# A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE POETIC CONSTANTS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF ALISHER NAVOIY'S POETRY IN RELATION TO JAMI AND FUZULI

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Abstract: This study examines the challenge of reconstructing the linguistic and poetic invariant in English translations of Alisher Navoiy's classical Turkic-Persian poetry, with comparative reference to the poetics of Jami and Fuzuli. After outlining the theoretical notion of the "invariant" within translation studies and defining key parameters for the poetic invariant—such as lexical and metaphorical patterns, metrical and rhythmic organization, and intertextual references—the paper analyzes selected English renderings of works by Navoiy, Jami, and Fuzuli. The analysis identifies instances where the invariant has been effectively maintained as well as areas where it has been diminished or lost, and discusses the resulting implications for literary translation practice. The findings indicate that although lexical and thematic invariants can often be successfully conveyed, rhythmic-formal and culturally intertextual aspects tend to be weakened in translation. The paper concludes by offering practical recommendations for translators engaged with classical Eastern poetry.

**Keywords:** Alisher Navoi; poetic invariant; translation studies; English translation; linguistic poetics; Jami; Fuzuli; comparative poetics; classical Eastern poetry; Turkic-Persian literature.

### Introduction

The Turkish-Persian poet Alisher Navoiy (1441-1501) remains a foundational figure in Central Asian literatures, composing in Chagatai Turkic and Persian and crafting a richly layered poetic language combining Sufi metaphors, courtly imagery, Turkic lexicon, and Persian poetic conventions.

(Алишер Наваи Корпус)

When his works are translated into English, the challenge arises of preserving not only meaning but the poetic invariant – a term we define here as the set of linguistic-poetic features (meter, rhyme/assonance, metaphor network, cultural allusion) that constitute the identity of the text in its source language.

Prior research has flagged the difficulties of translating Navoiy's lyrics into foreign languages (e.g., Shermamatova 2024). In this article we compare these challenges with similar issues in the translations of Jami and Fuzuli – two classical poets of the Persian-Turkic tradition – to highlight patterns, difficulties and possible strategies. We ask: To what extent can the poetic invariant of Navoiy be reconstructed in English translations? How does this compare with Jami and Fuzuli? We aim to contribute both to Navoiy studies and to translation poetics, proposing practical guidelines for translators of classical Eastern poetry into English.

#### Methods

Corpus Selection: The corpus for this study comprises a representative selection of texts from Alisher Navoiy, Jami, and Fuzuli. For Navoiy, we examined ghazals and rubāʿī drawn from existing English translations; for Jami and Fuzuli, we selected comparable poems (ghazals and masnavis) for which English translations are available. The corpus for each poet includes approximately five to seven poems or substantial excerpts, with particular



attention to passages where metrical structure, rhyme, metaphor, and intertextual reference are especially prominent.

Analytical Criteria: The poetic invariant was operationalized across four analytical dimensions:

- 1. **Lexical-metaphoric network** recurring metaphors, key images, and conventional tropes;
- 2. **Formal features** metrical patterns, rhyme schemes, and internal sound organization;
- 3. **Cultural and intertextual allusion** references to Sufi symbolism, classical Persian poetic motifs, and Turkic idiomatic expressions;
- 4. **Poetic effect** tone, register, and rhetorical strategies.

Each translation was examined to determine how these dimensions were treated in English – whether the invariant was preserved, adapted, lost, or transformed.

Comparative Approach: For every poet – translation pair, the analysis compared features of the source text (as established in authoritative editions) with those of the English version. Where possible, translation strategies were classified according to their dominant orientation – literal versus free, prose versus verse – and evaluated in terms of how effectively they reconstruct the poetic invariant. Subsequently, cross-poet comparison was undertaken to identify recurrent challenges, divergences in translation practice, and instances of best practice in rendering classical Turkic – Persian poetics into English.

Limitations: Several limitations should be noted. High-quality English translations, particularly of Navoiy, remain scarce; in some cases, source texts are available only in manuscript form or in transliteration. Moreover, achieving metrical equivalence between Turkic/Persian and English verse presents inherent difficulties. Nevertheless, the comparative framework adopted here provides valuable insights into the dynamics of poetic invariance and its reconstruction across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

#### Results

Alisher Navoiy. Our analysis of select Navoiy translations revealed that:

Lexical-metaphoric networks (e.g., garden/bird, dust-divine-love) are often simplified in English, losing subtle Turkic-Persian interplay.

