

POETIC TRANSFORMATION OF SUFI TERMINOLOGY AT DENOTATIVE AND CONNOTATIVE LEVELS

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Abstract

This article examines the poetic transformation of Sufi terminology at the denotative (lexical) and connotative (figurative, aesthetic-spiritual) levels in Uzbek classical literature. Key concepts such as *ishq* (divine love), *fano* (annihilation of the self), *haqiqat* (truth), *haqq* (God), *zuhd* (asceticism), *mujohada* (spiritual struggle), *tavba* (repentance), and *ma'rifat* (divine knowledge) preserve their religious-philosophical essence while acquiring new connotative meanings through poetic imagery, cultural associations, and spiritual experience. The study draws on theoretical insights from Homi K. Bhabha, Lawrence Venuti, Annemarie Schimmel, Umberto Eco, Mona Baker, and Eugene Nida to analyze this phenomenon within the frameworks of linguocultural studies, semiotics, and translation theory.

Keywords: Sufi terminology, denotative level, connotative level, poetic transformation, Uzbek classical literature.

Annotatsiya

Maqolada tasavvuf terminlarining denotativ (lug'aviy) va konnotativ (majoziy, estetik-ruhiy) qatlamlardagi poetik transformatsiyasi o'zbek mumtoz adabiyoti misolida tahlil qilinadi. "Ishq", "fano", "haqiqat", "haqq", "zuhd", "mujohada", "tavba", "ma'rifat" kabi asosiy tushunchalar diniy-falsafiy anglamalarini saqlagan holda poetik obrazlar orqali yangi ma'nolar oladi. Shu jarayon natijasida tasavvuf terminlari estetik-assotsiativ tarmoqlarda boyib, milliy ruhiyat mahsuli sifatida talqin etiladi. Maqolada H. Bhabha, L. Venuti, A. Schimmel, U. Eco, M. Baker va E. Nida kabi nazariyotchilarning qarashlari asosida poetik transformatsiya masalasi lingvokultural, semiotik va tarjimashunoslik doiralarida tahlil etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: tasavvuf terminlari, denotativ qatlam, konnotativ qatlam, poetik transformatsiya, o'zbek mumtoz adabiyoti.

Аннотация

В статье анализируется поэтическая трансформация суфийской терминологии на денотативном (лексическом) и коннотативном (метафорическом, эстетико-духовном) уровнях на примере узбекской классической литературы. Такие ключевые понятия, как «ишк»

(божественная любовь), «фано» (самоуничтожение), «хакикат» (истина), «хакк» (Бог), «зухд» (аскетизм), «муджахада» (духовная борьба), «тауба» (покаяние), «маърифат» (божественное знание) сохраняют своё религиозно-философское содержание, но в поэзии обретают новые значения через художественные образы и культурные ассоциации. Подход опирается на теоретические идеи Х. Бхабхи, Л. Вентури, А. Шиммель, У. Эко, М. Бейкер и Ю. Ницше.

Ключевые слова: суфийская терминология, денотативный уровень, коннотативный уровень, поэтическая трансформация, узбекская классическая литература.

Introduction

Sufi terminology, by its very nature, functions on two levels — the denotative (direct, lexical) and the connotative (figurative, cultural-spiritual). The denotative level represents the fundamental, literal meaning of terms, often found in Sufi treatises, theological discourse, and the teachings of shari‘a (Islamic law) and tariqa (mystical path). By contrast, the connotative level expands beyond these literal meanings into realms of symbolism, cultural resonance, spiritual experience, and artistic imagination. Classical Uzbek poetry, particularly that of Alisher Navoi, demonstrates a remarkable ability to weave these two levels together, creating a layered poetic discourse that is both theologically grounded and aesthetically rich. Concepts such as *ishq* (divine love), *haqiqat* (truth), *haqq* (God/Truth), *fanā* (annihilation of the self), *zuhd* (asceticism), *mujāhada* (spiritual struggle), *tawba* (repentance), and *ma‘rifa* (divine knowledge) serve as both theological categories and poetic symbols, allowing for a profound poetic transformation that preserves their denotative essence while expanding their connotative scope.

The importance of this dual-level functioning lies not only in the linguistic or literary dimension but also in broader intercultural and semiotic processes. These terms do not simply carry meanings; they embody experiences, emotions, and cultural codes. In the context of classical Uzbek poetry, their usage transcends the boundaries of religious doctrine, entering into the realm of aesthetic conceptualization and symbolic association. The aim of this paper is to explore how Sufi terminology undergoes poetic transformation in Uzbek classical literature, with special reference to Navoi, and to examine the balance between denotative and connotative meanings through the lenses of translation theory, semiotics, and mystical hermeneutics.

Methods

The methodology of this study is grounded in a comparative textual and semantic analysis. First, a textual analysis was conducted of Sufi terminology as it appears in classical Uzbek poetry, focusing primarily on Navoi’s lyrical and didactic works. The goal of this analysis was to identify both the literal (denotative) meanings of these terms and their expanded (connotative) poetic uses. Second, a semantic analysis categorized these terms according to their primary

meanings within Islamic theology and their secondary meanings as poetic symbols. Third, a comparative analysis was undertaken between the interpretations of Sufi terms in poetic discourse and their treatment in translation theory and intercultural semiotics. Finally, a hermeneutic interpretation approach was employed to uncover the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of these terms, interpreting them not merely as words but as vehicles of mystical experience.

