal, in miniature, the whole relationship between the two mentalities. The research question is therefore: what strategies does the translation of mentality-bearing metaphors between English and Uzbek require, and what determines which strategy is appropriate in a given case?

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical background in metaphor theory and translation studies. Section 3 describes the material and



method. Section 4 presents a typology of translation outcomes illustrated with metaphors from the two literary works. Section 5 discusses the factors that govern strategy choice and the notion of adequacy for metaphor translation, and Section 6 draws conclusions for theory and practice.

2. Theoretical background

Two lines of scholarship converge in this study. The first is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which holds that abstract target concepts are structured by mappings from concrete source domains and that these mappings surface in systematic families of everyday expressions. Central to the present argument is the distinction, internal to this theory, between the conceptual metaphor — the abstract mapping — and the metaphorical expression — its concrete linguistic instance. Because a single mapping can be realised by many different expressions, and because languages may share a mapping while differing in the expressions that realise it, the conceptual/expression distinction is exactly the tool a translator needs in order to locate where two languages agree and where they part.

The second line is the account of metaphorical variation, in which shared generic-level metaphors are elaborated differently across and within cultures. The relevant causes of variation include the natural and social environment, differing cultural preferences and the individual's dominant concerns. From the translator's standpoint, variation is the source of every difficulty: a metaphor that varies only at the specific level can be re-realised in the target language, whereas one that depends on a mapping absent from the target mentality cannot be transferred at all without loss or compensation.

Translation studies contribute a third, complementary perspective. The long-standing debate over equivalence — between renderings that stay close to the form of the source and those that reproduce its effect on a new audience — takes on a specific shape once metaphor is understood cognitively. A form-oriented rendering preserves the source's image but may fail to activate the intended mapping in the target mind; an effect-oriented rendering preserves the mapping but may sacrifice the image and its stylistic colouring. The cognitive account clarifies what is at stake in this choice: it locates the source of untranslatability not in the words but in the availability, to the target community, of the mapping



and its associations. Equivalence for metaphor, on this view, is a matter of associative rather than lexical correspondence, a reframing that the present study develops and tests.

Within Uzbek linguistics, metaphor has traditionally been studied under the headings of linguistic and stylistic metaphor. This native distinction is useful but does not coincide with the cognitive one: a conceptual metaphor is more abstract and more general than either category, standing behind both. Aligning the two frameworks is a prerequisite for the translation analysis, because the translator working between English and Uzbek must move between a cognitive description of the source and a stylistic tradition of description in the target. The study also draws on the procedures of conceptual analysis — definitional, contextual and etymological — to establish, for each metaphor, what precisely is being mapped and why, before asking how it can be carried across.

3. Materials and methods

The material consists of metaphorical units excerpted from two literary works chosen for their density of mentality-bearing language and their comparability of genre: Betty Smith's "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" for English and Utkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning ishlari" for Uzbek. Literary prose was preferred because it draws on several registers and thus exposes metaphors belonging to different layers of mentality, from the idiolectal speech of individual characters to nationally entrenched imagery.

The procedure had four stages. First, metaphorical expressions with a mentality component were identified in each text. Second, the underlying conceptual metaphor was reconstructed for each expression, since running text yields metaphorical expressions far more often than explicit conceptual metaphors; throughout, conceptual metaphors are set in small capitals and metaphorical expressions in bold italics to keep the two levels distinct. Third, each unit was subjected to conceptual analysis by the definitional, etymological and questioning methods in order to expose the association on which it depends. Fourth — the step specific to this study — each unit was translated into the other language and the translation was classified by the strategy it required, with attention to whether the receiving mentality supplied the necessary association.



Three general methods framed the work: the descriptive method for characterising metaphors in context; the comparative method for aligning source and target and detecting the point of divergence; and the statistical method for estimating the relative frequency of the different translation outcomes and for summarising a small survey administered to bilingual respondents. The survey asked respondents to judge the naturalness of candidate translations and to report the associations a given metaphor evoked, providing an external check on the analyst's classifications.

4. A typology of translation outcomes

Classifying the translated units by the strategy they demanded produced four recurrent outcomes, presented below in order of increasing difficulty. The outcome that applies in a given case is governed by the degree to which the two mentalities share both the mapping and its associations.

4.1. Direct transfer

Where the two languages share both the conceptual mapping and a comparable realisation, the metaphor can be transferred more or less directly. The personification of nature provides clear instances. The mapping TREES ARE HUMAN operates in both texts, and many of its realisations survive translation intact; the extension of personification to celestial bodies, as in the Uzbek image of the moon pausing as if to listen to a song, can be rendered into English without strain because English also personifies the moon. Metaphors resting on shared embodiment or on widely diffused symbolic practice — such as the elemental mapping in which earth, water, wind and fire stand for the constituents of life — likewise transfer with minimal adjustment. In these cases the translator's task is essentially reproductive.

