

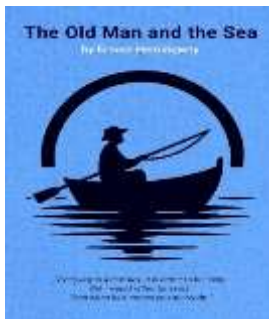
PRESERVING SYMBOLIC AND METAPHORICAL MEANING IN TRANSLATION: A COGNITIVE AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF “THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA”



Allabergenova Intizor Xojinazarovna

1st year master student at Asia International University.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19664060>



Abstract. *This study examines the retention of metaphorical and symbolic meaning in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*, specifically emphasizing English–Uzbek translation. The study is based on modern theories of translation equivalence, cognitive linguistics, and functional translation approaches. Metaphors and symbols in literary texts are not just ways to make the writing look good; they are also important ways to build meaning that show deep conceptual and cultural structures. However, translating them is very hard because of the hidden meanings, cultural specificity, and stylistic minimalism that are typical of Ernest Hemingway's writing..*

The study employs a qualitative and comparative methodology, analyzing key metaphorical and symbolic elements in the source text and their equivalents in the target language. Special attention is given to central symbols such as the sea, the marlin, and the lions, as well as recurring metaphors related to struggle, endurance, and human dignity. The findings reveal that while semantic equivalence is often maintained, cognitive and stylistic equivalence is frequently transformed due to linguistic and cultural differences. The research identifies common translation strategies, including adaptation, explicitation, and metaphorical substitution, and evaluates their effectiveness in preserving the aesthetic and philosophical depth of the original text.

The study contributes to translation studies by proposing a multidimensional model of equivalence that integrates semantic, cognitive, and functional aspects, particularly in the context of literary translation. It also offers practical insights for translators working with metaphorically dense and stylistically minimalist texts.

Key words: *metaphor translation, symbolic imagery, translation equivalence, literary translation, cognitive linguistics, *The Old Man and the Sea*, English–Uzbek translation*

Аннотация. *В данном исследовании рассматривается сохранение метафорического и символического смысла в переводе романа «Старик и море», с особым акцентом на перевод с английского на узбекский язык. Исследование основано на современных теориях переводческой эквивалентности, когнитивной лингвистике и подходах к функциональному переводу.*

Метафоры и символы в литературных текстах — это не просто способы придать тексту привлекательный вид; они также являются важными способами построения смысла, демонстрирующего глубокие концептуальные и культурные структуры. Однако их перевод представляет собой сложную задачу из-за скрытых смыслов, культурной специфики и стилистического минимализма, характерных для творчества Эрнеста Хемингуэя.

В исследовании используется качественная и сравнительная методология, анализирующая ключевые метафорические и символические элементы в исходном тексте и их эквиваленты на целевом языке. Особое внимание уделяется центральным символам, таким как море, марлин и львы, а также повторяющимся метафорам, связанным с борьбой, выносливостью и человеческим достоинством. Результаты исследования показывают, что, хотя семантическая эквивалентность часто сохраняется, когнитивная и стилистическая эквивалентность часто трансформируется из-за языковых и культурных различий. В исследовании определены распространенные стратегии перевода, включая адаптацию, экспликацию и метафорическую замену, и оценена их эффективность в сохранении эстетической и философской глубины оригинального текста.

Исследование вносит вклад в переводоведение, предлагая многомерную модель эквивалентности, которая интегрирует семантические, когнитивные и функциональные аспекты, особенно в контексте литературного перевода. Оно также предлагает практические рекомендации для переводчиков, работающих с метафорически насыщенными и стилистически минималистичными текстами.

Ключевые слова: *метафорический перевод, символическая образность, переводческая эквивалентность, литературный перевод, когнитивная лингвистика, «Старик и море», перевод с английского на узбекский.*

Literary translation is one of the most difficult areas of translation studies because it involves not only changing the meaning of the words but also keeping the source text's aesthetic, cultural, and philosophical aspects. Metaphors and symbols are some of the hardest things to translate in literature because they are important tools for creating meaning and expressing art.

