

PAPER

SEMANTIC APPROACH TO SEMIOSPHERE IN THE TRANSLATION OF SUFI TEXTS: THE CHALLENGE OF CONVEYING THE SPIRITUAL LAYER

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Abstract

The article discusses the transition from the semantic approach to the semiospheric paradigm in the translation of Sufi texts. From the perspective of modern translation theory, the limitations of linguistic equivalence in the transmission of the spiritual and symbolic layers of Sufi discourse are analyzed. Based on a comparative analysis of classical Uzbek Sufi works and their English translations, the author emphasizes the importance of a cultural and semiotic approach to adequately convey the "spiritual layer" of meaning.

Key words: Sufism, theory of translation, semiosphere, spiritual meaning, cultural semiotics, classical Uzbek literature, sacred texts.

Introduction

The translation of sacred texts, particularly Sufi literature, poses significant challenges to translators due to the complex layering of spiritual, symbolic, and cultural meanings. Traditional semantic approaches, while effective in conveying surface-level meaning, often fall short in transferring the metaphysical and experiential depth that defines much of Sufi discourse. This paper proposes a shift from purely semantic translation to a semiospheric model informed by cultural semiotics and the theory of semiospheres developed by Yuri Lotman.

The key question addressed is: How can the translator move beyond lexical equivalence to transmit the spiritual essence embedded in Sufi texts? The study draws on examples from the works of Alisher Navoi, Ahmad Yassawi, and Jaloliddin Rumi, examining how modern English translations either succeed or fail in maintaining the soul of the original.

Methodology

This research adopts a comparative qualitative methodology based on the following components:

- **Corpus Selection:** Representative excerpts from classical

Uzbek Sufi poetry (e.g., Navoi's "Lison ut-Tayr") and their English translations.

- **Theoretical Framework:** Application of semiotic theory (Lotman), hermeneutic translation theory (Berman), and cultural translation theory (Bassnett, Eco).

Analytical Tools:

- A) Semiospheric mapping of meaning layers.
- B) Identification of "culture-specific items" (CSIs).
- C) Comparison of metaphorical-transcendental structures.
- D) Translator's notes and prefaces as contextual evidence.

Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that while semantic translation can preserve lexical meaning, it often neutralizes spiritual resonance. For instance, the concept of *ko'ngil* (heart-spirit) is frequently translated as "heart," losing its rich connotation in Sufi epistemology. Similarly, metaphors like *ishq ilohi* (divine love) are rendered into generic spiritual terms, eroding their performative and affective function.

Three primary translation challenges emerged:

1. Loss of symbolic density: Sufi symbols like the *nightingale*, *beloved*, or *wine* carry multilayered mystical meanings.

Table 1. Comparative Table: Semantic vs Semiospheric Translation of Sufi Texts

Uzbek Original	Literal Translation	Semiospheric Translation
Ko'ngil uyin tozalagil...	Clean the house of your heart...	Purify the soul's sanctuary...
Har lahza Haqni zikr et...	Remember God every moment...	Immerse in the divine remembrance...
Ishq yo'lida yonmoq kerak...	One must burn on the path of love...	One must be consumed by divine passion...
Bu dunyo – g'aflat uyqusidir...	This world is a sleep of heedlessness...	Worldly life is a slumber of spiritual ignorance...
Jonimni fido aylayin Haq yo'lida...	I sacrifice my soul in the way of God...	I devote my being to the divine path...
Dard ila ibodat qil...	Worship with pain...	Let your suffering become sacred devotion...
Qalb ko'zgusini silliqilgil...	Polish the mirror of the heart...	Refine the heart's reflection to reveal the Divine...
Haqiqatga yetmak sabr bilan...	To reach truth, be patient...	Endure with faith to unveil the Real...
Naqshband yo'li – sukut yo'li...	Naqshband's path is the path of silence...	The Naqshbandi way is silent communion with the Divine...
Har nafasda Yaratganni unutmagil...	Do not forget the Creator in any breath...	In every breath, remain united with the Creator...

2. Misalignment of metaphysical worldviews: Translators often lack initiation into the esoteric dimensions, leading to surface-level interpretation.

3. Cultural dissonance in sacred terminology: Words such as *Haqq*, *zuhd*, or *maqom* are often left untranslated or poorly adapted.

A semiospheric approach allows these challenges to be reframed. Rather than seeking a 1:1 equivalence, translators are urged to treat the text as a living organism within a meaning-generating semiotic sphere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the spiritual layer in Sufi texts requires a semiospheric approach that goes beyond the lexical-semantic level. Translators must be cultural mediators who recreate not just words but entire spiritual environments. This approach, grounded in cultural semiotics and supported by comparative textual analysis, promotes a more authentic transfer of sacred meaning and poetic resonance. Future translation projects of Sufi texts must incorporate collaborative teams, including linguists, Sufi scholars, and literary experts, to preserve the sacred performativity and metaphysical intentions embedded in the original works.

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