

COGNITIVE MECHANISMS OF UZBEK NATIONAL CHARACTER REPRESENTATION IN LITERARY TRANSLATION: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Temirova Nigina Alisher qizi,

Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy

Corresponding author: n.temirova@navoiy-uni.uz

Abstract. This article investigates the cognitive mechanisms underlying the representation of the Uzbek national character image in literary translation. Drawing on comparative translation analysis, conceptual metaphor theory, and cognitive linguistics, the study examines how language units functioning as markers of national identity are transferred across English–Uzbek and Russian–Uzbek translation pairs. The research demonstrates that national character representation is not merely a lexical–semantic challenge but a deeply cognitive process in which translators negotiate between source conceptual frameworks and target cultural schemata. Findings reveal that successful representation of the Uzbek national character in translation depends on the translator's linguistic identity, socio-cultural competence, and ability to deploy cognitive equivalence at both denotative and connotative levels. The article contributes to cognitive translation studies and offers implications for translator education in multilingual Central Asian contexts.

Keywords: cognitive translation studies; Uzbek national character; conceptual equivalence; literary translation; linguistic identity; cultural schemas; cross-cultural semantics.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada adabiy tarjimada o'zbek milliy xarakteri obrazining ifodalanishi asosida yotuvchi kognitiv mexanizmlar tadqiq etiladi. Qiyosiy tarjima tahlili, konseptual metafora nazariyasi hamda kognitiv lingvistika yondashuvlariga tayangan holda, tadqiqot milliy o'zlik belgilarini aks ettiruvchi til birliklarining ingliz–o'zbek va rus–o'zbek tarjima juftliklarida qanday ko'chirilishini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, milliy xarakterni tarjimada ifodalash nafaqat leksik-semantik muammo, balki tarjimon manba til konseptual tizimi va maqsadli madaniyat sxemalari o'rtasida vositachilik qiladigan murakkab kognitiv jarayondir. Natijalar o'zbek milliy xarakterining tarjimada muvaffaqiyatli ifodalanishi tarjimonning lingvistik identifikatsiyasi, ijtimoiy-madaniy kompetensiyasi hamda denotativ va konnotativ darajalarda kognitiv ekvivalentlikni ta'minlash qobiliyatiga bog'liqligini ko'rsatadi. Maqola kognitiv tarjimashunoslik rivojiga hissa qo'shadi hamda ko'p tilli Markaziy Osiyo sharoitida tarjimonlar tayyorlash masalalari uchun amaliy tavsiyalar beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: kognitiv tarjimashunoslik, o'zbek milliy xarakteri, konseptual ekvivalentlik, adabiy tarjima, lingvistik identifikatsiya, madaniy sxemalar, madaniyatlararo semantika.

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуются когнитивные механизмы, лежащие в основе репрезентации образа узбекского национального характера в художественном переводе. Опираясь на методы сравнительного переводческого анализа, теорию концептуальной метафоры и когнитивную лингвистику, автор рассматривает способы передачи языковых единиц, выступающих маркерами национальной идентичности, в англо-узбекских и русско-узбекских переводческих парах. Результаты исследования показывают, что репрезентация национального характера в переводе представляет собой не только лексико-семантическую проблему, но и сложный когнитивный процесс, в рамках которого переводчик осуществляет посредничество между концептуальными структурами исходного языка и культурными схемами языка перевода. Установлено, что успешная передача узбекского национального характера в переводе зависит от языковой идентичности переводчика, его социокультурной компетентности и способности обеспечивать когнитивную эквивалентность как на денотативном, так и на коннотативном уровнях. Статья вносит вклад в развитие когнитивного переводоведения и имеет практическое значение для подготовки переводчиков в условиях многоязычного пространства Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: когнитивное переводоведение, узбекский национальный характер, концептуальная эквивалентность, художественный перевод, языковая идентичность, культурные схемы, межкультурная семантика.

Introduction. The question of how national character is encoded, preserved, and re-created in literary translation has occupied scholars of translation studies, cognitive linguistics, and cultural semiotics for decades. Within the Uzbek literary tradition, this question carries particular urgency: the Uzbek cultural identity, shaped by centuries of nomadic and sedentary coexistence, Silk Road cosmopolitanism, and Soviet-era linguistic policies, is encoded in distinctive conceptual structures that do not map neatly onto Russian or English frameworks.

Recent decades have seen a productive convergence between cognitive science and translation theory. Scholars such as Halverson (2010), Rojo and Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2013), and Muñoz Martín (2016) have argued that translation is fundamentally a cognitive act—a process of conceptual restructuring in which the translator mediates between two mental models of reality. Yet the application of cognitive frameworks to Central Asian literary translation remains underdeveloped.