These elements frequently possess implicit meanings, emotional significance, and culturally ingrained associations that defy direct translation. The problem becomes particularly evident in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, a work characterized by its stylistic minimalism and profound symbolic depth. Despite its seemingly simple narrative, the novella is structured around a complex system of symbols and metaphors, including the sea as a representation of life, the marlin as an embodiment of ideal struggle, and the lions as symbols of youth, strength, and existential memory. These elements are not explicitly explained but are conveyed through subtle linguistic and narrative techniques.

Translating such a text requires more than linguistic competence; it demands an understanding of cognitive structures, cultural contexts, and the functional role of figurative language. Traditional notions of equivalence, which emphasize formal or semantic correspondence, prove insufficient in capturing the multidimensional nature of metaphorical and symbolic meaning. As a result, modern translation studies have increasingly focused on functional, cognitive, and pragmatic approaches to equivalence.

This study aims to analyze how metaphorical and symbolic meanings are preserved, transformed, or lost in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* into Uzbek. It seeks to identify the strategies used by translators and evaluate their effectiveness in maintaining semantic, cognitive, and stylistic equivalence. By doing so, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of literary translation as a complex interpretative process and highlights the challenges of translating minimalist yet symbolically rich texts.

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design to examine the preservation of metaphorical and symbolic meaning in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea*. The research is based on modern translation studies, cognitive linguistics, and functional theories of equivalence.

The main data are chosen metaphorical phrases and symbolic parts taken from the original English text and their translations into Uzbek. The analysis concentrates on linguistically and conceptually significant units, encompassing pivotal metaphors (e.g., struggle as endurance, the sea as life) and central symbols (e.g., the marlin, lions, and the sea). These elements were chosen because they were used a lot, were important to the story, and had a lot of meaning in the text.

The study employs a comparative analysis method, examining source text (ST) and target text (TT) pairs to identify shifts in meaning, structure, and stylistic effect. Each example is analyzed across three levels:

- Semantic equivalence (accuracy of literal meaning)
- Cognitive equivalence (preservation of conceptual metaphor or symbolic interpretation)
- Stylistic/functional equivalence (maintenance of tone, minimalism, and narrative effect)

Additionally, the research applies elements of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and functional translation theory (Vermeer, 1989) to interpret how meaning is reconstructed in translation. Translation strategies such as literal translation, adaptation, explicitation, and substitution are identified and evaluated.

The methodology is interpretative in nature, as literary translation involves subjective and context-dependent meaning construction. However, systematic comparison ensures analytical consistency and allows for the identification of recurring translation patterns.

Analysis and discussion



Central Symbol: The Sea as a Multidimensional Concept.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the sea is one of the most complicated and useful symbols. It symbolizes not only the physical setting of the narrative but also functions as a metaphor for life, destiny, and existential conflict. Ernest Hemingway intentionally employs uncomplicated lexical structures to express profound symbolic meanings, thereby presenting considerable challenges for translation. The original text talks about the sea in both a neutral and emotional way: “He always thought of the sea as *la mar* which is what people call her in Spanish...”

In Uzbek translation, this may appear as: “U dengizni doimo ‘*la mar*’ deb o‘ylardi...”

At the semantic level, the translation is accurate. However, at the cognitive level, the feminine personification (“*la mar*”) carries cultural and emotional connotations that may not be

fully preserved in Uzbek. The translator faces a dilemma: retain the foreign element (foreignization) or adapt it to Uzbek conceptual norms.

Another example: “The sea is kind and very beautiful.”

Uzbek equivalent: “Dengiz mehribon va juda go‘zal.”

Here, semantic equivalence is maintained, but the minimalist tone—a key stylistic feature of Hemingway—is slightly intensified in Uzbek due to the emotional weight of the word *mehribon*. This demonstrates how stylistic equivalence may shift even when semantic meaning is preserved. Thus, the sea as a symbol undergoes partial transformation, especially at the cognitive and cultural levels.

The Sea as a feminine symbol: one of the strongest symbolic elements is the sea, which represents both life and unpredictability. Uzbek text:

“Chol bo‘lsa, doimo dengiz tiyilganda, goh tengi yo‘q saxovatlar in‘om etib, goh tumtayib turib oluvchi xotin kishini ko‘z o‘ngiga keltiradi.”