4.2. Conceptual transfer with substituted realisation

A larger group shares the conceptual mapping but not the specific realisation, so that literal translation produces an image the target language does not conventionally use. The English description of moss as a beard on a tree instantiates the shared mapping TREES ARE HUMAN, yet its literal Uzbek



rendering yields an unidiomatic picture; the appropriate strategy is to preserve the mapping while choosing a realisation native to Uzbek. The direction of difficulty is symmetrical: Uzbek realisations that elaborate a shared mapping in a distinctively Uzbek way must, in English, be re-expressed rather than transcribed. Here the translator works at the conceptual level, keeping the mapping and replacing its surface form — the strategy that most clearly requires the conceptual/expression distinction.

4.3. Dual rendering: literal plus interpretation

Certain metaphors resist a single satisfactory translation because their form and their sense pull apart; for these the analysis found that a dual rendering is often the honest solution, giving first a word-for-word version that preserves the image and then an interpretive version that recovers the meaning. This strategy is characteristic of metaphors that are semantically transparent to the source community but whose literal transfer would either puzzle or mislead the target reader. The dual rendering makes the mentality gap visible instead of papering over it, and it is especially appropriate in scholarly and pedagogical contexts, where the reader benefits from seeing both the source image and its sense.

4.4. Compensation or explanation

The hardest cases are metaphors that depend on a mapping or association absent from the target mentality altogether. The Uzbek mapping THE MOON IS A BIRD has no English counterpart, because English does not associate the moon with birds; a literal translation communicates nothing of the intended image, and the translator must compensate elsewhere or supply an explanation. Religiously and ethnically anchored comparisons behave the same way: an English comparison of a child to a little Jesus, or the use of an ethnonym to stand for a whole national type, rests on associations specific to the source mentality, and its Uzbek rendering would require either a different, culturally resonant figure or an explanatory gloss. In such cases equivalence in any strict sense is unattainable, and the translator manages loss rather than avoiding it.

The survey administered to bilingual respondents supported this ordering. Direct-transfer metaphors were judged natural in both directions; substituted-realisation



metaphors were accepted only when the surface form had been adapted, and rejected in literal form; dual renderings were preferred for the semantically transparent but formally alien cases; and compensation-requiring metaphors were reported as opaque until the underlying association was explained. Across the corpora, metaphorical expressions again outnumbered explicit conceptual metaphors, so that the conceptual level generally had to be reconstructed before any translation decision could be made.

4.5. Alternative conceptual metaphors and the shifting of concepts

A complication for translation arises from the fact that concepts are not static: the same target concept may be structured by different, even competing, conceptual metaphors, and the preferred structuring may change over time under the pressure of historical events. A concept that a community once elaborated through one source domain may come to be elaborated through another as war, social upheaval or technological change reshapes collective experience; such shifts leave a layered residue in the lexicon, where older and newer metaphors coexist. For the translator this means that the correct rendering of a metaphor may depend on the period and the discourse in which it occurs, and that a metaphor transparent to one generation may be opaque or archaic to the next.

The distinction between dead and living metaphors intersects with this diachronic dimension. A metaphor that is dead in the source language — processed as an ordinary word, its figurative origin no longer felt — may correspond in the target language to a still-living metaphor, or to no metaphor at all. Translating a dead metaphor literally can therefore inadvertently revive an image the source community no longer perceives, producing an effect of strangeness that was not present in the original. Recognising the vitality of a metaphor, and not only its mapping, is thus part of the translator's diagnostic task, and it is one more respect in which mentality — here, the community's sense of which images are still alive — governs the translation.

4.6. Idiolectal mentality and the translation of voice

Mentality operates not only at the level of the nation but at the level of the individual, and this too has consequences for translation. In the English text the



speech of a rough but kind-hearted street trader is saturated with body-based images that express his particular history and outlook; these idiolectal metaphors carry mentality at its most local. To translate such passages adequately the translator must reproduce not merely the propositional content and the mapping but the voice — the register, the coarseness, the warmth — in which the mentality is embodied. A rendering that preserves the mapping while flattening the voice loses precisely what makes the metaphor an index of the character's mind. Attention to idiolectal mentality therefore links the conceptual analysis of metaphor to the stylistic craft of literary translation.

5. Discussion

The four-way typology suggests that the decisive variable in translating a mentality-bearing metaphor is not lexical availability but associative overlap. When the two mentalities share both a mapping and its associations, translation is reproductive; when they share the mapping but not its surface realisation, translation becomes a matter of re-expression at the conceptual level; when the source image is transparent but formally alien, dual rendering preserves both form and sense; and when the association itself is missing from the target mentality, only compensation or explanation remains. Strategy choice, in other words, tracks the structure of the mentality gap.