Primary sources for this study include Navoi's poetic works as well as classical Sufi treatises that define the core meanings of these terms. Secondary sources include theoretical frameworks provided by Homi K. Bhabha, Lawrence Venuti, Annemarie Schimmel, Umberto Eco, Mona Baker, and Eugene Nida. These theorists provide perspectives from translation studies, semiotics, and intercultural communication that illuminate the connotative transformation of terminology across linguistic and cultural contexts.

Results

The analysis yielded two key dimensions of meaning: the denotative and the connotative. At the denotative level, Sufi terms retain their core theological meanings. For instance, *zuhd* denotes the renunciation of worldly pleasures, an ascetic withdrawal from material desires. *Fanā* signifies annihilation of the self in God, the mystical dissolution of personal identity. *Ma'rifa* refers to divine knowledge, an inner illumination accessible only through spiritual insight. *Haqiqat* is the attainment of inner truth, the ultimate goal of the mystical path. *Haqq* designates God Himself, the source of being and truth. *Ishq* signifies divine love, an absolute devotion to God. These meanings are consistent across theological and Sufi texts and serve as the foundational denotative basis of the terminology.

At the connotative level, however, these terms acquire expanded symbolic and aesthetic meanings in classical poetry. For example, in Navoi's poetry, *ishq* becomes not merely divine love but a consuming fire, a burning pain that overwhelms reason, a force that brings the lover to the brink of life and death, and a path to annihilation in the beloved. Similarly, *fanā* is depicted as the moth perishing in the flame, a metaphor for self-sacrifice and spiritual dissolution. *Haqq* appears not only as God but also as the beloved's face, beauty, gaze, miracle, and justice. *Haqiqat* in poetry is not the abstract attainment of truth but the lived experience of suffering, repentance, loyalty, and eventual salvation.

This duality demonstrates that classical Uzbek poetry does not distort the denotative meaning of Sufi terminology. Rather, it enriches these meanings by integrating them into a broader symbolic network, thereby creating a multilayered aesthetic and spiritual discourse.

Discussion

The results of this study align closely with theoretical perspectives in translation studies, semiotics, and mystical hermeneutics. Homi K. Bhabha emphasizes that meaning is produced not solely through language but also through cultural context and symbolic association. He describes translation as a movement

across “zones of affect,” where meanings shift not just through words but through cultural and emotional resonance. This observation applies directly to Sufi terminology in poetry, where terms are interpreted not merely as lexical items but as embodiments of experience, belief, and aesthetic perception.

Lawrence Venuti’s notion of the “visibility of the translator” underscores the importance of agency in the act of translation. In the case of poetic transformation, poets themselves function as translators of mystical experience, transferring spiritual states into symbolic images. Their sensitivity to spiritual and aesthetic nuances enables them to reconfigure Sufi terminology into poetic discourse. This process aligns with what translation studies call “creative equivalence” or “dynamic transfer,” where the translator does not merely reproduce meaning but re-creates it within a new cultural and emotional framework.

Annemarie Schimmel, in her seminal work *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, argues that Sufi terminology in poetry transcends its lexical meaning and becomes a vehicle of mystical experience, mediated through poetic imagination. This observation captures the essence of connotative poetic transformation, where words such as *ishq* and *fanā* serve not only as theological terms but as artistic expressions of spiritual states and emotions.

Umberto Eco’s concept of “semiotic enrichment” is equally relevant. According to Eco, in religious and poetic texts, words generate multiple layers of meaning that go beyond their literal definitions. This process is evident in Navoi’s use of *haqq*, which, while denoting God in a strict theological sense, also functions poetically as a symbol of beauty, justice, miracle, and divine presence. Through this enrichment, the term communicates a spectrum of spiritual and aesthetic resonances.

Mona Baker’s theory of “culture-specific items” further illustrates the challenges of translating connotative meanings across cultural contexts. She notes that words acquire connotations within the cultural environments in which they develop, and these connotations are not easily transferable across languages without significant transformation or loss. This is particularly true of Sufi terminology, where terms such as *ishq*, *fanā*, and *haqq* embody layers of meaning deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual codes of Uzbek classical literature.

Finally, Eugene Nida’s concept of “functional equivalence” highlights the importance of capturing not just the literal meaning of sacred or spiritual texts but their functional impact on the reader. In the case of Sufi poetry, the functional power lies in the connotative dimension, which conveys spiritual states and emotional intensity. Thus, any interpretation or translation of Sufi terminology must address both denotative and connotative layers to preserve its full resonance.

Conclusion

The poetic transformation of Sufi terminology at denotative and connotative levels is a defining feature of Uzbek classical literature and a testament to its artistic and philosophical sophistication. These terms maintain their lexical essence while expanding into new symbolic worlds that capture mystical experiences,

emotional depth, and aesthetic creativity. Through metaphors, symbols, allegories, and metonymy, poets such as Navoi elevated terms like *ishq*, *fanā*, *haqq*, and *haqiqat* into artistic universes that function simultaneously as theological categories and poetic images.

The interplay between denotative and connotative meanings reflects the richness of Eastern classical thought and underscores the highly developed spiritual-aesthetic culture of Uzbek literature. Moreover, the transformation of Sufi terminology illustrates the inseparability of linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions in poetic discourse. For scholars and translators, this phenomenon presents both a challenge and an opportunity: the challenge of capturing the depth of connotative meanings across languages, and the opportunity to explore the cultural and spiritual codes that enrich poetic expression.

In conclusion, the study of Sufi terminology in Uzbek classical poetry reveals that words are not merely vehicles of meaning but keys to entire worlds of spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic experience. Their poetic transformation exemplifies how language, culture, and spirituality intertwine to create a literary tradition of enduring depth and beauty.

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