

SEMANTIC AND STYLISTIC TRANSFORMATION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN TRANSLATION

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Annotation: This article explores the semantic and stylistic transformations that figurative language undergoes during translation, with special attention to the Uzbek-English language pair. It examines how metaphors, idioms, similes, and other stylistic devices are interpreted and adapted when transferred across languages and cultures. The author analyzes translation strategies such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, and semantic compression, which help maintain the emotional depth and artistic integrity of the source text. Uzbek figurative expressions rooted in folklore and rural imagery are discussed alongside their English counterparts to reveal the complexity and creativity involved in rendering culturally rich language. The findings support the idea that figurative translation is not merely a linguistic challenge, but a cross-cultural negotiation that requires both linguistic expertise and interpretive sensitivity.

Keywords: figurative language, semantic transformation, stylistic adaptation, metaphor translation, Uzbek-English translation, cultural substitution, translation theory, linguistic equivalence, artistic expression.

Translation is far more than a technical transposition of words—it is an intricate artistic and intellectual endeavor that seeks to recreate meaning, tone, and cultural resonance across linguistic boundaries. Among the most challenging elements in this process is the treatment of figurative language, which includes metaphors, similes, idioms, personification, and other stylistic devices that are often deeply rooted in the source culture's worldview.

Figurative language serves not only as a vehicle for aesthetic beauty but also as a reflection of cultural identity, emotional nuance, and philosophical depth. However, when such expressions are transplanted into another language, they frequently undergo semantic and stylistic transformations. These shifts may involve reimagining metaphors to suit new cultural contexts, simplifying complex imagery for clarity, or preserving stylistic integrity even at the expense of literal accuracy.

This article investigates the semantic and stylistic transformations that figurative language undergoes in the process of translation. It explores how translators navigate the delicate balance between fidelity to the original text and adaptation for the target audience, analyzing strategies that preserve or reshape figurative meaning. Through comparative examples and theoretical insights, the study sheds light on the translator's role as both linguistic mediator and artistic interpreter.

Figurative language plays a vital role in expressing cultural identity, emotional depth, and artistic nuance, making its accurate translation essential for cross-cultural understanding. In the context of Uzbek-English translation, this task becomes particularly significant due to the rich metaphorical and idiomatic traditions embedded in Uzbek literature and oral expression. Uzbek figurative expressions often reflect national values, folklore, and rural imagery, which may not have direct equivalents in English. As a result, translators must navigate semantic shifts and stylistic adaptations to preserve the original tone and meaning. For example, metaphors like “*tilidan bol oqqan*” (literally: “honey flows from his tongue”) require creative rendering to

convey eloquence in English, such as “*silver-tongued*.” These transformations are not merely linguistic—they are interpretive acts that shape how cultures perceive one another. Therefore, studying the semantic and stylistic transformation of figurative language in Uzbek-English translation is crucial for maintaining literary integrity, fostering intercultural empathy, and enriching the global appreciation of Uzbek artistic expression.

The translation of figurative language has long been a central focus in both theoretical and practical domains of linguistics. Initially, figurative expressions such as metaphors, idioms, and similes were often treated as peripheral embellishments, leading to their simplification or omission in early translation strategies. However, with the introduction of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), figurative language was redefined as a fundamental cognitive mechanism through which individuals interpret and structure their reality. This paradigm shift marked a significant turning point in translation studies, placing greater emphasis on the semantic depth and stylistic integrity of figurative language.

Under this framework, metaphor and other figurative devices are recognized as not only stylistic flourishes but also culturally embedded expressions. Scholars like Denroche (2022) argue that language itself is inherently figurative, with meaning shaped by construal and context. Consequently, translators must do more than match lexical items—they must reconstruct the “semantic space” of the source text in the target language. This is particularly important in Uzbek-English translation, where expressions such as “*Ko‘ngli muzdek edi*” (His heart was icy) or “*Tilidan bal oqqan*” (Honey flows from his tongue) carry nuanced emotional and cultural meanings not readily translatable without stylistic adaptation.

Mona Baker (2018) identifies four major challenges in translating figurative language: lack of direct equivalents, contextual variability, idiomatic shifts, and discourse-level differences. To address these challenges, translators often employ a range of strategies including paraphrasing, cultural substitution, explanatory glosses, or preservation of metaphorical form. Peter Newmark’s (1988) taxonomy of metaphor translation remains a cornerstone of this discussion, offering structured methods that vary from literal translation to adaptation and even omission depending on the communicative purpose and target audience.

