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The Ways And Methods Of Translating Similes In Alisher Navoi's Epic "Farhod Va Shirin"

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Abstract: Alisher Navoi's Farhod and Shirin, one of the five epics in his celebrated Khamsa, is distinguished by its rich use of similes that convey emotional depth, cultural imagery, and aesthetic beauty. Translating these similes into other languages presents significant challenges, as literal renderings often fail to capture the cultural resonance and poetic effect intended by the author. This study examines the ways and methods of translating similes in Farhod and Shirin, focusing on strategies such as literal translation, cultural adaptation, explicitation, and poetic recreation. Through comparative analysis of selected similes and their translations, the article highlights the tension between semantic accuracy and aesthetic preservation. The findings suggest that effective translation of Navoi's similes requires a balance between linguistic fidelity and creative adaptation, ensuring that the imagery remains accessible to international readers while retaining its poetic charm.

Keywords: Simile translation, figurative language, translation strategies, semantic vs. communicative translation, dynamic equivalence, translation shifts, cultural adaptation, translation norms, poetic and prose translation.

Introduction: Alisher Navoi (1441-1501), the eminent poet and thinker of the Timurid Renaissance, occupies a central place in the literary heritage of the Turkic world. His Khamsa ("Quintet"), modeled on the Persian tradition of Nizami Ganjavi, includes Farhod va Shirin, a romantic epic that combines narrative artistry with philosophical reflection. Among the stylistic devices employed by Navoi, similes hold particular importance. They serve not only as ornamental features but also as vehicles of cultural symbolism, emotional intensity, and philosophical meaning.

Simile, defined as a comparison using explicit markers such as **"like"** or **"as,"** is a universal rhetorical device. Yet, in Navoi's poetry, similes are deeply embedded in the cultural and natural imagery of Central Asia, drawing upon references to flora, fauna, celestial bodies, and everyday objects familiar to his audience. Translating these similes into other languages poses a dual challenge: maintaining semantic clarity while preserving aesthetic resonance. For instance, a simile comparing beauty to the narcissus flower may be transparent in Uzbek but obscure to readers unfamiliar with its cultural associations.

The present study seeks to explore the ways and methods of translating similes in Farhod va Shirin. It raises three central questions:

1. What types of similes are most frequently employed by Navoi in this work?
2. Which translation strategies are most effective in conveying their meaning and poetic effect?
3. How do cultural and linguistic differences influence the translator's choices?

By addressing these questions, the article aims to contribute to both Navoi studies and the broader field of translation theory, offering insights into the delicate balance between fidelity and creativity in literary translation.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative textual analysis of similes in Alisher Navoi's Farhod va Shirin. The corpus consists of selected passages where similes are central to the poetic imagery. The original Uzbek text was examined alongside Azam Obidov's English translation, with attention to semantic fidelity, stylistic resonance, and cultural adaptation.

Similes were categorized according to Mildred Larson's five strategies of translation (direct transfer, omission, description, addition, and substitution of objects). Gideon Toury's framework of translation norms was applied to explain the socio-cultural pressures influencing translator choices. Catford's theory of translation shifts was used to identify structural transformations, while Newmark's distinction between semantic and communicative translation guided evaluation of fidelity versus reader impact.

This multi-theoretical approach allowed for both linguistic and cultural analysis, highlighting how similes function in Navoi's text and how they are reshaped in translation for international audiences.

REVIEW

The study of similes in translation requires engagement with several foundational theories in translation studies. Eugene Nida's principle of dynamic equivalence emphasizes the importance of reproducing the same effect on the target audience as the source text. Peter Newmark's distinction between semantic and communicative translation highlights the tension between fidelity to the original wording and accessibility for the reader. In the case of similes, semantic translation often preserves the literal comparison, whereas communicative translation may adapt imagery to ensure resonance with the target culture.

Mildred Larson, in her work on Meaning-Based Translation, stresses the need to preserve both the referential and connotative meaning of figurative language. For similes, this means not only transferring the literal comparison but also ensuring that the emotional and cultural associations are retained. Her framework is particularly relevant to Navoi's epic, where similes often carry symbolic weight beyond their surface meaning. Mildred Larson, in Meaning-Based Translation (1984), stresses the need to preserve both referential and connotative meaning, identifying several strategies for handling figurative language. Gideon Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies (1995) shifts the focus to translation norms, explaining how cultural and systemic pressures shape translators' choices. J.C. Catford's Theory of Translation Shifts (1965) provides a linguistic framework for analyzing structural changes when similes are transformed in translation.

Building on these theoretical foundations, scholars have identified five practical strategies for translating similes:

Translation with simile (direct transfer): The simile is preserved with explicit markers such as **like** or **as**, **as if, as...as.**

Omission of simile: The comparison is removed, and only the core meaning is conveyed.

