

# SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF COLOR-BASED METAPHORS AND THEIR RENDERING IN TRANSLATION

Saliyeva Zarrina Ilhomovna

PhD, Acting Professor of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Jumayeva Umida Azamat qizi

PhD Student of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

## Abstract

Color-based metaphors represent a fundamental aspect of human cognition, structuring abstract concepts through sensory experiences of color. This study addresses the challenges of semantic transformations in color metaphors during translation, highlighting how cultural and linguistic differences affect their rendering. Drawing on cognitive metaphor theory, the research employs comparative analysis of English color metaphors and their equivalents or adaptations in Uzbek and other languages, supplemented by examples from literary and corpus data. The analysis reveals that while universal mappings (e.g., RED for anger or danger) facilitate direct transfer, culture-specific associations often require semantic shifts, substitution, or explicitation to preserve pragmatic impact. Effective translation of color metaphors demands cognitive awareness and contextual sensitivity, balancing fidelity to source meaning with target-culture acceptability. This contributes to improved translation strategies in cross-linguistic communication

**Keywords:** Color metaphors, semantic transformation, metaphor translation, cognitive linguistics, cross-cultural adaptation.

## Introduction

Metaphors are not merely rhetorical devices but fundamental mechanisms of human cognition and communication. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously asserted in *Metaphors We Live By*, metaphors structure our conceptual system, influencing how we perceive, think, and act in the world. Among various types of metaphors, color-based metaphors occupy a unique position because they are deeply rooted in universal human sensory experience while simultaneously being shaped by specific cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts.

Colors serve as powerful vehicles for expressing abstract concepts such as emotions, moral values, social status, and psychological states. In English, expressions like “green with envy,” “feeling blue,” “seeing red,” “white lie,” “black mood,” and “red tape” demonstrate how color terms systematically map onto non-color domains. These metaphors are highly productive in both everyday discourse and literary texts. However, when crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries, color metaphors frequently undergo significant semantic transformations — shifts



in meaning, intensity, cultural associations, or even complete substitution. This phenomenon becomes particularly complex in translation between English and Uzbek, two languages belonging to different language families (Germanic and Turkic) and rooted in distinct cultural traditions. While some color metaphors show near-universal tendencies (e.g., RED associated with anger or danger), many others reveal deep culture-specific variations. For instance, the color “white” in Western cultures often symbolizes purity and innocence, whereas in Uzbek and broader Islamic cultural contexts, it carries stronger religious and spiritual connotations of cleanliness and holiness.

Despite growing interest in cognitive approaches to metaphor translation (Kövecses, 2010; Schäffner, 2004), relatively few studies have focused specifically on color metaphors in the English-Uzbek language pair. This study aims to fill this gap by systematically examining the types of semantic transformations that occur when rendering English color-based metaphors into Uzbek, identifying dominant translation strategies, and analyzing factors that influence translators’ decisions. The research is significant not only for theoretical linguistics but also for practical translator training, literary translation, and cross-cultural communication in multilingual societies like Uzbekistan.

### Methods

This study employs a qualitative comparative-descriptive research design grounded in cognitive linguistics and descriptive translation studies (Toury, 1995). A specialized corpus of 180 English color-based metaphorical expressions was compiled from various sources, including contemporary English literature (novels by J. Fowles, J. Rowling, and F. Scott Fitzgerald), news articles from *The Guardian* and *BBC*, and established idiom dictionaries.

The metaphors were selected based on three criteria: (1) clear color term presence, (2) metaphorical rather than literal usage, and (3) frequency of occurrence in general English discourse. Each metaphor was analyzed for its conceptual mapping using the framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further developed by Kövecses (2010).

For the translation analysis, two types of target texts were examined: (a) published Uzbek translations of English literary works, and (b) translations produced by 25 professional and trainee translators (Master’s students in Translation Studies) in a controlled experimental setting. Translation strategies were categorized according to Newmark (1988) — literal translation, transference, naturalization, functional equivalence, and paraphrase — and supplemented by cognitive translation approaches (Mandelblit, 1995; Schäffner, 2004).

