



COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC MECHANISMS OF ALLUSION IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *The present article examines allusion as a cognitive-pragmatic mechanism of intertextuality in English and Uzbek literary discourse. Allusion is treated not merely as a stylistic ornament but as a complex cognitive operation that activates a precedent text a “source frame” stored in the reader’s long-term memory and blends it with the immediate co-text, generating emergent, inferential meaning that neither structure carries on its own. Drawing on frame semantics, the theory of conceptual integration (blending), and the Moscow school’s theory of precedent phenomena, the study identifies and compares the cognitive mechanisms and pragmatic functions of allusion in a corpus of English and Uzbek literary prose. The results show that the underlying cognitive operations frame activation, conceptual blending, and presupposition triggering are universal and language-independent, while the cognitive base from which allusions are drawn is culturally specific: English allusive strategy relies predominantly on the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman canon and on Shakespeare, whereas Uzbek allusive strategy is grounded in classical Eastern poetry (above all Alisher Navoiy and the wider Persian-Tajik tradition), Qur’anic and Sufi sources, and national folklore. This asymmetry of cognitive bases is shown to have direct consequences for literary interpretation, cross-cultural pragmatics, and, in particular, for literary translation, where it produces systematic “culture bumps” requiring conscious compensatory strategies.*

Keywords: *allusion, intertextuality, cognitive pragmatics, precedent phenomena, conceptual blending, frame semantics, literary discourse, translation, English, Uzbek.*



Introduction

The concept of intertextuality entered linguistic and literary theory through Julia Kristeva's reading of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism: every text, in this view, is constructed as "a mosaic of quotations," absorbing and transforming other texts, so that any utterance necessarily exists in dialogue with the utterances that precede it [1, p. 439]. Bakhtin himself had already argued that no utterance is the first or the last word of its speaker, but a link in an unbroken chain of verbal communication [11, p. 106]. Gérard Genette later systematized this broad notion into a typology of "transtextual" relations, of which allusion belongs to the category of hypertextuality a text (hypertext) that evokes an earlier text (hypotext) without necessarily citing it directly [2, p. 23]. Michael Riffaterre, from a reader-oriented perspective, insisted that intertextuality is not a property of the text alone but a compulsory interpretive operation performed by a competent reader who recognizes the trace of another text [3, p. 56].

Within this broad theoretical field, allusion occupies a special place: unlike direct quotation, it is minimally marked and maximally economical, relying on a single name, phrase, or paraphrase to activate an entire body of shared cultural knowledge [4, p. 61]. This economy is precisely what makes allusion a cognitive, and not merely stylistic, phenomenon: its interpretation presupposes the existence, in the reader's mind, of a stable mental structure a precedent phenomenon associated with a given name, text, or situation [6, p. 44]. Following Karaulov, Gudkov, and Zakharenko et al., a precedent phenomenon is a phenomenon (a text, a name, a statement, or a situation) that is well known to the majority of members of a given national-cultural community, is cognitively and emotionally significant, and is regularly reactivated in discourse [12, p. 84].

Existing cognitive-pragmatic and precedent-phenomena research has been developed chiefly on Russian- and English-language material [6, p. 44; 7, p. 18; 12, p. 88], while Uzbek literary discourse with its cognitive base rooted in classical Eastern poetics, Islamic culture, and Turkic folklore has rarely been examined



through this theoretical lens, and almost never in direct comparison with English. Existing Uzbek-language scholarship on intertextuality tends to remain within a literary-critical rather than a cognitive-linguistic paradigm, describing what is being alluded to without systematically modeling how the allusion is cognitively processed and what pragmatic effect it produces. This gap motivates the present study.

The aim of this study is to identify and compare, within a unified cognitive-pragmatic framework, the mechanisms underlying the creation and interpretation of allusion in English and Uzbek literary discourse.

