

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE HORSE AS A SYMBOL OF STRENGTH, FREEDOM, BEAUTY, AND DIGNITY IN TRANSLATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the symbolic image of the horse as reflected in English and Uzbek literary texts. It investigates the cultural values, metaphorical meanings, and emotional connotations associated with the horse in both cultures, revealing how this image reflects collective memory, worldview, and national identity. By analyzing original and translated literary texts, the research identifies key challenges in translating culturally loaded symbols and offers linguocultural strategies to preserve meaning, symbolism, and aesthetic impact. The study is grounded in modern approaches such as conceptual metaphor theory, pragmatics, and cross-cultural analysis, providing new insights into intercultural translation.

Keywords: Horse image, linguoculture, cultural symbolism, literary translation, metaphor, collective memory, national identity, conceptual metaphor, cross-cultural analysis.

Introduction

When examining the history of world cultures, the image of the horse is consistently recognized as a symbol of strength, freedom, beauty, and dignity. To explore its translation more profoundly, it is essential to apply modern linguocultural approaches, taking into account the concepts of symbolism and cultural transformation. Translating such culturally rich images requires not only linguistic precision but also a deep cultural understanding, as the roots of symbols often lie within a nation's history, literature, and worldview.

Each culture develops its own symbolic representations based on its unique historical and cultural context. For example, in Western culture, the image of the horse is frequently associated with the ideals of freedom and untamed nature, as exemplified by the iconic figure of the mustang. This symbolic association reflects the cultural values and frontier mythology embedded in the Western tradition. As George Lakoff points out¹, **cultural metaphors function as cognitive structures that shape our perception of the world**, guiding how individuals conceptualize experience and assign meaning to symbols. In contrast to Western interpretations, in Uzbek culture the horse is not merely a symbol of physical freedom or aristocratic bearing, but rather embodies values such as dignity, loyalty, and strength.² These associations stem from the region's nomadic heritage, where the horse was not only a means of transportation or survival, but also an integral part of family life, social hierarchy, and spiritual

¹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

² Найда, Е. Теория перевода: между языками и культурами / Е. Найда. – М.: Прогресс, 1993. – 320 с.

worldview. Historically, the horse was seen as a companion in rites of passage, a bearer of communal identity, and a mark of masculine honor. As a result, in Uzbek literary and oral traditions, the horse frequently functions as a cultural archetype-one that carries emotional resonance far beyond its literal meaning.³ This makes its translation particularly challenging, as the symbol must be interpreted through the lens of national history, collective memory, and inherited values.

MAIN BODY

According to our analysis, in Uzbek literature and oral tradition, the horse represents not only physical attributes, but also embodies ethical values passed down from generation to generation. As I.A. Karimov notes, “in Uzbek culture, the horse is considered a symbol of endurance and strength, closely linked to a national worldview rooted in overcoming adversity.”⁴ A vivid example of this can be found in Tog‘ay Murod’s novella “The Evening When the Horse Neighed” (*Ot kishnagan oqshom*), in which the horse becomes a moral and emotional support to the main character during a time of hardship. In this work, the protagonist Ziyodulla recalls how his horse Tarlon helped him overcome life’s most difficult moments: “The horse, like a loyal friend, stood beside him in the darkest of times, reminding him of the patience and hidden strength that flowed in every drop of his being.”⁵

Comparative analysis of symbolic rendering in original and translated texts

The fame of the Stallion that never was known to gallop was spreading. Extraordinary stories were told of his gait, his speed, and his wind...⁶

(E.Seton-Tompson: *The Pacing Mustang*)

Yorg‘alaganda oyog‘i umuman adashmaydigan ayg‘irning dong‘i kun sayin oshdi. Uning epchilligi, yo‘rg‘asi, chayir tabiyati xususida ko‘z ko‘rmagan sarguszashtlar gurungi bo‘ldi.⁷

(T.Murod: *Yovvoyi Yo‘rg‘a*)

The comparison presented highlights the differences in how Ernest Seton-Thompson’s original text and Tog‘ay Murod’s translation convey symbolic meaning through the image of the stallion. In the English original, the focus is on the growing reputation of a unique horse whose gait, speed, and endurance defy ordinary expectation. The phrase “Extraordinary stories were told of his gait, his speed, and his wind” emphasizes the horse’s almost mythical abilities, lending a legendary aura to the animal.⁸

In Tog‘ay Murod’s Uzbek translation, the symbolic layer is further deepened through culturally resonant language. The phrase “Yorg‘alaganda oyog‘i umuman adashmaydigan ayg‘irning

3 Матвиенко, С. П. (2006). *Этнокультурные символы в традициях народов Центральной Азии*. Ташкент: Издательство Академии наук Узбекистана.