Semantic transformations were identified through micro-level contrastive analysis, focusing on changes in mapping domain, emotional intensity, cultural relevance, and pragmatic effect. The analysis was supported by House’s (2015) Translation Quality Assessment model to evaluate functional adequacy of renderings. All examples were discussed within their broader textual and cultural contexts to ensure ecological validity.

### Results

The analysis revealed four major patterns of semantic transformation in the translation of color-based metaphors:



1. Preservation of Conceptual Mapping (38% of cases) Universal metaphors tended to transfer with minimal change. For example, “green economy” (intense anger) was successfully rendered as “yashil iqtisodiyot” in Uzbek, maintaining both the color image and emotional intensity.

2. Cultural Substitution (27% of cases) When source and target cultural associations diverged significantly, translators opted for substitution. The metaphor “blue blood” (aristocratic origin) was often replaced with culturally appropriate equivalents such as “oq suyak” (white bone) in Uzbek, reflecting traditional social hierarchy concepts.

3. Semantic Shift or Attenuation (19% of cases) Some metaphors underwent /meaning adjustment. “Green-eyed monster” (jealousy) was translated simply as “hasad qiluvchi,” sometimes losing the color component entirely due to weaker “green = jealousy” association in Uzbek culture.

4. Explication and Paraphrase (16% of cases) Highly idiomatic expressions like “out of the blue” (suddenly and unexpectedly) were commonly rendered descriptively as “kutilmagan joydan” or “birdaniga,” prioritizing communicative effect over metaphorical form.

The following expanded table illustrates representative examples:

English Metaphor	Meaning	Uzbek Translation	Transformation Type	Degree of Equivalence
Blacklist	Exclusion/ rejection	Qora ro'yxat	Direct transfer	High
Feeling blue	Sadness	Kayfiyati tushgan/ g'amgin	Semantic shift	Medium
Grey hair	Sign of old age	Oq soch/ oqsoqol	Cultural analogy	High
Black market	Disgrace	Qora bozor/ noqonuniy savdo	Direct transfer	High
White lie	Harmless lie	Zararsiz yolg'on	Cultural adaptation	Medium
Red tape	Bureaucracy	Rasmiyatchilik/ Byurokratiya	Partial preservation	Medium

These patterns demonstrate that while many color metaphors benefit from shared human embodied experience, cultural filtering plays a decisive role in their successful rendering.

## Discussion

The findings strongly support the cognitive theory of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010), confirming that primary metaphors grounded in bodily experience are more easily translatable, while complex metaphors heavily dependent on cultural models require significant transformation.

The observed preference for functional and pragmatic equivalence over literal translation aligns with Newmark's (1988) recommendations and Toury's (1995) concept of translation norms. In the Uzbek context, translators appear to follow target-culture acceptability norms more than source-text adequacy, which is typical for literary and general translation (House, 2015).

Particularly noteworthy is the role of religious and historical factors in Uzbek culture. The strong positive connotation of white and green (associated with Islam) influences how these colors are used metaphorically, sometimes creating opportunities for creative translation solutions but also potential misunderstandings.

The results also corroborate Schäffner's (2004) argument that a cognitive approach helps translators move beyond surface-level equivalence to underlying conceptual mappings. Raising translators' awareness of these mappings, as suggested by Boers (2003), could significantly improve translation quality.

Limitations of the study include the relatively limited size of the corpus and focus primarily on written translation. Future research should examine audiovisual translation and real-time interpreting contexts.

### Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that color-based metaphors undergo systematic semantic transformations during translation due to the interplay between universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific conceptualizations. While some metaphors transfer relatively smoothly, many require strategic adaptation — substitution, explicitation, or pragmatic adjustment — to achieve functional equivalence in the target language and culture.

The research contributes to both metaphor theory and translation studies by providing empirical evidence from the understudied English-Uzbek language pair. For translation practice, the findings highlight the necessity of cognitive and cultural competence in addition to linguistic proficiency. Translator training programs should incorporate systematic metaphor analysis modules to better prepare professionals for handling such challenges.

Future studies could expand this work by developing a comprehensive typology of color metaphor transformations across more language pairs and exploring their implications for machine translation systems.

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