Let’s analyse: In English, Hemingway uses “*la mar*” → feminine image

Uzbek translation: preserves this symbol through “xotin kishi” keeps cognitive metaphor: SEA = WOMAN

Cognitive equivalence is preserved and cultural adaptation is successful (Uzbek readers understand feminine imagery)

Human–animal symbolic parallel (existential layer)

Uzbek text: “Ammo lekin,— deb o‘yladi chol,— yuragim yuragidan farq qilmaydi...”

Analysis: Symbol: turtle is a symbol of endurance, life force

Metaphor: HUMAN = ANIMAL (shared biological destiny)

The fish as a symbol of struggle and destiny

Uzbek text: “Baliq ovi meni ham go‘rga tiqyapti, ham go‘r og‘zidan qaytarib olib kelyapti.”

Analysis: This is extremely powerful metaphor:

English concept: struggle = life/death boundary

Uzbek translation: intensifies meaning using: “go‘r” (grave) and repetition → emotional emphasis. Here functional equivalence = STRONGER than original and Uzbek version is even more expressive

Birds as Symbols of Fragility

Uzbek text: “Qushlar turmushi... bizning kun kechirishimizga qaraganda ham juda og‘ir.”

Analysis: Symbol: birds are symbol of vulnerability

philosophical idea: existence = struggle for all beings

Symbolic layer preserved but tone slightly more explanatory → stylistic shift



The Marlin as a symbol of ideal struggle

The marlin stands for honor, strength, and the perfect enemy in a fight. It is not just a fish; it is a symbol of Santiago himself.

Example: “Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you...”

Uzbek translation: “Baliq, men seni yaxshi ko‘raman va hurmat qilaman. Ammo seni o‘ldiraman...”

Here, semantic equivalence is fully preserved, and the emotional duality (love vs. necessity) is effectively conveyed. However, the philosophical tension embedded in the original may be slightly softened due to structural differences in Uzbek syntax.

Another metaphorical expression: “He was comfortable but suffering...”

Uzbek: “U o‘zini qulay his qilardi, ammo azob chekardi...”

This reflects a conceptual paradox, central to Hemingway’s philosophy of endurance. The translation preserves meaning but slightly increases explicitness (*azob chekardi*), which reduces the subtle ambiguity present in the original.

Thus, the marlin symbol is generally well preserved semantically, but cognitive subtlety and minimalism are partially reduced.



The lions as a symbol of memory and youth

The lions in Santiago's dreams stand for youth, strength, and the idea that life goes on. They are purely symbolic and don't serve any purpose in the story, which makes them especially hard to translate.

Example: “He dreamed of the lions on the beaches of Africa.”

Uzbek: “U Afrikaning sohillaridagi sherlarni tushida ko‘rdi.”

While semantically accurate, the Uzbek version may not fully convey the nostalgic and symbolic resonance associated with the lions. In the original, lions evoke a deeply personal and emotional memory tied to Santiago’s youth.

The symbolic interpretation requires reader inference, but translation tends to make meaning more explicit, thereby reducing interpretative openness.

Minimalism and its impact on translation

One of the defining features of Ernest Hemingway’s style is minimalism, often associated with the “Iceberg Theory.” This stylistic approach implies that much of the meaning remains beneath the surface of the text.

Example: “He was rowing steadily and it was no effort for him...”

Uzbek: “U bir maromda eshkak eshardi va bu unga qiyinchilik tug‘dirmasdi...”

Here, the translation introduces slight expansion (*qiyinchilik tug‘dirmasdi*), which increases clarity but reduces stylistic compression. This demonstrates a key pattern: Translation tends to shift from implicit to explicit meaning.

As a result:

- Semantic meaning → preserved
- Cognitive meaning → partially preserved
- Stylistic minimalism → often weakened

We can say the analysis reveals several important patterns:

1. Semantic equivalence is largely preserved across translations.
2. Cognitive equivalence is partially maintained, but often weakened due to cultural differences.
3. Stylistic equivalence (minimalism) is the most difficult to preserve. Translators frequently apply: explicitation, lexical expansion, cultural adaptation
4. Symbolic elements (sea, marlin, lions) are: preserved at surface level, transformed at deeper conceptual levels

Conclusion

This study examined the preservation of metaphorical and symbolic meaning in the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* into Uzbek, with particular attention to semantic, cognitive, and stylistic dimensions of equivalence. The findings confirm that literary translation extends far beyond linguistic substitution and requires deep interpretative engagement with the conceptual and aesthetic structure of the source text.