Description of simile: The figurative comparison is explained in descriptive terms rather than retained as a simile.

Addition of words to identify simile: Extra lexical items are inserted to clarify the comparison for target readers.

Changing the object of simile: The original image is replaced with a culturally familiar equivalent in the target language.

These strategies illustrate the range of translator decisions, from literal fidelity to creative adaptation. For example, Larson emphasizes that omission and description may weaken the aesthetic impact, while addition and substitution can enhance clarity but alter cultural resonance.

Toury's framework explains why translators often adapt or omit similes to align with target-language norms, while Catford's notion of category shifts accounts for structural transformations such as turning a simile into a metaphor. Newmark's communicative translation further justifies adaptation when literal rendering risks obscuring meaning for the target audience.

Together, these theories and strategies provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the translation of similes in Alisher Navoi's Farhod va Shirin. They highlight the delicate balance between preserving the poetic imagery of the source text and ensuring accessibility and resonance for international readers.

From a methodological perspective, this simile illustrates the tension between literal translation and adaptation. A literal rendering would preserve the comparison but risk sounding flat in English. By contrast, Obidov's adaptation conveys the intended majesty and hyperbole, though it modifies the imagery. Such decisions highlight the translator's dual role as linguist and poet: fidelity to Navoi's imagery must be balanced with the need to evoke similar emotional resonance in the target language. This case also underscores the importance of cultural context, as references to the sky in Central Asian literature often symbolize transcendence and divine proximity, connotations that may not be immediately apparent to international readers without stylistic enhancement.

ANALYSIS

The following section presents a detailed examination of selected similes from Alisher Navoi's Farhod va Shirin and their English translations by Azam Obidov. The analysis is guided by the theoretical frameworks

outlined in the Literature Review, particularly the approaches of Nida, Newmark, Larson, Toury, and Catford. Each example is considered in terms of semantic fidelity, stylistic resonance, and cultural adaptation, with attention to the strategies identified by Larson: direct transfer, omission, description, addition, and substitution of objects.

Original: "Uning oliy qasri osmon misoli, balki undan ham yuksak edi." (Farhod va Shirin, p.19.)

Translation :"His heavenly castle stood supreme and higher than the sky above us." (Azam Obidov, Farhod and Shirin, p.9):

Imagery in the original:

osmon misoli → explicit simile ("like the sky")

undan ham yuksak → hyperbolic intensification ("even higher").

Translation choices:

"heavenly castle" replaces "like the sky" → **changing the object of simile**.

"stood supreme" adds grandeur → **addition of words to identify simile**.

The explicit simile marker ("like the sky") is omitted → **omission of simile**.

Theoretical grounding:

Larson's strategies: Combination of omission, addition, and substitution.

Newmark: Communicative translation – prioritizing effect on English readers.

Catford: Category shift – simile → descriptive phrase.

Toury: Target-language norms explain why "supreme" was chosen to enhance readability and resonance.

Although the translation conveys the meaning of the original text correctly, several aspects deserve attention. In the translation, the phrase **"uning oliy qasri"** is rendered as **"his heavenly castle."** This choice is both semantically and stylistically appropriate, since the adjective **"heavenly"** effectively reflects the grandeur and loftiness of the palace through the simile.

The expression **"supreme and higher than the sky above us"** accurately conveys the meaning of the original **"undan ham yuksak edi**." Notably, the word supreme suggests not only physical height but also elevated status and rank.

However, the original phrase **"osmon misoli"** is not directly represented in the translation. While the English phrase "stood supreme and higher" indirectly implies this meaning, the simile could have been more explicitly conveyed through morphological devices such as **"like the sky"** or **"sky-like."**

The translated text is clear and maintains a poetic rhythm, yet the explicit simile present in the original **"osmon misoli"** appears somewhat weakened. Semantically, the artistic meaning of the original expression is preserved: **"His heavenly castle stood supreme and higher than the sky above us"** successfully conveys grandeur and magnificence. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a single word such as **"sky-like"** would have provided a more precise depiction of the simile. For example, the sentence could have been rendered as **"His sky-like castle stood supreme and higher than the sky above us,"** thereby enhancing the impact of the simile in translation.

Overall, the translation is successful and retains the artistic meaning of the original. Yet, a more explicit representation of the simile "osmon misoli" would have created richer poetic harmony. At the same time, the use of heavenly and supreme in the translation clearly conveys the divine and majestic qualities of the palace.

