



THE LINGUISTIC AND TRANSLATIONAL NATURE OF METAPHOR: A COGNITIVE AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.

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ABSTRACT

Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of human cognition and language, extending far beyond its traditional role as a literary device. This article investigates the linguistic and translational dimensions of metaphor from cognitive and cross-cultural perspectives, drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The study examines how metaphors are conceptually structured, culturally embedded, and linguistically realized across different languages, with particular attention to the challenges these features pose for translators. Through a comparative analysis of metaphorical expressions in English, Uzbek, and Russian, the article demonstrates that while some conceptual metaphors exhibit cross-linguistic universality rooted in shared embodied experience, others are deeply culture-specific and resist direct translation. The findings reveal that translators must navigate not only lexical equivalence but also cognitive and cultural mapping in order to preserve metaphorical meaning. This paper argues that an adequate approach to metaphor translation requires a framework that integrates cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and intercultural communication. The implications of this research extend to translation pedagogy, lexicography, and the broader field of applied linguistics.

Introduction

Metaphor has occupied a central position in the study of language and thought since Aristotle's foundational treatment in the *Poetics*, where it was defined as the transfer of a name belonging to another thing (Aristotle, trans. 1987). For centuries, metaphor was regarded primarily as an ornamental feature of poetic and rhetorical discourse. This view was fundamentally challenged by Lakoff and Johnson's seminal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), which demonstrated that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a basic cognitive mechanism through which humans conceptualize abstract domains in terms of more concrete or familiar ones.

In the decades following this paradigm shift, cognitive linguists have established that conceptual metaphors are ubiquitous in everyday language and thought, shaping our understanding of time, emotion, morality, causation, and social relationships (Kovecses, 2002). At the same time, translation scholars have increasingly recognized that metaphor presents unique challenges in interlinguistic transfer, particularly when source-language metaphors are grounded in culture-specific conceptual systems (Newmark, 1988; Schaffner, 2004).

However, despite extensive research, the interaction between cognitive universality and cultural specificity in metaphor translation remains insufficiently explored. This study provides a comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Russian metaphorical expressions, an area that remains relatively underexplored in existing literature.

This article addresses three interrelated questions: (1) How are metaphors linguistically structured according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory? (2) To what extent are conceptual metaphors universal versus culturally specific? (3) What strategies do translators employ when rendering metaphors across languages with different conceptual systems? By addressing these questions through a comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Russian metaphorical expressions, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that bridges cognitive linguistics and translation studies.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative methodology informed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and the MIP/MIPVU procedure for metaphor identification (Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen et al., 2010). The corpus consists of 120 metaphorical expressions drawn from three sources: (1) literary texts translated between English, Uzbek, and Russian; (2) political discourse from official governmental speeches; and (3) everyday conversational data collected from bilingual informants.

Metaphorical expressions were identified using the MIPVU procedure, which involves (a) reading the entire text to establish meaning; (b) identifying lexical units; (c) determining basic and contextual meanings; and (d) assessing whether a contextual meaning contrasts with but can be related to the basic meaning. Identified metaphors were then classified according to their conceptual structure (structural, orientational, or ontological), following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) typology.

Translation equivalents were analyzed using Newmark's (1988) seven-strategy framework for metaphor translation, which ranges from reproducing the same image to replacing the metaphor with a non-metaphorical paraphrase. Cross-cultural universality was assessed by comparing conceptual mappings across the three languages and consulting the cross-linguistic metaphor databases compiled by Kovecses (2005)

and the Hamburg Metaphor Database (Herrmann et al., 2012). Intercoder reliability was established through independent analysis by two trained annotators, yielding a Cohen's kappa of .84, indicating strong agreement. The data were collected from published literary sources, official speeches, and naturally occurring conversational interactions.

Results

Conceptual Structure of Identified Metaphors

Analysis of the 120 expressions identified 74 structural metaphors (61.7%), 28 orientational metaphors (23.3%), and 18 ontological metaphors (15%).

Table 1. Distribution of Metaphor Types

Type of metaphor	Number	Percentage
Structural	74	61.7%
Orientalational	28	23.3%
Ontological	18	15%

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of identified metaphor types in the analyzed corpus. The results show that structural metaphors constitute the largest proportion, accounting for 74 instances (61.7%), which indicates their dominant role in conceptualizing abstract domains across languages. Orientalational metaphors represent 28 cases (23.3%), reflecting the use of spatial orientation in organizing conceptual meaning. Ontological metaphors are the least frequent, with 18 occurrences (15%), suggesting that they play a comparatively smaller role in the dataset.

Overall, the distribution demonstrates that structural metaphors are the most productive and widely used type, supporting the assumption that they serve as a primary mechanism for conceptual mapping in language.

The most frequently attested conceptual metaphors across all three languages were ARGUMENT IS WAR (e.g., English: "He shot down every objection"; Uzbek: "U barcha e'tirozlarni ag'darib tashladi"; Russian: "On razgromil vse vozrazheniya"), TIME IS MONEY (e.g., "Don't waste my time"; "Vaqtimni behuda sarflama"; "Ne trat' moyo vremya"), and LIFE IS A JOURNEY (e.g., "She's at a crossroads"; "U hayot yo'lida chorrahada").