The objectives of the study are:

1. to define allusion as a cognitive-pragmatic phenomenon, distinguishing it from adjacent forms of intertextuality (quotation, paraphrase, parody);
2. to classify the allusive units found in the English and Uzbek corpus according to their source domain and their status as precedent name, precedent statement, precedent text, or precedent situation [12, p. 90];
3. to model the cognitive mechanisms frame activation, conceptual blending, and presupposition that underlie the processing of allusion, illustrating each with corpus examples;
4. to compare the pragmatic functions allusion performs in the two literary traditions, together with their relative frequency;
5. to outline the implications of the findings for literary translation and cross-cultural pragmatics.

The novelty of the research lies in the combined application of conceptual integration theory and the theory of precedent phenomena to a contrastive English–Uzbek literary corpus, a language pair and theoretical combination not previously addressed in the literature, and in proposing a unified four-stage cognitive-pragmatic model of allusion processing applicable to both languages.

Materials and Methods

The empirical basis of the study consists of approximately 80 contextual samples containing allusive elements, selected in equal number (40 + 40) from



English (British and American, 20th–21st century) and Uzbek (20th–21st century) literary prose through continuous sampling. Selection criteria included the presence of at least one allusive marker: a culturally marked proper name, a phraseological unit of literary or religious origin, a direct or paraphrased precedent statement, or an evocation of a precedent situation. For each sample, the immediate micro-context (the sentence and the surrounding paragraph) was retained to allow contextual-pragmatic interpretation.

Stages and methods of analysis. The analysis was carried out in four stages, each relying on a distinct method:

1. Identification stage – continuous sampling and manual annotation of allusive markers, using the method of contextual-interpretive analysis to confirm that a given unit indeed functions allusively (as opposed to a conventionalized, “dead” phraseological unit with no active intertextual force);

2. Classificatory stage – grouping of the identified units by source domain and precedent-phenomenon type, using comparative-contrastive analysis to align the English and Uzbek data;

3. Cognitive-modeling stage – reconstruction, for each allusive unit, of the source frame and its blending with the co-textual frame, using the method of conceptual (frame) analysis grounded in Fauconnier and Turner’s four-space model of conceptual integration (two input spaces, a generic space, and a blended space) [5, p. 47];

4. Functional-pragmatic stage – determination of the dominant pragmatic function of each allusive unit in its context (characterizing, evaluative, cohesive-dialogic, ironic, didactic), with quantitative tallying of function frequency across the two subcorpora.

Results

Classification of allusion by source domain and precedent-phenomenon type. The analysis of the corpus yielded the following distribution of allusions by source domain:



Source domain	English subcorpus	Uzbek subcorpus
Biblical / Qur'anic-Islamic	high (Bible: Genesis, Job, Judas, Solomon)	high (Qur'anic narratives, Sufi motifs)
Classical mythology (Greco-Roman)	high (Achilles, Pandora, Sisyphus)	negligible
Classical Eastern poetry (Navoiy, Nizami, Persian-Tajik canon)	negligible	high (Farhod–Shirin, Layli–Majnun)
Persian-Turkic epic tradition (Shahnoma and related)	negligible	moderate (Rustam)
National canonical author (Shakespeare / Navoiy)	high	high
Folklore, proverbs, dostons	moderate	high
Historical events and figures	moderate	moderate

Applying the four-part typology of precedent phenomena [12, p. 90], the allusive units were further classified as:

- precedent names (e.g., Job, Judas, Achilles in English; Farhod, Majnun, Rustam in Uzbek) – the most frequent type in both subcorpora;
- precedent statements – paraphrased or minimally altered precedent lines (e.g., an English narrator's ironic echo of a biblical phrase; a Uzbek narrator's echo of a line from Navoiy's khamsa);
- precedent texts – allusion to an entire work as a whole (e.g., a title or plot structure evoking Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, or a Uzbek text structurally echoing *Farhod va Shirin*);



- precedent situations – allusion to a recognizable narrative situation rather than to a specific verbal formula (e.g., a “Solomon’s judgment” situation of impossible choice; a “Layli–Majnun” situation of love destroyed by social prohibition).

