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THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: Idioms are an important component of language because they express ideas, emotions, and cultural concepts in a concise and figurative form. However, their translation presents considerable difficulties because their meanings often cannot be understood by translating their individual words literally. This is particularly relevant to English–Uzbek translation, as the two languages differ in their linguistic structures, cultural backgrounds, and systems of figurative expression. This paper examines the main challenges involved in translating English idioms into Uzbek, focusing on semantic differences, cultural specificity, the lack of direct equivalents, and contextual meaning. It also considers several translation strategies, including the use of equivalent idioms, paraphrasing, descriptive translation, and cultural substitution. The analysis demonstrates that successful idiom translation requires more than linguistic knowledge; translators also need to understand the cultural and contextual meanings underlying idiomatic expressions. Therefore, an effective translation should preserve the intended meaning and communicative effect of an idiom while producing a natural expression in the target language.

Keywords: idioms, English–Uzbek translation, translation challenges, semantic equivalence, cultural specificity, translation strategies, phraseology

Introduction

Translation is not simply the process of replacing words from one language with words from another. An effective translation requires the transfer of meaning, communicative intention, and, where possible, cultural associations from the source language to the target language. This becomes particularly challenging when translating idiomatic expressions. Idioms are fixed or relatively fixed expressions whose overall meanings cannot always be derived from the meanings of their individual components. Consequently, literal translation may result in an unnatural, unclear, or completely incorrect expression in the target language.

Idioms play an important role in English because they are frequently used in everyday communication, journalism, literature, films, and other forms of discourse. Expressions such as *break the ice*, *spill the beans*, and *hit the nail on the head* have meanings that extend beyond the literal meanings of their individual words. A translator who focuses only on the lexical meaning of each word may therefore fail to communicate the intended message. Recent research on English–Uzbek idiom translation similarly identifies figurative meaning, cultural specificity, and the absence of direct equivalents as major challenges.

The problem becomes more complex when English idioms are translated into Uzbek because idiomatic expressions are closely connected with the cultural and historical



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experiences of language communities. An image that is familiar and meaningful to English speakers may not have the same association for Uzbek speakers. As a result, an English idiom may have a direct Uzbek equivalent, a partially corresponding expression, or no idiomatic equivalent at all. In such cases, translators must select an appropriate strategy to preserve the intended meaning and communicative effect.

For example, the English idiom “*break the ice*” does not normally refer to physically breaking ice. It describes the act of making people feel more comfortable and beginning a friendly interaction. Translating the expression word for word would not communicate this meaning effectively. Depending on the context, a translator may therefore need to use an Uzbek expression with a similar meaning or explain the meaning through a descriptive translation.

Translation scholars have proposed different approaches to dealing with such problems. Common strategies include using an idiom with a similar meaning and form, using an idiom with a similar meaning but different form, paraphrasing the expression, and omitting an idiomatic element when no satisfactory equivalent is available. Recent English–Uzbek studies also emphasize equivalence, paraphrasing, cultural adaptation, and descriptive translation as practical approaches to idiomatic translation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the major challenges involved in translating English idioms into Uzbek and to identify appropriate strategies for overcoming these difficulties. Particular attention is given to semantic and cultural differences between English and Uzbek and to the importance of context in selecting an appropriate translation. The paper argues that successful idiom translation requires both linguistic competence and cultural awareness, since preserving the communicative meaning of an idiom is often more important than maintaining its literal linguistic form.

1. Major Challenges in Translating English Idioms into Uzbek

Translating idioms from English into Uzbek presents several linguistic and cultural challenges. The difficulties arise because idioms are not simply combinations of individual words; they often express meanings that depend on metaphor, cultural knowledge, and context. Therefore, a translator needs to identify the intended meaning of an idiom before selecting an appropriate expression in Uzbek.

The first major difficulty is the difference between literal and figurative meaning. An idiom may contain words whose individual meanings are completely different from the meaning of the expression as a whole. For instance, the English idiom “*spill the beans*” literally refers to spilling beans, whereas its idiomatic meaning is “to reveal a secret.” Translating the expression word for word would therefore fail to communicate its intended meaning. A meaning-based translation such as *sirni oshkor qilmoq* is more appropriate in Uzbek.

Similarly, “*break the ice*” does not refer to physically breaking ice. It means to make people feel more comfortable and begin a friendly interaction. An appropriate Uzbek translation should therefore communicate the communicative function of the expression rather than reproduce its individual lexical components.

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Idioms are strongly connected with the culture in which they develop. They may contain references to traditions, food, historical events, social practices, animals, or objects that have particular cultural associations. As a result, an expression that is immediately understandable to English speakers may be unfamiliar to Uzbek readers.

For example, the English expression “*cry over spilt milk*” refers to regretting something that has already happened and cannot be changed. A culturally appropriate Uzbek expression such as *o‘tgan ishga salovat* can communicate a similar idea without preserving the original image. Such examples demonstrate that cultural adaptation can sometimes be more effective than literal translation. Recent English–Uzbek research similarly identifies cultural adaptation as an important strategy when the imagery of an English idiom does not have a natural equivalent in Uzbek.

Another important challenge is the absence of a direct idiomatic equivalent in Uzbek. Some English idioms have expressions in Uzbek with almost the same meaning and similar imagery, while others do not.