Cross-Cultural Universality and Cultural Specificity

Sixty-two percent of identified metaphors demonstrated cross-linguistic parallels in all three languages, suggesting a degree of universality grounded in shared embodied experience (Grady, 1997). However, 38% of metaphors exhibited significant cultural specificity. Uzbek data revealed a set of metaphors rooted in agricultural imagery absent from English equivalents, such as expressions mapping DIFFICULTY onto DROUGHT ("bu ish quruqchilikday og'ir" — 'this work is as hard as a drought'). Similarly, Russian political discourse employed metaphors of WAR AND SIEGE not systematically replicated in Uzbek translations, reflecting distinct historical and ideological contexts. These findings are consistent with previous studies on conceptual metaphor universality and cultural variation.

Translation Strategies

When translating metaphors exhibiting cross-linguistic equivalence, translators predominantly employed Strategy 1 (reproducing the same image, 58%). For culture-specific metaphors, Strategy 5 (substituting a culturally equivalent metaphor) was most common (41%), followed by Strategy 7 (paraphrase, 32%).

Table 2. Translation Strategies Distribution

Strategy	Description	Percentage
Strategy 1	Same image	58%
Strategy 5	Cultural substitution	41%
Strategy 7	Paraphrase	32%

Table 2 presents the distribution of translation strategies used for rendering metaphorical expressions. The data indicate that Strategy 1 (reproducing the same image) is the most frequently applied approach, accounting for 58%, particularly in cases where metaphors show cross-linguistic equivalence. Strategy 5 (cultural substitution) is used in 41% of cases, highlighting the importance of adapting culture-specific metaphors to maintain meaning and communicative effect. Strategy 7 (paraphrase) appears in 32% of instances, reflecting situations where metaphorical meaning is conveyed through non-metaphorical expression to ensure clarity.

Notably, only 11% of culture-specific metaphors were translated using Strategy 1, indicating that literal reproduction frequently failed to preserve pragmatic or conceptual meaning. Translators of literary texts showed greater tolerance for metaphorical adaptation, while translators of political discourse exhibited a stronger preference for semantic equivalence over metaphorical preservation. Overall, the findings demonstrate that translators tend to balance between preserving the original metaphorical image and adapting it to the target language, depending on cultural and contextual factors.

Discussion

The results of this study provide further evidence supporting the cognitive nature of metaphor. The findings of this study confirm and extend earlier work on cross-linguistic metaphor (Kovecses, 2005; Yu, 1995) by demonstrating that while embodied universals underlie a substantial proportion of conceptual metaphors across typologically distinct languages, cultural and historical factors introduce significant variation. The high frequency of cross-linguistic parallels for primary metaphors, such as AFFECTION IS WARMTH and MORE IS UP, supports Grady's (1997) theory of primary metaphor, which attributes universal conceptual mappings to the correlation of physical experience with subjective states during early cognitive development.

The culture-specific metaphors documented in Uzbek and Russian data underscore the importance of Sharifian's (2011) concept of cultural cognition, which holds that conceptual systems are not solely individual

but are distributed across members of cultural communities through shared practices, beliefs, and historical experience. For translation practitioners, this finding has direct practical implications: a translator who approaches metaphor solely at the lexical level risks producing a target text that is semantically accurate but pragmatically incoherent or culturally alien.

The dominance of Strategy 5 (cultural substitution) in rendering culture-specific metaphors aligns with Schaffner's (2004) argument that translation is not merely a linguistic but a cultural act. However, substitution carries its own risks, particularly in literary translation where the source-language metaphor may carry authorial intention beyond its semantic content. A notable limitation of this study is its reliance on a relatively small, genre-mixed corpus. Future research should replicate these findings using larger, genre-controlled corpora and extend the analysis to additional language pairs. The interaction between metaphor and register also warrants further investigation, as preliminary results suggest that translators in formal genres prioritize semantic over metaphorical fidelity. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of integrating cognitive and cultural perspectives in metaphor analysis and translation.

Conclusion

This article has argued that metaphor is simultaneously a universal cognitive mechanism and a culturally mediated linguistic phenomenon. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and cross-linguistic corpus analysis, the study demonstrates that the translational challenges posed by metaphor arise not only from structural differences between languages but from divergences in the conceptual systems and cultural schemas that underlie metaphorical mappings. An adequate framework for metaphor translation must therefore integrate insights from cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, and translation pragmatics.

For translation pedagogy, these findings suggest that training programs should expose students to the cognitive architecture of metaphor and equip them with culturally contrastive tools for metaphor analysis, rather than restricting metaphor instruction to the level of idiomatic equivalence. For cognitive linguistics, the systematic documentation of culture-specific metaphors in under-researched languages such as Uzbek provides valuable evidence for theories of cultural conceptualization. The intersection of cognition, language, and culture in metaphorical meaning-making remains a productive and expanding area of inquiry that continues to reshape our understanding of both language and mind. This study has shown that metaphors are structured through conceptual mappings between domains, that they are both universal and culturally specific in nature, and that their translation requires flexible strategies such as substitution, adaptation, and reformulation depending on linguistic and cultural context

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