The analysis demonstrated that semantic equivalence is generally maintained in translation, as core meanings of metaphorical expressions and symbolic elements are accurately rendered.

However, cognitive equivalence is only partially preserved, since conceptual metaphors and culturally embedded symbols often undergo transformation due to differences in linguistic worldview and cultural perception. The most significant challenge was observed in the preservation of stylistic equivalence, particularly the minimalist and implicit nature of Ernest Hemingway's prose. The tendency toward explicitation in translation leads to a reduction in ambiguity and interpretative openness, which are essential features of Hemingway's artistic style.

The study also identified key translation strategies, including literal translation, explicitation, and adaptation. While these strategies ensure clarity and readability in the target language, they may simultaneously alter the depth and subtlety of symbolic meaning. As a result, translation involves a continuous negotiation between accuracy and artistic preservation.

From a theoretical perspective, this research supports a multidimensional understanding of equivalence, integrating semantic, cognitive, and functional aspects. It highlights the need to move beyond traditional binary models of equivalence and adopt a more flexible, context-sensitive approach, particularly in literary translation.

From a practical standpoint, the findings provide valuable insights for translators working with metaphorically rich and stylistically minimalist texts. The study emphasizes the importance of preserving not only what is explicitly stated but also what is implied, suggested, and symbolically encoded.

In conclusion, the translation of *The Old Man and the Sea* demonstrates that achieving full equivalence is not always possible; instead, translation should be viewed as a process of controlled transformation, where meaning is reconstructed rather than replicated. This perspective opens new directions for research in literary translation, particularly in the interaction between language, cognition, and culture.

REFERENCES

1. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
2. Nida, E. A., & Taber, C. R. (1969). *The theory and practice of translation*. Brill.
3. Newmark, P. (1988). *A textbook of translation*. Prentice Hall.
4. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
5. Toury, G. (1995). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. John Benjamins.
6. Baker, M. (2018). *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
7. House, J. (2015). *Translation quality assessment: Past and present*. Routledge.
8. Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.

9. Gibbs, R. W. (2008). *The Cambridge handbook of metaphor and thought*. Cambridge University Press.
10. Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
11. Barcelona, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads*. Mouton de Gruyter.
12. Schäffner, C. (2004). Metaphor and translation: Some implications of a cognitive approach. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36(7), 1253–1269.
13. Dickins, J. (2005). Two models for metaphor translation. *Target*, 17(2), 227–273.
14. Mandelblit, N. (1995). The cognitive view of metaphor and its implications for translation theory. *Translation and Meaning*, 3, 483–495.
15. Rahmatullayev, Sh. (2006). *O'zbek tilining izohli lug'ati*. Toshkent: O'zbekiston Milliy Ensiklopediyasi.
- Nazarov, Q. (2018). Metafora va uning lingvistik tabiati. *O'zbek tili va adabiyoti*, 3, 45–52.
16. Karimova, D. (2020). Badiiy tarjimada metaforalarni ifodalash usullari. *Tarjima nazariyasi masalalari*, 2, 67–74.
17. Nazarova, M. (2019). Metafora va milliy tafakkur. *Filologiya masalalari*, 4, 88–95.
18. Iskandarova, Sh. (2015). *Matn lingvistikasi va tarjima muammolari*. Toshkent: Fan.
19. Tursunov, U., & Muxtorov, A. (2012). *Hozirgi o'zbek adabiy tili*. Toshkent: O'qituvchi.
20. Yusupov, U. (2014). *Tarjima nazariyasi asoslari*. Toshkent: Akademy Nashr.
21. Abdullayeva, N. (2021). Metafora va uning tarjimadagi muammolari. *Filologik tadqiqotlar*, 1, 112–118.
22. Rasulova, M. (2022). Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida metaforalarning qiyosiy tahlili. *Xorijiy filologiya*, 2, 55–62.
23. Sodiqova, G. (2020). Lingvokulturologik yondashuv asosida metaforalar tahlili. *Til va madaniyat*, 3, 73–80.