4 Каримов, И.А. *Лингвокультурологические особенности узбекских фразеологизмов*. Ташкент: Фан, 2007.

5 Tog‘ay Murod – *Ot kishnagan oqshom*

6 Seton-Thompson, E. *Wild Animals I Have Known*. – New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898, P. 88

7 Murod, T. *Ot kishnagan oqshom*. – Toshkent: G‘afur G‘ulom nomidagi Adabiyot va san‘at nashriyoti, 1989, b 64.

8 Seton-Thompson, E. *Wild Animals I Have Known*. – New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898.

“dong‘i kun sayin oshdi” not only preserves the original meaning but intensifies the image by focusing on the precision of movement (oyog‘i umuman adashmaydi – “his legs never faltered while pacing”) and by choosing the word “dong‘i” (renown, fame), which evokes strong associations in the context of Uzbek heroic epics. The addition of “ko‘z ko‘rmagan sarguzashtlar gurungi bo‘ldi” (“tales of unseen adventures began to circulate”) introduces a folkloric dimension, further emphasizing the legendary and national character of the horse figure⁹.

To fully capture the symbolic essence of the horse and its successful transfer into the target culture, one must also consider a pragmatic approach to translation.

Another notable divergence appears in the treatment of the idea of death or destruction. In the original, Seton-Thompson writes: “the mere notion of turning that magnificent creature into a mass of carrion was horrible.” This phrase communicates revulsion not only at the loss of life but at the violation of natural nobility, as if destroying the stallion would be a transgression against nature itself.

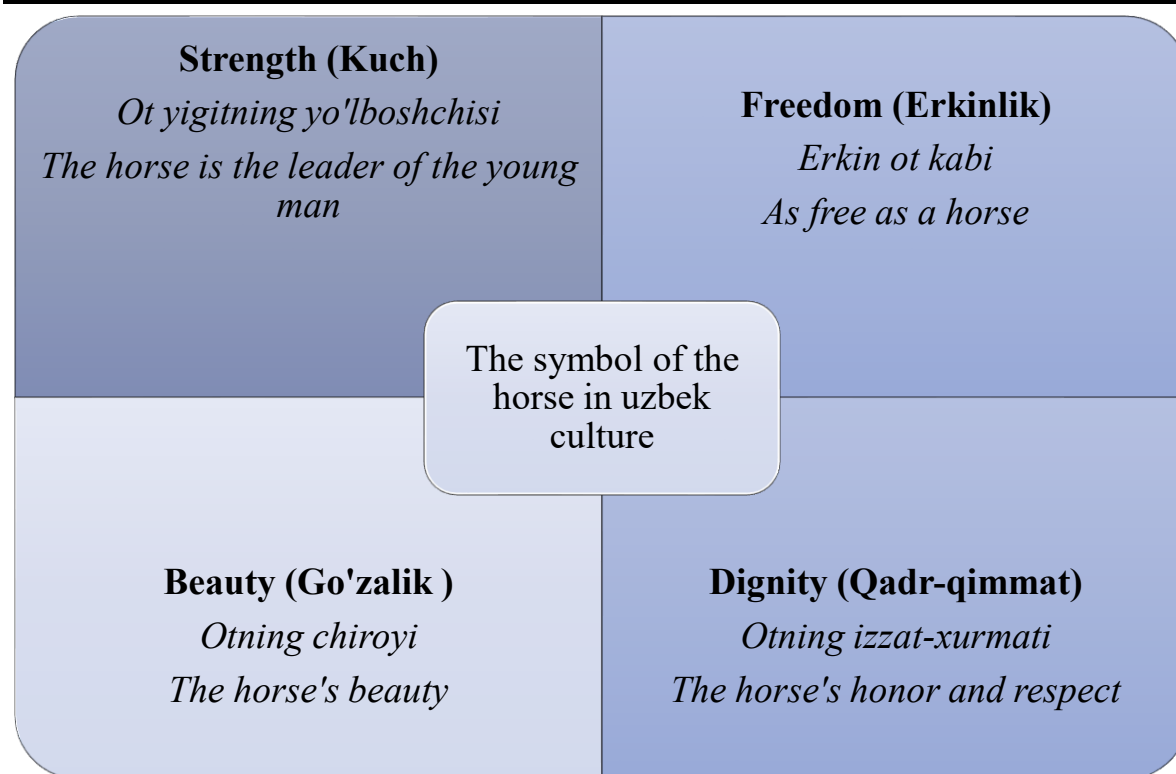
In the Uzbek version, this emotion is localized and personalized: “shunday noyob jonivorni nobud qilib, bir to‘da masalliqqa aylantirishga ko‘nglim bormadi”. The lexeme “ko‘nglim bormadi” expresses an inner ethical resistance, highlighting the emotional and moral connection between the human and the horse. It reflects a deeply cultural response, rooted in Uzbek values of mercy, reverence, and harmony.

