



FROM LITERAL TO CULTURAL: THE EVOLUTION OF STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATING CULTURALLY BOUND METAPHORS

Azimova Ozoda Olimjon qizi

Master's degree student

National University of Uzbekistan

E-mail: azimovaozoda@gmail.com

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This paper addresses the evolution of translation strategies employed in rendering culturally bound metaphors in literary texts. Metaphor is approached as a cognitive and cultural mechanism of transfer closely related to the process of translation itself. Drawing on classical and contemporary theoretical perspectives, the study traces the shift from early source-oriented and formally equivalent approaches toward functional, dynamic, and culture-oriented models of translation. Particular attention is paid to the role of the translator as an intercultural mediator and to the use of adaptation, substitution, and explicitation in dealing with culture-specific metaphorical expressions.

Metaphor has traditionally been understood as a mechanism of transfer through which meaning is projected from the known onto the unknown. Aristotle's definition of metaphor as the transfer of a name from one entity to another already implies a cognitive operation based on similarity and association. This understanding reveals a close conceptual affinity between metaphor and translation. The Greek term "*metaphora*", like the Latin "*translatio*", denotes both metaphor and translation, pointing to their shared function as processes of transfer and transformation.

In literary texts, metaphors frequently operate as carriers of culturally embedded meanings, reflecting collective experiences, traditions, and symbolic systems. Such metaphors, commonly referred to as culturally bound metaphors, derive their significance from culturally specific conceptual frameworks. Their translation therefore represents one of the most challenging tasks in literary translation, as it requires the transfer of meaning not only across languages but also across cultures. As Venuti states, "A translation is a linguistic 'zone of contact' between the foreign and translating cultures" (2001), highlighting the intercultural space in which translation takes place.

Early source-oriented approaches to metaphor translation. Early approaches to translation were largely shaped by a linguistic and source-text-oriented understanding of equivalence. Translation was primarily conceived as the accurate transfer of meaning from the source language to the target language, with particular emphasis on preserving formal and structural features. Within this framework, metaphors were often treated as stable linguistic units whose meaning could be conveyed through *literal translation* or close formal correspondence.

The concept of formal equivalence played a central role in this stage of translation theory. Nida's early work (1964) emphasized the importance of maintaining the formal characteristics of the source text, which encouraged translators to reproduce metaphorical expressions as directly as possible. Similarly, Newmark (1988) argued that original metaphorical images should be retained in translation whenever feasible in order to preserve stylistic and semantic



richness. These approaches assumed that metaphorical meaning could be transferred without significant loss, provided that linguistic equivalence was maintained. However, such assumptions proved problematic in the case of culturally bound metaphors. Literal translation often resulted in obscure or misleading interpretations when metaphors relied on culture-specific knowledge unfamiliar to the target readership. The limitations of source-oriented strategies revealed that metaphorical meaning cannot be fully separated from cultural context, thereby exposing the inadequacy of purely formal approaches.

Functional and dynamic perspectives. The recognition of these limitations led to a gradual shift toward functional and reader-oriented approaches in translation theory. Translation came to be viewed not merely as a linguistic operation but as a communicative act aimed at producing a comparable effect on the target audience. This shift was particularly significant for metaphor translation, where communicative impact often outweighs formal correspondence. Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence (1982) marked a turning point in this regard. Dynamic equivalence prioritizes the response of the target reader, proposing that translation should evoke a similar effect rather than replicate linguistic form. In the context of metaphor translation, this approach allows for *adaptation* and *reformulation* when literal transfer fails to convey intended meaning. Evans supports this view by suggesting that a translated text may function "as a metaphor for the foreign text" (1998), implying that translation itself involves metaphorical reconstruction. Functional approaches further legitimized strategies such as *paraphrase*, *functional substitution*, and *explanatory reformulation*. These strategies aim to preserve the pragmatic and aesthetic function of metaphors rather than their exact linguistic shape. While such methods enhance readability and comprehension, they also raise concerns regarding the preservation of cultural specificity, as original imagery may be partially altered or lost.

Contemporary culture-oriented approaches. Contemporary translation studies increasingly place culture at the center of the translation process, viewing translation as an act of intercultural communication. This perspective is particularly relevant for culturally bound metaphors, whose meaning depends on shared cultural knowledge and symbolic associations. As Baker observes, "metaphors are closely bound up with the way a particular culture conceptualizes experience" (2018), which necessitates culturally informed translation strategies.

Modern approaches emphasize the role of the translator as an active mediator who negotiates between source and target cultures. Strategies such as *cultural substitution*, *adaptation*, and *explicitation* are employed to ensure that metaphorical expressions remain meaningful within the target cultural context. Toury highlights (1995) that translation norms are shaped by the target culture, influencing the selection of strategies used in translation. Within this framework, the translator evaluates whether to retain, adapt, or explain culturally bound metaphors depending on their function and relevance.

Schäffner further argues that metaphor translation involves cognitive and cultural dimensions that extend beyond linguistic substitution, stating that "metaphor translation involves cognitive, cultural and contextual factors" (2004). Contemporary culture-oriented approaches therefore integrate linguistic accuracy, functional adequacy, and cultural relevance, providing a flexible framework for handling culturally bound metaphors in literary texts.



Implications for literary translation. The evolution of translation strategies has significantly expanded the translator's decision-making process in literary translation. Translators are now required to interpret metaphorical meaning within its cultural context and to select strategies that balance fidelity with accessibility. This shift underscores the importance of intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. Moreover, the strategic evolution in metaphor translation contributes to a more balanced relationship between fidelity and creativity. While early approaches prioritized formal accuracy, contemporary models recognize the necessity of creative mediation in achieving functional and cultural equivalence. As a result, translators are better equipped to preserve the artistic and cultural value of literary texts while ensuring their interpretability for target readers.

The translation of culturally bound metaphors illustrates the broader evolution of translation theory from source-oriented literalism to culturally sensitive and functionally informed approaches. Early strategies, grounded in formal equivalence, proved insufficient for capturing the cultural and cognitive dimensions of metaphorical meaning. The development of functional, dynamic, and contemporary cultural-oriented models has provided translators with more flexible tools for mediating between languages and cultures. Ultimately, the effective translation of culturally bound metaphors depends on the translator's ability to integrate linguistic competence, cultural awareness, and interpretative skill, reaffirming translation as a complex act of intercultural communication.

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