Another striking simile appears in Farhod va Shirin: **"Uning qaddi-qomati jannat savsaniday ozod, yuzi gul, biroq yuz gulning xirmani kabi edi" (p.116).** Literally, this can be rendered as "Her stature was free like the heavenly iris, her face was a flower, yet like a heap of a hundred flowers." In Azam Obidov's translation, the passage reads: **"Her bearing was free like a heavenly flower-de-luce, her face was like a flower-bed and held devastating attraction" (Farhod and Shirin, p.182).**

Original: "Uning qaddi-qomati jannat savsaniday ozod, yuzi gul, biroq yuz gulning xirmani kabi edi**."** **(Farhod va Shirin, p.116):**

Literal rendering: "Her stature was free like the heavenly iris, her face was a flower, yet like a heap of a hundred flowers."

Translation: "Her bearing was free like a heavenly flower-de-luce, her face was like a flower-bed and held devastating attraction." **(Azam Obidov, Farhod and Shirin, p.182)**

Original imagery:

jannat savsani (heavenly iris/lily) → symbolizes elegance, purity, and freedom.

yuz gulning xirmani (heap of a hundred flowers) → hyperbolic beauty, abundance, and richness.

Translation choices:

flower-de-luce (fleur-de-lis) replaces savsani. This is a **substitution strategy**, adapting the image to a symbol familiar in Western culture.

flower-bed simplifies heap of a hundred flowers. This is a **description strategy**, reducing hyperbole to a more

neutral image.

held devastating attraction is an **addition**, intensifying emotional effect beyond the literal.

Theoretical grounding:

Larson's strategies: Combination of changing the object of simile, description, and addition.

Newmark: Communicative translation – prioritizing resonance and readability for English readers.

Catford: Category shift – hyperbolic simile → simplified metaphor with added evaluative phrase.

Toury: Target norms explain why hyperbole ("hundred flowers") was softened; English poetic convention favors moderation.

The original Uzbek text employs two layers of simile. First, the comparison of the woman's figure to a jannat savsani (heavenly iris/lily) emphasizes elegance, purity, and freedom. Obidov's choice of **flower-de-luce (fleur-de-lis)** is culturally adapted, drawing on a symbol familiar to Western readers. This represents a translation shift in Catford's terms, moving from a culturally specific Central Asian flower to a European equivalent. While this adaptation enhances accessibility, it slightly alters the cultural resonance of Navoi's imagery.

Second, the original simile **"yuzi gul, biroq yuz gulning xirmani kabi"** intensifies beauty by comparing the face not only to a single flower but to a heap of a hundred flowers. Obidov's rendering as **"her face was like a flower-bed"** captures multiplicity but simplifies the hyperbolic force of "hundred flowers." The addition of **"held devastating attraction"** introduces an interpretive element, shifting from literal imagery to emotional effect. This reflects Newmark's communicative translation, prioritizing impact on the target reader over strict semantic fidelity.

From Larson's perspective, the translation succeeds in preserving the connotative meaning of beauty and attraction, though the referential precision of "hundred flowers" is weakened. Toury's framework of translation norms explains this choice: translators often adapt hyperbolic similes to align with target-language expectations, avoiding what might seem excessive or unnatural in English.

Overall, this example illustrates the interplay of literal translation, adaptation, and poetic recreation. While the translation maintains the aesthetic tone and poetic rhythm, the cultural specificity of Navoi's imagery – particularly the iris and the "hundred flowers" – is partially transformed. The result is a text that resonates with international readers but demonstrates the inevitable compromises in translating culturally embedded similes.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that translators of Navoi's similes often face a tension between preserving literal imagery and adapting it for readability. Direct transfer of similes works well for universal images (e.g., comparisons to the moon or fire), but culturally specific references (such as savsani or "hundred flowers") require adaptation. Obidov's translation demonstrates strategies of substitution (fleur-de-lis for savsani) and explicitation (devastating attraction to clarify emotional effect).

From Larson's perspective, omission and description reduce aesthetic richness, while addition and substitution enhance clarity but alter cultural resonance. Toury's norms explain why translators adapt hyperbolic similes to align with English stylistic expectations, avoiding what might seem excessive. Catford's shifts highlight the structural changes when similes are transformed into metaphors or descriptive phrases. Newmark's communicative translation justifies these adaptations, prioritizing reader impact over strict semantic fidelity.

Overall, the findings suggest that translating Navoi's similes requires balancing semantic accuracy with aesthetic preservation. The translator must act as both linguist and poet, ensuring that the imagery resonates with international readers while retaining the grandeur of the original.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that similes in Farhod va Shirin are not merely ornamental but integral to Navoi's poetic vision. Translating them involves complex decisions shaped by linguistic, cultural, and stylistic factors. While literal translation preserves fidelity, adaptation and poetic recreation are often necessary to convey the intended resonance.

The analysis of selected examples shows that strategies such as substitution and explicitation can successfully bridge cultural gaps, though they may alter the original imagery. Future research could extend this study to other works in Navoi's Khamsa, comparing simile translation across different translators and languages. Such work would deepen understanding of how classical Turkic poetry can be made accessible to global audiences without losing its aesthetic essence.

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