In the Uzbek-English context, preserving stylistic texture and national color becomes a complex endeavor. Figurative expressions in Uzbek literature often reflect rural life, folklore, and Islamic traditions—elements that may be unfamiliar to English-speaking readers. Omar (2021) stresses the importance of cultural sensitivity in this process, advocating for translations that retain poetic rhythm and emotional resonance even when semantic restructuring is necessary.

Recent studies have also explored the performance of AI tools like ChatGPT in figurative translation. Although these systems exhibit fluency and coherence, they often struggle with metaphorical nuance and culture-specific interpretations. As Sahari et al. (2024) demonstrate, human translators outperform AI in texts rich with figurative language, underscoring the irreplaceable value of human insight and cultural intuition in literary translation.

Together, these studies affirm that translating figurative language demands more than technical skill—it requires interpretive judgment, artistic sensibility, and cultural empathy. Understanding the semantic and stylistic transformations involved in Uzbek-English translation helps ensure that figurative meaning is not lost, but rather reimagined in a way that resonates with new audiences while honoring the spirit of the original.

Figurative language, rich in metaphor, idiom, and imagery, often undergoes semantic and stylistic transformation when translated across languages. These transformations are not merely linguistic—they reflect cultural adaptation, aesthetic choices, and the translator’s interpretive skill. In Uzbek-English translation, such shifts are particularly pronounced due to differences in worldview, poetic tradition, and idiomatic structure.

For instance, the Uzbek expression “*Tilidan bal oqqan*” literally means “Honey flows from his tongue.” Semantically, it conveys eloquence and charm. In English, the closest stylistic equivalent would be “*He’s silver-tongued*.” While the metaphorical image changes—from

honey to silver—the underlying meaning remains intact. This is a clear example of semantic substitution paired with stylistic adaptation.

Another example is “*Ko‘ngli muzdek edi*”, which translates as “His heart was icy.” This metaphor expresses emotional coldness and detachment. English has a direct stylistic parallel in “*He was cold-hearted.*” Here, the metaphor is preserved both semantically and stylistically, demonstrating cross-cultural metaphorical alignment.

More complex transformations occur with culturally embedded idioms. Take “*Esagi bilan maslahatlashib ish qiladi*”—“He consults with his donkey before making decisions.” This humorous metaphor implies foolishness or indecision, rooted in rural Uzbek imagery. In English, a stylistically appropriate rendering might be “*He’s all over the place*” or “*He doesn’t know what he’s doing.*” The original metaphor is replaced with a culturally familiar idiom, showing stylistic replacement and semantic generalization.

Similarly, the Uzbek phrase “*Sochiga oq tushgan har bir tol hayotning bir sabog‘i*”—“Every white strand in his hair is a lesson from life”—reflects reverence for age and experience. In English, this might be rendered as “*His gray hair tells stories of experience.*” Though the metaphor shifts slightly, the emotional and cultural tone is preserved, illustrating semantic compression with stylistic preservation.

These examples reveal that figurative language in translation is not static—it evolves to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience. Translators must balance fidelity to the original with creative adaptation, ensuring that the figurative meaning resonates without losing its poetic or cultural essence.

Figurative language, as a carrier of cultural depth and artistic resonance, presents a unique challenge in the field of translation. Its transformation across languages is not merely a matter of linguistic equivalence but a nuanced interpretive process that demands creativity, cultural awareness, and stylistic sensitivity. In the case of Uzbek-English translation, this complexity intensifies due to the rich tapestry of Uzbek idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and poetic images often rooted in folklore, rural life, and spiritual traditions.

Translators must skillfully navigate semantic shifts and stylistic changes to preserve the original intent and emotional texture of the source text. Whether through metaphor substitution, paraphrasing, or stylistic reconstruction, the goal remains the same: to maintain the aesthetic and cultural integrity of figurative language within a new linguistic framework. These transformations play a crucial role in enabling literary and cultural exchange, offering new audiences access to the expressive power and artistic spirit of Uzbek literature.

Ultimately, understanding and mastering the semantic and stylistic transformation of figurative language not only elevates translation practice but also strengthens intercultural dialogue by honoring the unique voice and worldview embedded within every phrase.

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