This has a direct bearing on how adequacy should be conceived for metaphor translation. A criterion framed purely in terms of lexical or even mapping-level correspondence is too coarse: two renderings may correspond at the level of the mapping yet differ sharply in the associations and evaluations they trigger, and it is these that carry the metaphor's force. An adequate translation is therefore one that reconstructs, as far as the target mentality permits, the associative and evaluative network of the source — and that, where this is impossible, signals the loss rather than concealing it. The dual-rendering strategy is valuable precisely because it makes the residue of untranslatability explicit.

The lexico-stylistic dimension reinforces the point. The metaphors examined are not stylistically neutral: their register, their emotional colouring and their place in a character's idiolect are part of their meaning. The speech of an uneducated but warm-hearted character, dense with body-based images, carries mentality at the



individual level and must be translated with an eye to stylistic as well as conceptual fidelity. Attending to lexico-stylistic features thus complements the conceptual analysis, ensuring that what is transferred is not only the mapping but the voice.

These results also speak to the sources of ambiguity that learners and translators routinely encounter. A single word frequently carries several apparently unrelated meanings, and one major source of this polysemy is metaphor: the additional senses are the deposits of past mappings, some still felt and some dead. A learner who grasps how a word's senses hang together through an underlying metaphor is better placed to acquire and use them than one who memorises them as an arbitrary list, and a translator who recognises the mapping behind a polysemous item can choose the sense the context demands with more confidence. The examples and analyses assembled here are, in this respect, directly useful in the teaching of stylistics, lexicology and translation, where they can illustrate how metaphorical motivation organises the lexicon and constrains its rendering across languages.

5.1. Directionality and asymmetry

An important refinement is that the difficulty of translating a metaphor is not symmetrical between the two directions. A mapping present in Uzbek but absent in English, such as the association of the moon with a bird, poses a compensation problem when translating into English but no problem at all in the reverse direction, where it is native. Conversely, associations rooted in the religious or ethnic imagery of the English-speaking community resist transfer into Uzbek while being unproblematic within English. The typology of outcomes must therefore be read as direction-sensitive: the same metaphor may fall into the direct-transfer category in one direction and the compensation category in the other. This asymmetry is a direct reflection of the fact that the two mentalities do not merely differ but differ in specific, locatable ways, each possessing associations the other lacks.

The practical upshot is that a translator's competence in this domain is not a single skill but a map of where the two mentalities align and where they do not. Building that map is exactly what the conceptual analysis of a corpus provides: by



cataloguing which mappings and associations each language commands, it lets the translator anticipate, before encountering a given metaphor, which direction will be easy and which will demand compensation. In this sense the comparative-conceptual method is not only descriptive but predictive, and its pedagogical value lies in making the asymmetries of two mentalities teachable.

Two limitations qualify these conclusions. The corpus is confined to two literary works and two authorial idiolects, so the frequencies reported are indicative rather than representative; and the survey, useful as a check, was small and not stratified by the social variables — age, region, occupation — along which within-culture variation is known to run. A larger corpus and a stratified survey would allow the typology to be weighted and its boundaries tested, and would show how the individual and social layers of mentality interact with the national one in translation.

6. Conclusion

This study asked what the translation of mentality-bearing metaphors between English and Uzbek requires, and it answered by distinguishing four outcomes — direct transfer, conceptual transfer with substituted realisation, dual rendering, and compensation or explanation — each corresponding to a different configuration of the mentality gap. The governing variable proved to be associative overlap rather than lexical correspondence, and adequacy was redefined accordingly as the reconstruction, so far as the target mentality allows, of the source metaphor's associative and evaluative network.

The contribution of the work is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it brings the conceptual/expression distinction and the notion of mentality to bear on the classic problem of metaphor translation, and it reframes adequacy in associative rather than lexical terms. Practically, it offers translators a diagnostic: by asking first whether the target mentality supplies the association a metaphor presupposes, the translator can predict which of the four strategies a given case will demand. The same analysis has applications in bilingual lexicography, where entries for mentality-bearing metaphors should record not only equivalents but the associations that govern their use, and in translator training, where the four-way typology can structure the treatment of figurative language.



More generally, the study confirms that metaphor is a window onto mentality and that translation is the moment at which the shape of that mentality becomes visible. What can and cannot be carried across between two languages tells us, in the end, where two ways of perceiving the world coincide and where they diverge. Extending the analysis to larger corpora, to other genres and to further language pairs would turn this preliminary typology into a general account of how mentality constrains the translation of figurative meaning.

Finally, the findings caution against the assumption that a good bilingual dictionary suffices for the translation of figurative language. Because the force of a mentality-bearing metaphor lies in its associations and evaluations rather than in its lexical shell, an equivalent recorded without those associations can mislead as easily as it helps. What the translator, the lexicographer and the learner require is not a list of correspondences but an account of the mentalities that stand behind them — of which images each community keeps alive, which source domains it favours, and which evaluations it attaches to them. Providing such an account, one metaphor at a time, is the long-term task to which comparative-conceptual studies of this kind contribute, and it is a task whose value grows as contact between the English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking worlds continues to deepen.

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