A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

Phraseological units form an important part of the lexical system of a language because they convey conventional meanings that are often shaped by cultural experience and cannot always be inferred from individual words. This article compares selected phraseological units in English and Uzbek, focusing on semantic correspondence, figurative imagery, cultural specificity, and translation. A qualitative contrastive approach is used to examine illustrative examples from both languages. The comparison shows that expressions may share a communicative meaning while differing in lexical structure and imagery. It also demonstrates why literal translation can produce unnatural or misleading results. Depending on the context, translators may use an established equivalent, a functionally similar expression, or a concise paraphrase. The article discusses the relevance of phraseological competence to translation practice and foreign-language teaching. Since the examples are illustrative rather than corpus-derived, the analysis is exploratory and points to the need for further research using larger, systematically collected data.

Keywords: phraseological units, idioms, English, Uzbek, contrastive linguistics, cultural

meaning, translation

1. Introduction

Language is not merely a means of transmitting information; it also reflects the experiences, values, and interpretive habits of the communities that use it. Phraseological units are especially relevant in this respect because they allow speakers to express complex ideas through conventional, often figurative, combinations of words. They occur in everyday conversation, literature, journalism, and other forms of discourse. Their intended meanings are not always transparent from their individual components. English and Uzbek provide a useful basis for contrastive analysis. English belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, whereas Uzbek is a Turkic language. Although their grammatical systems and historical development differ, both languages contain idioms used to describe emotions, behaviour, social relations, decisions, and everyday situations. Comparing these expressions can reveal both shared human experiences and language-specific ways of representing them. The purpose of this article is to compare selected English and Uzbek phraseological units in terms of meaning, imagery, and cultural associations, and to discuss practical implications for translation and language teaching. The article addresses three questions: (1) what semantic similarities can be observed between selected expressions; (2) how do their images and structures differ; and (3) which translation strategies can best preserve their intended meaning?

2. Theoretical Background

Phraseology investigates conventional multi-word expressions, including idioms and other fixed or semi-fixed combinations. Many idioms are non-compositional: their conventional meaning cannot be calculated simply by adding the literal meanings of their words. For example, spill the beans normally means ‘reveal a secret’, rather than describing the physical act of spilling beans. Other expressions are more transparent, but their interpretation may still depend on convention and context. Phraseological units can be studied from semantic, structural, pragmatic, and cultural perspectives. Their degree of fixedness,

grammatical behaviour, stylistic register, and frequency may vary. As Moon (1998) demonstrates through a corpus-based approach, fixed expressions and idioms form a varied group rather than a completely uniform category. Cowie (1998) likewise presents phraseology as a field with important theoretical and applied dimensions. Kunin's work is a major reference in the study of English phraseology, while Rahmatullayev's research and dictionary work have contributed to the description of Uzbek phraseological expressions.

3. Methodology

The article adopts a qualitative contrastive approach. Selected English idioms are paired with Uzbek expressions that appear to convey a comparable communicative meaning. Each pair is considered in relation to its core meaning, figurative image, degree of equivalence, and likely translation in context. The examples are illustrative and were selected to demonstrate different types of correspondence; they do not constitute a statistically representative sample of either language. The comparison distinguishes semantic similarity from formal identity. Two expressions may communicate the same idea while differing in word choice, grammatical structure, register, or cultural associations. For this reason, proposed Uzbek equivalents should be checked against reliable phraseological dictionaries and native-speaker usage before being used as evidence in a larger empirical study.

4. Semantic Similarities Between English and Uzbek

A number of English and Uzbek expressions describe broadly similar human experiences. For instance, a piece of cake means that a task is very easy. The Uzbek expression suv ichgandek oson can convey a comparable idea. The expressions use different images, but both emphasise the absence of difficulty. Similarly, to lose one's head can describe becoming confused or panicking, while Uzbek o'zini yo'qotmoq can express a similar reaction. Other examples include to make up one's mind and bir qarorga kelmoq, both associated with making a decision, and to keep an eye on someone and ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq, which can both refer to watching or

looking after someone. Such correspondences show that idioms in unrelated language families can perform similar communicative functions. Nevertheless, the exact choice of an equivalent depends on the sentence and the context in which the expression is used.

