

THE SEMANTICS OF “HEAD” AS AN OBJECT OF RESEARCH IN TRANSLATION STUDIES**Khalimova Mukhayyokhon**PhD of Philological sciences, docent
Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages**Abstract**

This article explores the semantic field of the lexical unit "head" and its equivalents in English and Uzbek within the framework of translation studies. The "head" is not merely a biological term but a foundational element in cognitive linguistics, forming numerous idioms, metaphors, and polysemantic layers. The study analyzes the challenges of maintaining semantic equivalence when translating somatisms (body part terms) and discusses the strategies used to bridge the gap between literal meaning and cultural conceptualization.

Keywords

Translation Studies, Somatisms, Semantics, Metaphor, Head (Bosh), Cognitive Linguistics, Equivalence.

In modern linguistics, somatism words denoting body parts occupy a central place in the lexical system of any language. Among them, the “head” (bosh) stands as the primary somatic element, representing the center of intellect, leadership, and physical orientation. For translators, the word “head” presents a unique challenge: it functions as a noun, a verb, and a component of fixed expressions. This article examines the multi-layered semantics of “head” and the methodological approaches to its translation. In addition to its literal anatomical reference, “head” encapsulates cognitive, cultural, and metaphorical dimensions that vary across languages and discourse communities. The term may signal hierarchy (head of state, head of department), directionality and movement (to head north, to head home), measurement and enumeration (head of cattle), as well as emotional and evaluative nuances (level-headed, hothead). Each of these senses interacts with syntax and collocation patterns, creating translation constraints that demand sensitivity to register, genre, and pragmatic intent.

A thorough analysis requires distinguishing polysemy from homonymy, mapping core meanings to extended metaphorical networks, and identifying language-specific idioms where direct equivalence fails. For instance, idiomatic constructions such as “keep one’s head,” “lose one’s head,” or “off the top of one’s head” rely on culturally entrenched conceptual metaphors linking the head to rational control, spontaneity, and memory retrieval. In some target languages, these metaphors may align; in others, alternative somatic anchors (heart, face, hand) carry comparable functions, necessitating substitution rather than literal transfer.

Moreover, aspect and valency shifts in verbal uses (to head a team vs. to head off a problem) require attention to argument structure, prepositional governance, and aspectual nuance to avoid ambiguity or semantic drift. Methodologically, translators benefit from corpus-based contrastive analysis, frame semantics, and cognitive-linguistic mapping to trace usage frequencies and collocational profiles. Parallel corpora can reveal preferred equivalents in specialized domains legal, administrative, sports, navigation, while monolingual reference corpora highlight native-like patterns and constraints. Terminological consistency should be balanced with contextual appropriateness: in technical documentation, “head” may denote specific components (e.g., print head, cylinder head), where precision and domain conventions override general-language metaphors.

Conversely, in literary or journalistic texts, stylistic effects and intertextual echoes justify creative modulation, including shifts in metaphor, rhythm, and emphasis. Pedagogically, a staged approach sense disambiguation, collocation analysis, genre calibration, and back-translation verification supports accuracy and fluency. Decision trees or glossaries keyed to domains can

streamline repeated choices, while translator notes document rationale for non-literal solutions. Ultimately, the translator's task is to preserve semantic depth and pragmatic function: rendering "head" not merely as a lexical item but as a cultural signifier that orchestrates thought, authority, and spatial orientation within the target language's conceptual landscape.

The «head» is a prolific source of metaphors. In English, these are often linked to cognitive states or social status.

English: «To lose one's head»; Uzbek: "Boshini yo'qotmoq" (Equivalent: to panic; also used for acting irrationally under pressure, e.g., in emergencies or heated arguments).

English: "To be over one's head"; Uzbek: "Qurbi yetmaslik" (Literal: boshidan baland kelmoq; used when a task exceeds one's ability, resources, or authority, such as complex projects or legal matters).

English: "Head over heels"; Uzbek: "Qulog'igacha (sevib qolgan)" (Note: The Uzbek equivalent shifts from "head" to "ear"; both convey intense infatuation or sudden, all-consuming love, often implying impulsivity).

English: "To keep a cool head"; Uzbek: "Boshlikni sovuq saqlamoq / O'zini bosib olish" (Meaning: to remain calm and rational in tense situations).

English: "To have a good head for something"; Uzbek: "Bir narsaga boshi ishlamoq" (Meaning: to be naturally talented or quick-witted in a specific domain, like numbers or languages).

English: "To put heads together"; Uzbek: "Bosh qo'shmoq / maslahatlashmoq" (Meaning: to collaborate to solve a problem).

English: "Off the top of my head"; Uzbek: "Darrov og'zimdan chiqdi / o'ylab o'tirmay aytdim" (Meaning: from immediate recollection, without careful thought).

English: "To bite someone's head off"; Uzbek: "Boshini yemoq / ustiga baqirmoq" (Meaning: to respond angrily or harshly, often disproportionate to the situation).

Translation studies must categorize these into:

Full equivalents: where both languages use "head/bosh" similarly (e.g., Head of the family / Oila boshi), preserving both semantic meaning and pragmatic function across formal and informal registers.