For example, “*keep an eye on*” can be translated by the Uzbek expression *ko‘z-quloq bo‘lmoq*, which conveys a similar meaning through a different linguistic form. In such cases, the translator does not need to preserve the exact structure of the English idiom. Instead, the priority is to preserve its meaning and communicative function.

When no appropriate Uzbek idiom exists, paraphrasing may be necessary. Recent comparative research indicates that paraphrase is frequently used in English–Uzbek idiom translation when an exact equivalent is unavailable.

Context is another essential factor in idiom translation. The same expression may have different interpretations depending on the situation in which it is used. Therefore, translators should consider the surrounding text, the relationship between speakers, the purpose of communication, and the stylistic level of the source text.

For example, an idiom used humorously in a conversation may require a different translation from the same expression used in a serious literary context. A translation that is semantically correct but inappropriate for the context may still fail to reproduce the intended effect of the original.

2. Strategies for Translating English Idioms into Uzbek

Different strategies can be used to overcome the difficulties described above. The appropriate strategy depends on the relationship between the source idiom and possible expressions in the target language.

The most successful situation occurs when an Uzbek idiom exists that expresses approximately the same meaning and produces a similar communicative effect. In such cases, the translator can replace the English idiom with the corresponding Uzbek expression.

For example:

English: *Keep an eye on the child.*

Uzbek: *Bolaga ko‘z-quloq bo‘lib tur.*



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Although the grammatical structure is different, both expressions communicate the idea of watching or taking care of someone. This is an example of functional equivalence, where the communicative meaning is preserved rather than the exact form.

When no suitable Uzbek idiom exists, the meaning can be expressed through a non-idiomatic phrase. This strategy prioritizes clarity and semantic accuracy.

For example:

English: *Spill the beans.*

Uzbek: *Sirni oshkor qilmoq.*

The figurative image of the original expression is lost, but its intended meaning is preserved. This approach is particularly useful when clarity is more important than stylistic similarity. Comparative English–Uzbek research identifies paraphrasing as one of the frequently used approaches to idiom translation.

Cultural substitution involves replacing a source-language idiom with a target-language expression that is culturally familiar to the target audience and communicates a similar idea.

For example:

English: *Cry over spilt milk.*

Uzbek: *O'tgan ishga salovat.*

The literal images are different, but both expressions communicate the idea that there is little value in regretting something that has already happened. This strategy can make a translation more natural for Uzbek readers while maintaining its communicative purpose.

In some cases, an idiom can be translated by briefly explaining its meaning. This strategy is useful when an expression has a highly culture-specific meaning and no natural Uzbek equivalent exists.

Although descriptive translation may reduce the figurative character of the original, it can ensure that the reader understands the intended message. Therefore, the translator must decide whether preserving the metaphor or preserving the meaning is more important in the particular context.

3. Examples of English–Uzbek Idiom Translation

The following examples demonstrate how different strategies can be applied:

English idiom	Meaning	Possible Uzbek rendering	Strategy
<i>Break the ice</i>	Start a friendly interaction	<i>Suhbatga kirishib ketmoq / muhitni yumshatmoq</i>	Paraphrase
<i>Spill the beans</i>	Reveal a secret	<i>Sirni oshkor qilmoq</i>	Paraphrase
<i>Cry over spilt milk</i>	Regret something that cannot be changed	<i>O'tgan ishga salovat</i>	Cultural substitution
<i>Keep an eye on</i>	Watch or take care of someone	<i>Ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq</i>	Functional equivalent
<i>A piece of cake</i>	Something very easy	<i>Juda oson</i>	Paraphrase



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English idiom	Meaning	Possible Uzbek rendering	Strategy
Hit the nail on the head	Describe something exactly/rightly	Gapning to 'g'risini aytmoq / aniq topmoq	Functional translation

These examples demonstrate that there is no single translation method suitable for every idiom. The translator needs to consider the semantic meaning, cultural background, communicative situation, and stylistic characteristics of the original expression. The primary goal is to produce a natural target-language expression that communicates the intended message to the reader.

Conclusion

The translation of English idioms into Uzbek is a complex process that requires more than knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Because idioms frequently contain figurative meanings, cultural references, and context-dependent expressions, their translation can present significant linguistic and cultural challenges. Literal translation is often ineffective because the meaning of an idiom cannot necessarily be understood from the meanings of its individual words.

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that the major difficulties in English–Uzbek idiom translation include semantic differences, cultural specificity, the absence of direct equivalents, and the influence of context. An English idiom may have a close Uzbek equivalent, but in many cases translators need to use paraphrasing, functional equivalence, cultural substitution, or descriptive translation.

The examples discussed in the paper also demonstrate that the translator's primary responsibility is to communicate the intended meaning and communicative function of the source expression. For example, expressions such as *spill the beans* and *a piece of cake* may be more effectively translated by conveying their figurative meanings rather than reproducing their literal forms. In other cases, an Uzbek expression with a comparable cultural meaning may provide a more natural solution.

Cultural competence is therefore an essential component of successful idiom translation. A translator should understand not only the linguistic structure of the source and target languages but also the cultural associations and communicative contexts in which expressions are used. The choice of translation strategy should consequently depend on the specific idiom, its context, the target audience, and the purpose of the translation.

In conclusion, successful English–Uzbek idiom translation requires a balance between semantic accuracy, naturalness, and cultural appropriateness. No single strategy can be applied to all idiomatic expressions. Instead, translators should critically evaluate each expression and select the method that most effectively preserves its intended meaning and communicative effect.

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