Formal features: the original uses classical Persian/Chagatai meters which are rarely reproduced; many translations render the poem in free verse, thereby losing part of the rhythmic invariant.

Cultural/allusion layer: many Sufi and Turkic idioms are either omitted or converted into generic Western metaphors, reducing specificity.

Poetic effect: while meaning is often retained, the musicality, emotional register, and multi-layered resonance are diminished.

**Jami.** In the Jami translations studied, we found somewhat better preservation of metaphorical networks (due to stronger presence of Persian tradition familiar to translators) though formal and intertextual dimensions still often suffer.

**Fuzuli.** For Fuzuli, the trilingual (Turkish-Persian-Arabic) complexity poses additional challenges: translators tend to prioritise meaning and eschew rhyme/meter, resulting in a more radical transformation of the invariant.

**Comparative observations** 



Across all three poets, the main losses in translation are: the formal-rhythmic dimension and the culturally-specific intertextual network. The lexical-metaphoric layer is most often retained, albeit in a simplified form. Among the three, Navoiy seems most vulnerable to invariant loss, owing to his less familiar Turkic dimension, while Jami fares relatively better in English translation.

### Discussion

The findings reveal persistent challenges in reconstructing the poetic invariant in English translations of classical Eastern poetry. In the case of Alisher Navoiy, the hybrid Turkic-Persian linguistic texture and the interplay between courtly and Sufi symbolism generate multiple layers of meaning that are difficult to render in English. Moreover, limited familiarity among translators with Chagatai Turkic exacerbates the loss of linguistic nuance and cultural resonance. By contrast, Jami's corpus – being exclusively Persian – proves relatively more accessible to translators working within the established Persian poetic tradition, whereas Fuzuli's multilingual composition (Ottoman Turkish, Persian, Arabic) presents its own set of complexities. The comparative analysis thus underscores a clear pattern: the greater the linguistic and cultural distance between the source and the target traditions, the more difficult it becomes to reconstruct the poetic invariant.

From a translation-poetic perspective, these findings suggest that translators seeking to preserve the invariant must engage not only with lexical accuracy, but also with the formal and cultural dimensions of the source text. This involves:

- striving, where possible, to reproduce or creatively approximate meter and rhyme, or to compensate for their loss in a deliberate and aesthetically motivated manner;
- providing footnotes or glosses to clarify culturally specific allusions, Sufi terminology, or symbolic imagery;
- employing creative adaptation to sustain the original metaphoric network even when formal patterns cannot be fully transferred.

For Navoiy's poetry in particular, bilingual editions with detailed commentary or hybrid translation forms – for instance, partial rhyme or echoic structures – could help convey something of the original's rhythmic and formal complexity.

It must also be acknowledged that English poetic language operates under a distinct metrical and rhythmic system, making absolute replication of the source invariant unattainable. Nevertheless, approximation and evocation of the poetic effect remain both feasible and desirable aims.

Finally, the study points to implications for literary reception. When the invariant is insufficiently maintained, English readers encounter a flattened or diluted version of the poem, stripped of its musicality, intertextual depth, and spiritual undertones. Translators, therefore, bear an ethical responsibility to mediate the original text sensitively – seeking balance between accessibility and fidelity, rather than domesticating the poem entirely into the norms of English verse.

### Conclusion

This study of Navoiy, Jami and Fuzuli affirms that reconstructing the poetic invariant in English translations remains challenging, especially for less familiar poetic traditions like Navoiy's. However, strategic translation choices — attention to metaphor networks, conscious handling of form, and cultural annotation — can improve the fidelity of translated poetry. Future work might enlarge the corpus, explore reader reception of different translation strategies, and experiment with new hybrid translation forms (e.g., English-Chagatai bilingual renderings). In conclusion, while perfect replication of the invariant may be unattainable, translation that respects and evokes the original's poetic architecture offers the best pathway for engaging global readership with Navoiy's rich heritage.



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