Partial equivalents: where the concept remains, but the structure changes, such as shifts in syntax, idiomatic framing, collocational patterns, or degree of metaphorical extension that require adaptation rather than direct substitution.

Non-equivalent somatisms: where "head" is replaced by another body part in the target language to keep the meaning, reflecting culturally specific metaphor networks (e.g., using "heart", "mind" or "eye" to convey leadership, responsibility, or attention) while maintaining communicative intent and stylistic tone.

When translating "head" related units, translators typically employ three main strategies:

1) Literal Translation (Calque): Used when the metaphor is universally understood and the semantic mapping between source and target languages is transparent. This method preserves the original image and syntactic structure, maintaining lexical economy and terminological consistency in formal or technical registers. It is most effective when cultural load is low and the phrase has a near one-to-one correspondence. Example: "The head of the organization", "Tashkilot rahbari/boshi"; likewise, "head office", "bosh ofis" and "head nurse", "bosh hamshira".

2) Functional Equivalence: replacing the English idiom with a target language idiom that conveys the same emotion, pragmatic force, and register. This approach prioritizes communicative impact over literal imagery, ensuring naturalness and idiomaticity for the target audience. It is especially suitable for literary or journalistic contexts where tone and fluency are paramount. Example: "Cool head", "Vazminlik/Bosiqlik"; similarly, "to keep a level head", "o'zini qo'lga ola bilish" or "bosiq qolish".

3) Descriptive Translation: Explaining the meaning when no direct equivalent exists, or when the metaphor may confuse readers due to cultural specificity. This strategy expands the expression to clarify function or outcome, sometimes adding brief contextual cues or paraphrases to avoid ambiguity. It is useful in academic, legal, and explanatory texts where precision outweighs brevity. Example: «To head off a crisis», “Inqirozni oldini olmoq”; additionally, “to head something up” (manage/lead), “biror ishni boshqarib borish” or “rahbarlik qilish”. In practice, translators assess factors such as audience, genre, stylistic register, and intertextual conventions to select among these strategies, and may combine them (e.g., a calque with a brief gloss) to balance accuracy and readability.

From a cognitive perspective, “head” represents the semantic \space value = (Literal \space Meaning) + (Cultural \space Context) + (Syntactic \space Function). Translators must decode this formula to ensure that the “head” in the source text does not lose its symbolic power in the target text.

More specifically, the literal meaning invokes the anatomical or physical topmost part, while the cultural context activates entrenched metaphors, hierarchies, and honorific usages that vary across communities; the syntactic function, in turn, positions “head” within grammatical structures (e.g., head noun, head of a phrase), shaping how agency, prominence, or control is distributed in a sentence. In practical translation scenarios, overlooking any of these components risks flattening nuance diminishing authority, leadership, or primacy that the term evokes. For instance, in institutional discourse, “head” may signal formal rank (head of department), charisma and competence (head of the team), or even metonymy for decision-making centers (the head weighed the options), each demanding culturally sensitive equivalents.

UP orientation in the “UP-DOWN” spatial metaphor. In both English and Uzbek cultures, “top” or “head” is associated with positive, superior, or controlling attributes. This vertical schema underlies expressions like “rise to the top”, “hold your head high” or Uzbek parallels that elevate status, dignity, and moral rectitude through upward motion or elevated position. Crucially, the UP axis also encodes vitality and alertness (keep your head up) versus DOWN as fatigue, defeat, or subordination (bow one’s head). Recognizing these shared yet locally inflected mappings allows translators to preserve evaluative force and social indexing when rendering idioms, proverbs, and institutional titles.

Semantic \space Value = (Literal \space Meaning) + (Cultural \space Context) + (Syntactic \space Function). Translators must decode this formula to ensure that the “head” in the source text does not lose its symbolic power in the target text. To operationalize this, translators can:

- (1) identify the base sense (body part vs. structural apex vs. leadership role);
- (2) map culture-specific connotations (honor, prestige, responsibility, spiritual elevation);
- (3) align syntax to maintain prominence (e.g., preserving head position or leadership semantics through collocational norms);
- (4) verify metaphorical coherence along the UP-DOWN axis so that evaluative polarity, authority, and dignity remain intact across languages.

The study of “head” semantics in translation reveals that while the biological “head” is universal, its linguistic “shadow” is deeply cultural. Successful translation requires a shift from word-for-word substitution to a cognitive-pragmatic approach. Researchers should focus on the «hidden» semantics of somatisms to improve the quality of literary and technical translation by attending to metaphorical networks, idiomatic usages, and context-dependent inferences. This entails analyzing how “head” participates in collocations (e.g., head start, headstrong), grammaticalized patterns, and culture-specific frames that shape meaning beyond literal reference. In practice, translators must evaluate genre, register, and communicative intent, leveraging corpus evidence and discourse analysis to capture nuances such as evaluative stance, politeness strategies, and embodied cognition. By integrating insights from cognitive linguistics, relevance theory, and cross-cultural pragmatics, such research can guide more accurate

renderings, reduce semantic loss, and foster equivalence at conceptual and functional levels in both literary narrative and specialized documentation.

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