Thus, while both versions condemn the idea of killing the horse, the English original emphasizes the philosophical horror of destroying natural greatness, whereas the Uzbek version underscores the human heart’s moral reluctance, adding a more intimate tone. Moreover, the lexical choices show pragmatic adaptation. Terms like “magnificent creature” and “mass of carrion” in English evoke grandeur and grotesque contrast, while the Uzbek equivalents “noyob jonivor” and “masalliq” carry culturally specific emotional connotations. The translation doesn’t aim to reproduce the metaphor verbatim, but to reconstruct its resonance in the target culture. As M.U. Beknazarova notes, in Uzbek literature the horse is often depicted as a standard of aesthetic harmony, an image of natural beauty and balance.¹⁰ This idea is clearly expressed in *Ot kishnagan oqshom*, where the horse’s elegance is conveyed through vivid motion and subtle grace. Therefore, the translation must reflect not only the descriptive elements but also the emotional and aesthetic ideals embedded in the source culture.

9 Murod, T. *Ot kishnagan oqshom*. – Toshkent: G‘afur G‘ulom nomidagi Adabiyot va san‘at nashriyoti, 1989.

10 Бекназарова, М.У. *Эстетические идеалы узбекской культуры*. Ташкент: Издательство Национального университета Узбекистана, 2012.





The symbolic dimensions of the horse in Uzbek culture Figure 1

The examples presented in this diagram emphasize that, in Uzbek culture, the horse is not merely an animal, but a multifaceted symbol that embodies important values and qualities. The phraseological expressions associated with the image of the horse convey the subtle aspects of the Uzbek worldview for the purpose of expressing culturally significant values such as strength, freedom, beauty, and dignity.

For example, the Uzbek phrase “alp sakrab, o‘radan o‘tib ketdi” could be expanded with culturally resonant intensifiers: “Ot alpdek sakrab, xavfli va chuqur o‘radan, o‘limni bosib o‘tgan kabi, erkinlik sari o‘tib ketdi.” Such a phrase maintains cultural fluency while reintroducing the dramatic intensity of the original scene. Additionally, Nida and Taber’s theory of dynamic equivalence supports this approach, suggesting that the emotional and cognitive response of the target reader should match that of the source reader³. Therefore, enhancing the drama in line with the target culture’s stylistic norms is not only acceptable but desirable from a pragmatic translation perspective.

This example clearly illustrates how essential it is for a translator not only to possess linguistic competence but also to have a deep understanding of the symbolic and cultural systems of both the source and target languages. We strongly agree with the notion that metaphors and symbolic expressions, such as “the Angel of the wild things is with him”, carry far more than just descriptive meaning—they reflect underlying cultural beliefs, emotions, and worldviews. Simply translating such a phrase literally would risk losing its deeper resonance and its emotional effect on the reader. In our opinion, it is precisely in such moments that a translator must step beyond literalism and engage in creative cultural interpretation. By adapting culturally embedded

symbols through local equivalents-such as introducing imagery tied to ancestral protection, divine will or harmony with nature in Uzbek culture-the translator ensures that the symbolic weight and emotional tone are preserved. This approach allows the translated work to retain its expressive and communicative power, fulfilling the expectations of the target audience while respecting the author's original intent.

CONCLUSION

The representation and translation of the horse as a symbolic figure of strength, freedom, beauty, and dignity reveal the deep interconnection between language, culture, and collective memory. Our comparative analysis demonstrates that the horse, as a culturally embedded symbol, cannot be fully conveyed through literal translation alone. Instead, it requires a nuanced, culturally sensitive approach that considers both the emotional resonance and symbolic function of the image within the source and target cultures.

In English literature, particularly in the works of Seton-Thompson, the horse often embodies ideals of untamed nature, individualism, and natural nobility. In contrast, Uzbek literary tradition, as exemplified by Tog'ay Murod, infuses the horse with ethical values such as loyalty, moral strength, and emotional intimacy, rooted in the nation's nomadic and spiritual heritage. These differing cultural frameworks necessitate translation strategies that move beyond surface-level meaning to achieve dynamic and functional equivalence.

By applying linguocultural and pragmatic approaches, the research highlights how the symbolic image of the horse serves not only as a narrative element but also as a cultural signifier that shapes national identity and worldview. The translator's task, therefore, is to mediate between cultural systems, preserving the symbolic essence and aesthetic depth of the original while adapting it meaningfully to the target audience. This study confirms that effective translation of culturally significant symbols requires both linguistic skill and cultural insight, making it a fundamentally interpretive and creative act.

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