English expression
Possible Uzbek equivalent Core meaning
a piece of cake
suv ichgandek oson Something very easy
English expression
Possible Uzbek equivalent Core meaning
to lose one's head
o'zini yo'qotmoq To become confused or panic
to make up one's
mind bir qarorga kelmoq To make a decision
to keep an eye on
someone ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq To watch or look after someone
to be in hot water
boshiga tashvish tushmoq To be in a difficult situation

Table 1. Illustrative semantic correspondences between selected English and Uzbek

phraseological units. The equivalents are context-dependent rather than exact word-for-word matches.

5. Structural and Cultural Differences

Similar meanings are often expressed through different figurative images. The English idiom when pigs fly describes an event considered extremely unlikely or impossible. In Uzbek, tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda may be used to convey a comparable idea. The animal imagery differs, but both expressions evoke an implausible situation. This example illustrates how each language can use locally

conventional images to express a similar pragmatic meaning. Another example is to let the cat out of the bag, which means to reveal information that was meant to remain secret, sometimes unintentionally. Uzbek expressions such as sirni oshkor qilib qo‘ymoq can convey the relevant meaning more directly. The English idiom presents the meaning through a figurative scene, while the Uzbek phrase explicitly refers to revealing a secret. The comparison should not be taken to mean that all English idioms are more figurative or that Uzbek idioms are more direct; it simply shows that particular expressions differ in their conventional imagery. Phraseological imagery may be associated with animals, food, the human body, nature, domestic life, and social relations. These associations can preserve traces of historical experience and shared cultural knowledge. However, idioms should not be treated as straightforward descriptions of an entire culture. Their meanings are conventional and may vary according to generation, region, genre, and context.

6. Translation Implications

Translating idioms requires more than replacing each source-language word with a target-language word. A literal rendering of spill the beans, for example, would usually fail to communicate the intended meaning in Uzbek. The translator must first identify the expression as an idiom and interpret its function in context. Three practical strategies are especially relevant. First, an established idiomatic equivalent may be used when it conveys a similar meaning and register; to make up one’s mind and bir qarorga kelmoq provide a useful example. Second, a functional equivalent may preserve the communicative purpose while changing the image. For instance, depending on context, break the ice may be rendered as suhbatni boshlab yubormoq or oradagi noqulaylikni bartaraf etmoq. Third, paraphrase is useful when no natural idiomatic equivalent is available; spill the beans can be translated as sirni oshkor qilmoq.

The most suitable strategy depends on genre, audience, and communicative purpose. A literary translation may attempt to preserve imagery where it remains

understandable, whereas a practical or academic text may prioritise clarity. Translators should also consider register, humour, emphasis, and whether the expression is common in contemporary usage.

7. Implications for Foreign-Language Teaching

Phraseological competence contributes to communicative competence because idioms are common in authentic conversation, films, literature, and online communication. Learners may understand the grammar and individual words of an expression but still fail to infer its conventional meaning. Explicit instruction can therefore support listening, reading, vocabulary development, and more natural spoken interaction. A contrastive approach can include matching English idioms with Uzbek equivalents, interpreting expressions in short dialogues, comparing the images used in each language, and creating context-appropriate sentences. Teachers should explain not only meaning but also register and frequency, since an expression can be grammatically correct yet unsuitable in a particular situation. Learners should be encouraged to consult reliable dictionaries and examples of authentic usage rather than rely on literal translation.

8. Conclusion

The comparison of selected English and Uzbek phraseological units indicates that the two languages often use idioms to express similar human experiences, including ease, confusion, decision-making, difficulty, and the disclosure of information. However, semantic similarity does not guarantee identical wording or figurative imagery. Some expressions have close functional equivalents, while others require adaptation or paraphrase. The analysis also highlights the role of context and cultural convention in interpreting and translating idioms. A successful translation should preserve the intended meaning and communicative effect rather than reproduce the source-language wording mechanically. In language teaching, comparing idioms can help learners recognise figurative meaning and communicate more naturally. Since this article uses illustrative examples rather than a large

empirical dataset, future research could examine a balanced English–Uzbek corpus, assess idiom frequency and register, and consult native speakers to validate proposed equivalents.

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