The present article addresses this gap by examining how language units that evoke, construct, or reinforce images of Uzbek national character function within translated literary texts. Specifically, we ask: (1) What cognitive mechanisms do translators activate when transferring culturally loaded markers of Uzbek identity? (2) How does the translator's linguistic identity shape the conceptual choices available during this transfer? (3) What are the implications of conceptual asymmetry between Uzbek source texts and their Russian and English translations?

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant theoretical frameworks from cognitive translation studies and cultural linguistics. Section 3 outlines the methodology. Section 4 presents the empirical analysis. Section 5 discusses findings in relation to translator identity and pedagogical implications. Section 6 concludes.

Theoretical Framework.

Cognitive Translation Studies. Cognitive translation studies (CTS) holds that translation processes are rooted in general cognitive capacities—categorisation, analogical reasoning, frame activation, and conceptual integration—rather than in purely linguistic operations (Muñoz Martín, 2016; Alves, 2015). Within this paradigm, the translator is viewed not as a passive decoder of surface structures but as a cognitive agent who constructs, evaluates, and revises mental representations of source text meaning before encoding them in the target language.

Particularly relevant to the present study is Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that abstract concepts are understood through systematic mappings onto more concrete experiential domains. National character images—pride, hospitality, endurance, communal solidarity—are precisely the kinds of abstract, culturally

situated concepts that are structurally metaphorised in ways that vary across languages. When a translator encounters an Uzbek expression encoding hospitality as a sacred duty, for instance, they must not only find a lexical equivalent but must negotiate between two differently structured conceptual domains.

Linguistic Identity in Translation. The concept of linguistic identity (or linguistic personality) has a rich theoretical history in Russian and Uzbek scholarship (Vinogradov, 1930; Karaulov, 1987; Ashurova, 2012; Normurodova, 2020). In the translation context, the translator's linguistic identity is a secondary, mediating identity: it must reproduce the source author's conceptual world while remaining transparent to the target-language reader. Normurodova (2020) has expanded the standard three-level model of linguistic identity (verbal-semantic, linguo-cognitive, pragmatic) with two additional levels—linguo-cultural and psychological—that are particularly salient for literary translation.

Building on this framework, we argue that the translator's linguo-cognitive level—that is, their network of culturally specific concepts, values, and evaluative schemata—directly determines the degree to which national character markers are preserved, transformed, or lost in translation. A translator who lacks cognitive access to Uzbek cultural schemas cannot activate the appropriate conceptual mappings, however fluent they may be at the verbal-semantic level.

National Character as Conceptual Configuration. Following Wierzbicka (1997) and Sharifian (2011), we treat national character not as a fixed essence but as a culturally shared configuration of conceptual units—what Sharifian terms 'cultural schemas'—that are distributed across the minds of members of a speech community. These schemas are encoded in language through lexical choices, idiomatic expressions, narrative structures, and pragmatic conventions. In Uzbek, key schemas associated with national identity include mehmonnavozlik (hospitality as sacred obligation), andisha (thoughtful restraint in social interaction), and or-nomus (honour and dignity). These concepts have no single-word equivalents in Russian or English, and their translation requires conceptual explication rather than lexical substitution.

Methodology. The empirical component of this study employs comparative translation analysis (Toury, 1995; Baker, 2011) applied to a corpus of 12 Uzbek literary texts translated into Russian and English between 1980 and 2022. The corpus spans three genres—prose fiction, drama, and lyric poetry—selected to capture variation in the density and type of national character markers.

We follow a three-stage analytical procedure. First, national character markers are identified in source texts using criteria developed from Vinogradov's (2001) framework for fono-cultural semantics: the marker must carry a culturally loaded meaning that is not reducible to its denotative referent, and it must activate a cultural schema recognisable to Uzbek readers. Second, translation equivalents (or non-equivalents) are identified in target texts. Third, the cognitive operations employed by translators—including domestication,

foreignisation, conceptual expansion, semantic attenuation, and hyponimisation—are classified and their effect on national character representation is assessed.

To supplement textual analysis, we draw on paratextual evidence (translator prefaces, editorial notes) and, where available, published interviews with translators, in order to reconstruct the cognitive rationale behind key translation decisions.

Empirical Analysis.

Patterns of Conceptual Equivalence. Analysis of the corpus reveals four major patterns in the treatment of national character markers: (a) direct conceptual equivalence, in which a target-language expression activates the same or a closely parallel schema; (b) partial equivalence, in which the conceptual mapping is preserved but attenuated in cultural specificity; (c) functional substitution, in which a target-culture schema replaces a source-culture schema with comparable pragmatic effect but different conceptual content; and (d) conceptual loss, in which no equivalent schema is available in the target system and the marker is either deleted or rendered at the denotative level only.

