

PAPER

# TRANSFORMATION AND SPIRITUAL TRANSLATION: SHIFTS IN CONNOTATIVE LAYERS IN TRANSLATION

Qahramonjon A. Ismoilov<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Acting Associate Professor, PhD on Philological Sciences, Kokand State University, Uzbekistan

\* hero-2008@bk.ru

## Abstract

This study is devoted to the difficulties of translating key Sufi terms — *zikr*, *fana* and *ishq* — while preserving their connotative and spiritual connotations. Analyzing various approaches to the translation of these concepts, the author emphasizes the need for a deep understanding of the cultural and religious context in order to adequately convey the Sufi experience in translations.

**Key words:** Sufism, theory of translation, connotation, dhikr, fana, ishq, spiritual translation, poetic transformation.

## Introduction

Translating spiritual and poetic texts presents one of the most nuanced challenges in the field of translation studies. In particular, Sufi terminology embodies profound metaphysical, cultural, and emotional layers that are not easily rendered into another language. The terms *Zikr*, *Fana*, and *Ishq* are essential within Sufi discourse—not merely as lexical items, but as experiential and philosophical phenomena. This paper explores the role of connotative shifts when such terms are translated into English. By focusing on these three terms, this study addresses the spiritual loss that occurs if literal translation is favored over a culturally-sensitive or semiospheric approach. This introduction sets the scene for a deeper analysis into how poetic transformation can enable spiritual translation in a more faithful way.

## Methodology

This paper adopts a comparative textual methodology. Primary data includes English translations of classical Sufi works—particularly those by Jalaluddin Rumi, Al-Ghazali, and Al-Hujwiri. Comparative excerpts were selected for their inclusion of key terms: *Zikr*, *Fana*, and *Ishq*. Each translation is examined to assess (1) the literal rendering, (2) interpretative expansion, and (3) spiritual fidelity. Supporting frameworks are drawn from the works of Eugene Nida (dynamic equivalence), Lawrence Venuti (domestication vs foreignization), and Yuri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere. Additional analysis includes translator

commentary and the translator's positionality in relation to the source tradition. A 10-term comparative table is used to visually synthesize the range of translation strategies and their interpretative consequences.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that literal translations often strip away the metaphysical texture of Sufi terminology. For example, *Zikr* is frequently rendered as “remembrance,” yet this term fails to capture the ecstatic, embodied practice it represents in Sufi devotion. Similarly, *Fana* is often translated as “annihilation,” which misses the transcendental experience of ego dissolution. *Ishq*, typically translated as “love,” lacks the Sufi connotation of divine obsession and surrender. Translations that apply poetic transformation—e.g., “immerse in divine remembrance” for *Zikr* — better convey the intended spiritual impact. However, this strategy demands from the translator not only linguistic but cultural immersion. The discussion emphasizes the importance of semiospheric awareness — i.e., the translator must translate not just words, but worlds.

## Conclusion

Sufi texts are spiritually charged and semantically dense. As demonstrated in this study, a surface-level translation of terms like *Zikr*, *Fana*, and *Ishq* often leads to spiritual flattening.

**Table 1.** Comparative Table:

Original Term	Literal Translation	Connotative Meaning
Zikr	Remembrance	Continuous spiritual mindfulness of the Divine
Fana	Annihilation	Dissolution of the ego in the presence of God
Ishq	Love	Intense, selfless divine love
Sabr	Patience	Enduring trials with steadfast faith
Tawakkul	Trust	Complete reliance on God's will
Ma'rifa	Knowledge	Gnosis or direct experiential knowledge of God
Haqq	Truth	The ultimate reality or God Himself
Nur	Light	Divine illumination and guidance
Dhikr	Remembrance	Repetitive invocation leading to spiritual awakening
Wajd	Ecstasy	Spiritual rapture experienced during divine remembrance

True poetic transformation requires translators to enter the semiosphere of the original text—to feel, understand, and re-express its spiritual realities. Therefore, the paper concludes that translators of Sufi literature must act not only as linguistic intermediaries but also as cultural and spiritual interpreters. Preserving connotative depth is not a luxury but a necessity when dealing with texts that aim to evoke inner transformation.

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