Cognitive mechanisms of allusion processing. Three interrelated cognitive mechanisms were identified as underlying allusion processing in both languages; each is illustrated below with a representative type of corpus example.

(a) Frame activation. An allusive marker activates a pre-existing frame stored in long-term cultural memory, together with its associated evaluative and emotional load. For instance, the English precedent name Job activates a frame of patient, undeserved suffering; the Uzbek precedent name Farhod activates a frame of heroic, self-sacrificing labor undertaken for the sake of love. In both cases, a single lexical item is sufficient to import a dense evaluative structure into the current discourse without any explicit elaboration.

(b) Conceptual blending. The activated source frame (“input space 1”) is projected onto the immediate narrative situation (“input space 2”); the generic structure shared by both (e.g., “a figure enduring hardship”) licenses their partial fusion into a new “blended space,” in which the precedent figure and the current character are simultaneously present. The blended space is not reducible to either input: describing a character as “a modern-day Job” does not merely mean “he suffers,” but imports the entire biblical narrative of unjust trial, faith, and eventual vindication, projecting onto the present character an implicit trajectory the narrative may not yet have completed [5, p. 47]. The same mechanism operates when a Uzbek author compares two lovers’ devotion to that of Layli and Majnun: the blend imports not only the notion of intense love, but also its association with social obstruction and tragic inevitability – a much richer inference than the literal words convey.

(c) Presupposition triggering and cognitive economy. Because allusion presumes rather than states shared knowledge, it allows the author to compress a complex evaluative or emotional meaning into a minimal linguistic form, in



accordance with the principle of cognitive economy governing text formation [4, p. 61]. Where the presupposed precedent frame is not part of the reader's cognitive base, the presupposition fails to trigger the intended inference, and the allusive unit is processed only at its literal, non-allusive level a risk that becomes systematic in cross-cultural reading, as discussed in Section 4.

Pragmatic functions and their distribution. Five recurrent pragmatic functions were identified across the corpus, with markedly different relative frequency in the two subcorpora:

Function	English subcorpus	Uzbek subcorpus
Characterizing (indirect characterization via a precedent figure)	dominant	dominant
Evaluative / axiological (implicit author or narrator evaluation)	high	high
Cohesive-dialogic (establishing dialogue with the cultural tradition)	moderate	moderate
Ironic / comic	high	low
Didactic-moralizing	low	high

The pronounced difference in the last two rows is telling: English allusion, particularly to biblical and Shakespearean sources, is frequently deployed for ironic or subversive effect, exploiting the gap between the solemnity of the precedent frame and the triviality or absurdity of the current situation. Uzbek allusion, by contrast drawing on a poetic tradition in which ethical and didactic content is inseparable from aesthetic form more often preserves and reinforces the moral weight of the precedent frame rather than undercutting it.

Discussion



The results support the central hypothesis of the study: allusion is best described as a cognitive-pragmatic, rather than a purely decorative stylistic, mechanism. The conceptual-blending model explains why an allusive unit generates meaning that exceeds the sum of its parts the reader does not simply “recognize a reference” but actively constructs a new, emergent mental representation in which the precedent situation reinterprets the present one, and the present situation, reciprocally, casts new light on the precedent [5, p. 47]. This bidirectional inferential process is what distinguishes allusion from a “dead” phraseological unit, in which the source frame has become inert and is no longer actively reconstructed by the reader.

At the same time, the comparative data reveal a fundamental asymmetry in the cognitive base from which the two literary traditions draw. Following Karaulov’s notion of the national cognitive base as the invariant body of knowledge presumed to be shared by every competent member of a linguo-cultural community [6, p. 44], the near-total absence of Greco-Roman mythological allusion in the Uzbek subcorpus, and the near-total absence of classical Eastern poetic allusion in the English subcorpus, are not accidental gaps but structural reflections of two historically distinct cognitive bases. This asymmetry carries three concrete implications.