Direct conceptual equivalence is rare but not absent. The Uzbek schema of elder respect (*kattalarni hurmat qilish*), for example, maps onto functionally comparable schemas in both Russian and English literary traditions, allowing translators to activate existing target-language representations without significant conceptual distortion. By contrast, the schema of *or-nomus* (honour-shame complex) presents systematic challenges: Russian translations tend to reduce this to the semantically narrower *честь* (*chest'*, 'honour'), losing the communal and shame-avoidance dimensions; English translations vary between 'honour', 'dignity', and 'face', none of which captures the relational dynamics of the Uzbek concept.

The Role of Translator Linguistic Identity. Comparative analysis of multiple translations of the same source text reveals that differences in translator linguistic identity produce systematically different cognitive strategies. Translators with deep immersion in Uzbek cultural life tend to employ foreignisation with contextual explication—preserving the source-language term alongside a culturally situated explanation—whereas translators working primarily from reference materials tend toward domestication, substituting familiar target-culture equivalents. The former strategy preserves the cognitive architecture of the national character image at the cost of some communicative ease; the latter facilitates comprehension at the cost of conceptual accuracy.

This finding aligns with Venuti's (1995) advocacy for foreignisation as a strategy of cultural resistance, but our cognitive framing adds a new dimension: foreignisation is not merely an ideological stance but a cognitively necessary response to the absence of pre-existing schemas in the target system. Where target-culture schemas do not exist, no amount of domestication can achieve genuine conceptual equivalence; what is achieved is, at best, a functional approximation.

Lexical Gaps and Conceptual Expansion. A particularly revealing site of cognitive challenge is the translation of Uzbek cultural realia—lexical items denoting objects, practices, or roles specific to Uzbek material and social life. Our analysis identifies three strategies employed to bridge lexical gaps: (1) transliteration with contextual definition, in which the Uzbek term is preserved phonologically and its meaning is supplied by surrounding context or paratextual notes; (2) periphrastic expansion, in which a multi-word description replaces the single-word source term; and (3) hyperonymic generalisation, in which a broader target-language category subsumes the more specific source concept.

Each strategy involves a different cognitive trade-off. Transliteration maximises conceptual fidelity but may impede comprehension for readers unfamiliar with the source culture. Periphrastic expansion conveys denotative content but tends to dissolve the emotional and evaluative charge of the original term. Hyperonymic generalisation is the most common strategy in the corpus but produces the greatest conceptual loss, reducing culturally specific schemas to generic categories and thereby flattening the representation of Uzbek national character.

Discussion. The findings of this study have implications for both cognitive translation theory and translator education. At the theoretical level, they suggest that national character representation in literary translation is best understood as a process of conceptual negotiation rather than lexical transfer. The adequacy of a translation depends not primarily on the availability of dictionary equivalents but on the translator's ability to activate, construct, or substitute cultural schemas in the target system.

At the pedagogical level, the findings argue for a reorientation of translator education toward cognitive and cultural competence alongside linguistic competence. Translators working between Uzbek and other languages require not only strong bilingual proficiency but also what we may call conceptual bilingualism: the capacity to inhabit, compare, and navigate between two culturally situated worldviews. This capacity cannot be acquired through language instruction alone; it requires sustained engagement with the source culture's literature, history, and social practices.

The study also raises broader questions about the politics of translation in post-Soviet Central Asia. The systematic attenuation of Uzbek cultural schemas in Russian and English translations is not merely a technical limitation; it reflects and reinforces asymmetries in cultural prestige and visibility. A cognitive translation studies perspective, by foregrounding the conceptual architecture of national character representation, can help make these asymmetries visible and provide a framework for their remediation.

Conclusion. This article has argued that the representation of Uzbek national character in literary translation is a cognitively complex process governed by the interaction of conceptual schemata, translator linguistic identity, and the availability of target-language equivalents. Through comparative analysis of a multilingual corpus, we

have identified four patterns of conceptual equivalence and demonstrated that translator cognitive competence—specifically, access to Uzbek cultural schemas—is a primary determinant of translation adequacy at the level of national character representation.

Future research should extend this analysis to digital and machine-assisted translation contexts, where the absence of human cognitive immersion creates particular risks of conceptual flattening. There is also scope for a more systematic empirical study of translator cognitive processes using think-aloud protocols or eye-tracking methodology. Such work would deepen our understanding of the cognitive architecture of cross-cultural translation and contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical frameworks for literary translators working in underrepresented linguistic traditions.

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