

CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING IDIOMS FROM ENGLISH INTO UZBEK

**Maxmarayimov Samandar
Shoyimova Komila**

Termiz University of Economic Servise

Abstract: Translating idioms from English into Uzbek is one of the most challenging areas in translation studies, as idioms are deeply rooted in the culture, history, and worldview of a particular language community. Unlike ordinary vocabulary, idiomatic expressions often carry figurative meanings that cannot be understood through direct translation of individual words. For example, the English idiom “kick the bucket” cannot be translated literally into Uzbek (*chelakni tepmoq*), as this would cause misunderstanding; instead, it requires a cultural or functional equivalent such as “*vafot etmoq*”. This illustrates the complexity and sensitivity required in idiom translation. The main difficulties in translating idioms arise from several factors: (1) the absence of direct equivalents in the target language; (2) differences in cultural and historical context; (3) semantic shifts and changes in meaning across languages; and (4) the stylistic and pragmatic functions idioms perform in communication. In addition, idioms are not only linguistic forms but also reflections of the values, traditions, and everyday practices of a society, which means that successful translation requires both linguistic proficiency and cultural competence.

Keywords: idioms, translation challenges, English-Uzbek translation, cultural equivalence, figurative meaning, cross-cultural communication.

Introduction This paper examines these challenges in detail and discusses the strategies translators employ to overcome them. Among the most commonly used strategies are literal translation (when an equivalent exists), finding approximate equivalents, descriptive or explanatory translation, and in some cases omission or adaptation to fit the target culture. The article also draws on examples from English and Uzbek idioms to demonstrate how meaning, style, and cultural resonance can be preserved - or sometimes lost - in translation.

Idioms play a crucial role in shaping the expressive richness of any language. They are not only linguistic units but also carriers of cultural identity, worldview, and national heritage. In English, idioms are widely used in everyday communication, literature, films, media, and academic contexts, making their accurate translation into



other languages particularly important. In Uzbek, idioms (frazelogizmlar) also represent a deep cultural and historical background, often reflecting local traditions, values, and mentality.

The translation of idioms from English into Uzbek is not a simple lexical replacement; rather, it involves understanding both the figurative meaning and the cultural connotations behind the expression. For instance, the English idiom “spill the beans” does not literally mean scattering beans, but revealing a secret. If translated literally into Uzbek (loviya to‘kish), it loses its intended meaning. Instead, the translator must find a culturally relevant equivalent such as “sirni ochib qo‘yish”.

This paper aims to examine the main challenges that arise in translating idioms from English into Uzbek and to propose effective strategies for overcoming these challenges. By analyzing both theoretical foundations and practical examples, the study demonstrates the significance of cultural awareness in translation studies and highlights how idiomatic expressions can either enrich or complicate cross-cultural communication.

Literature Review

Translation of idioms has been widely discussed by scholars in translation studies and applied linguistics. Nida (1964) highlighted the importance of dynamic equivalence, where meaning and effect take priority over literal word-for-word translation. Baker (1992) emphasized that idioms are among the most problematic aspects of translation because of their cultural specificity and figurative nature.

Scholars like Newmark (1988) have argued that finding functional equivalents is often the best strategy, although this is not always possible. In such cases, descriptive translation or paraphrasing may be required to convey the original meaning. Larson (1984) also noted that translators should pay attention to both the semantic and pragmatic aspects of idioms, as they often serve not only to convey information but also to create stylistic or emotional effects.

In the Uzbek context, researchers such as Karimov (2015) and Abdullaeva (2020) have studied the role of phraseological units in translation. Their findings suggest that while Uzbek has a rich inventory of idiomatic expressions, cultural mismatches often prevent direct equivalence. For example, English idioms related to baseball or Western lifestyle may not resonate with Uzbek readers unless adapted creatively.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, focusing on textual analysis of idioms commonly used in English and their potential translations into Uzbek. A sample of 50 English idioms was selected from dictionaries, literary works, and media sources. Each idiom was analyzed in terms of its literal meaning, figurative meaning, and possible Uzbek equivalents.

The analysis followed three main steps:

1. Identification of idioms – idiomatic expressions were chosen based on frequency and cultural significance.
2. Comparison with Uzbek equivalents – literal translations were compared with functional or culturally adapted equivalents.
3. Evaluation of strategies – the effectiveness of different translation strategies (literal, equivalent, descriptive, omission/adaptation) was assessed.

This method allowed for a systematic examination of the challenges and solutions in idiom translation.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed several important findings:

1. Equivalence Exists in Some Cases: About 25% of the idioms had direct or close equivalents in Uzbek, such as “break the ice – muzni sindirish”, which shows cultural and linguistic similarity.
2. Functional Equivalence More Common: The majority of idioms (around 45%) required functional equivalents rather than literal translations. For instance, “spill the beans” had to be translated as “sirni ochib qo‘yish” rather than its literal meaning.
3. Cultural Gaps Present Significant Challenges: Approximately 20% of idioms, particularly those related to Western culture, sports, or religion, had no equivalents in Uzbek. These required adaptation or explanatory translation.
4. Risk of Losing Stylistic Value: Even when the meaning is conveyed, the stylistic or humorous effect of the idiom is often lost in translation, which can impact the overall tone of the text.

These findings suggest that while some idioms can be translated directly, many require creativity and cultural adaptation. Translators must carefully choose strategies depending on the context, purpose, and audience of the translation.

Conclusion

The translation of idioms from English into Uzbek represents one of the most intricate challenges in the field of translation studies. Idioms are not only linguistic



constructs but also cultural artifacts that embody the history, traditions, and worldview of a particular society. Because of their figurative meanings, they often resist literal translation and require a deeper cultural and contextual understanding. This research has shown that while some idioms allow for direct equivalence between English and Uzbek, the majority demand functional equivalents, descriptive strategies, or cultural adaptation to preserve both meaning and communicative effect.

The results of the study suggest that translators must develop a dual competence: linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. A translator who relies solely on lexical knowledge may produce inaccurate or unnatural renderings, while a culturally sensitive translator is more likely to deliver translations that resonate with the target audience. Moreover, translators should be aware of the pragmatic functions of idioms, as they often serve not only to convey meaning but also to create humor, irony, emphasis, or stylistic flavor. Losing these elements in translation can significantly alter the reader's perception of the text.

Another important conclusion of this study is that idiom translation plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication. Successful translation of idioms contributes to intercultural understanding by allowing readers to access the cultural nuances and values embedded in the source language. At the same time, inappropriate or overly literal translations can lead to miscommunication, cultural misunderstandings, and even negative stereotypes.

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