First, from a purely interpretive standpoint, the success of an allusion is never guaranteed by the text alone but is contingent on the reader’s possession of the relevant precedent frame; where that frame is absent, presupposition fails and the allusion collapses into its literal meaning, with a corresponding loss of the evaluative and emotional content the author intended to convey.

Second, from a cross-cultural pragmatic standpoint, this dependency explains why allusion functions as one of the most reliable markers of a text’s implied readership: an author’s choice of precedent source (Bible and Shakespeare versus Navoiy and Qur’anic narrative) is itself a pragmatic signal of the cultural community the text is addressing.



Third, and most practically, from a translation-studies standpoint, the asymmetry constitutes what Leppihalme terms a “culture bump” [4, p. 4]: a point at which the translator must choose between (I) preserving the allusive form, at the risk that the target reader’s cognitive base does not contain the corresponding frame and the allusion is processed only literally; (II) supplying an explicit gloss or footnote, which restores the propositional content but sacrifices the economy that defines allusion as a device; or (III) substituting a functionally, though not formally, equivalent allusion drawn from the target culture’s own cognitive base. The material analyzed here suggests that Uzbek–English (and English–Uzbek) literary translation systematically requires such compensatory strategies for allusions rooted in classical Eastern poetry, Sufi imagery, or Qur’anic narrative on the one hand, and Greco-Roman mythology on the other precisely because these source domains have no ready-made counterpart in the recipient culture’s cognitive base. A title such as Huxley’s *Brave New World*, itself an allusion to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, illustrates the problem in reverse: rendered literally into Uzbek, it preserves the propositional content of the phrase but loses, for most target readers, the ironic Shakespearean frame that gives the English title its full pragmatic force an effect that can only be restored through translatorial commentary, not through lexical choice alone.

These findings also carry a pedagogical implication: the systematic teaching of precedent phenomena rather than isolated vocabulary or grammar should form part of foreign-language literary education, since competent reading of literary discourse in a second language presupposes access to a cognitive base that formal language instruction rarely addresses explicitly.

Limitations. The study is restricted to literary prose and does not include poetry, drama, or media discourse, registers in which allusive density and function are known to differ; the corpus size (80 samples), while sufficient to reveal robust qualitative tendencies, does not support statistically representative quantitative



generalization. The proposed frequency figures should therefore be read as indicative of tendencies rather than as exhaustive statistical measures.

Conclusion

The study has shown that allusion operates as a universal cognitive-pragmatic mechanism grounded in three interlocking processes frame activation, conceptual blending, and presupposition triggering while the specific content of the frames it activates is culturally and cognitively bound. In English literary discourse, this content is drawn predominantly from the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, and Shakespearean canon; in Uzbek literary discourse, from the classical Eastern poetic tradition (above all Alisher Navoiy), Qur'anic and Sufi sources, and national folklore. The pragmatic functions allusion performs characterization, evaluation, cohesive dialogue with tradition, irony, and moral instruction are shared by both traditions but distributed with different relative weight, reflecting deeper differences in the two literary cultures' relationship to their own canonical past.

Recognizing this dual nature of allusion cognitively universal in mechanism, culturally specific in content has direct theoretical value for cognitive linguistics and literary stylistics, and direct practical value for translation studies and foreign-language literary pedagogy, where the mismatch between source- and target-language cognitive bases must be consciously identified and compensated for rather than left to incidental lexical correspondence. The four-stage cognitive-pragmatic model proposed here identification, classification, cognitive modeling, and functional-pragmatic analysis is not specific to the English–Uzbek pair and may serve as a general framework for the contrastive study of allusion and other intertextual phenomena across other language pairs and discourse types, including poetry and media discourse, which remain a priority for future research.

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