

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF TRANSLATING ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL
UNITS INTO UZBEK

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Annotation: This paper examines the cultural challenges and strategies involved in translating English phraseological units into Uzbek. Phraseological units—such as idioms, proverbs, and fixed expressions—often carry meanings deeply rooted in cultural contexts, historical events, and social norms. The study analyzes examples where direct translation fails to convey intended meanings, leading to potential misunderstandings or loss of nuance. It explores methods like cultural adaptation, descriptive translation, and the search for functional equivalents in Uzbek to preserve both meaning and stylistic effect. The paper highlights the importance of cultural competence for translators and underscores how linguistic creativity can bridge gaps between English and Uzbek cultures, ensuring accurate and culturally sensitive translations.

Key words: Phraseological units, Idioms, Translation, Cultural adaptation, Equivalence, Uzbek language, English language, Cross-cultural communication, Linguistic meaning, Cultural context, Translation strategies, Semantic nuances, Intercultural competence, Figurative language.

Introduction: Translation is far more than substituting words between languages. It is a cultural negotiation, especially when dealing with phraseological units such as idioms, proverbs, and fixed expressions. These linguistic elements are deeply embedded in the history, beliefs, and everyday life of a speech community. When translating English phraseological units into Uzbek, translators encounter challenges that go beyond vocabulary and grammar—they must bridge cultural concepts that often have no direct equivalents. This article explores the cultural aspects involved in translating English phraseological units into Uzbek, discussing the nature of these expressions, the cultural gaps they create, and strategies translators employ to produce accurate and culturally appropriate renditions.

Main body:

Understanding Phraseological Units

Phraseological units refer to combinations of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of their individual parts. For instance, the English idiom “spill the beans” means to reveal a secret, not to literally pour out beans. Similarly, proverbs like “A stitch in time saves nine” encapsulate wisdom rooted in cultural norms and historical contexts. These expressions serve multiple functions—they add color and style, convey cultural identity, and compress complex ideas into a few words. Translating them requires a grasp not only of linguistic forms but also of cultural meanings.

Cultural Barriers in Translation

One major obstacle in translating English phraseological units into Uzbek is the cultural specificity of many expressions. English idioms often stem from historical events, folklore, literature, or cultural practices unfamiliar to Uzbek speakers. For example:

“Carry coals to Newcastle” references the English coal industry and the redundancy of bringing coal to a place already abundant in it. Uzbek readers may not understand the geographical or economic background behind this phrase.

“Bite the bullet” originates from wartime surgery practices where soldiers bit on bullets to endure pain. The imagery and historical context are specific to English-speaking cultures.

Another issue is that Uzbek culture has its own phraseological stock, often shaped by different religious, social, or environmental factors. A direct translation might distort meaning or cause confusion. For example:

The English proverb “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” has a similar Uzbek equivalent: “Tuxumdan jo’ja sanama,” meaning “Don’t count chicks from the egg.” In this case, cultural overlap allows a relatively straightforward translation. But such overlaps are not always available.

Moreover, some English idioms rely on humor, irony, or puns, which can be extremely difficult to transfer into Uzbek without losing their effect.

Translation Strategies

Faced with these challenges, translators adopt various strategies to ensure the translated text is meaningful and culturally resonant. Key strategies include:

1. Equivalence (Finding Uzbek Counterparts)

When possible, translators replace English phraseological units with existing Uzbek equivalents that convey the same meaning and emotional impact. For instance, translating “Every cloud has a silver lining” to “Har bir yomonlikning bir yaxshiligi bor” (“Every bad thing has a good side”) preserves both message and cultural relevance.

2. Literal Translation

Sometimes, literal translation is attempted if the meaning is universal and the imagery can be understood cross-culturally. However, this works only for expressions that do not depend on culturally specific references.

3. Descriptive Translation or Paraphrase

When no equivalent exists, translators may explain the meaning in simpler terms. For example, “Kick the bucket” might be rendered as “vafot etmoq” (“to die”) rather than a literal translation, which would sound absurd in Uzbek.

4. Adaptation

Adaptation involves changing the imagery or reference to fit the target culture. For instance, instead of “as busy as a bee,” a translator might choose an Uzbek expression about being diligent or hardworking, using culturally familiar metaphors.

5. Omission

In some rare cases, if an idiom contributes little to the overall meaning or would disrupt comprehension, it might be omitted. However, this is generally a last resort, as it risks flattening the stylistic color of the text.

Importance of Cultural Competence

A successful translation demands cultural competence—a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures. Translators must recognize the social norms, beliefs, and historical contexts shaping phraseological units. Without this cultural insight, translations can end up awkward, misleading, or even offensive.

Consider humor and taboos: certain English idioms involving pigs or dogs may carry negative connotations in Uzbek, a culture influenced heavily by Islamic traditions, where certain animals hold different symbolic meanings. Sensitivity to such cultural factors is crucial for avoiding miscommunication.

Case Studies

To illustrate the challenges and solutions, consider these examples:

“To let the cat out of the bag.”

Literal translation would confuse Uzbek readers. A suitable Uzbek equivalent might be “yashirin sirni ochib qo‘ymoq” (“to reveal a hidden secret”).

“The ball is in your court.”

A literal translation about a “ball” and “court” may be meaningless in Uzbek. Translators often rephrase it as “navbat senga keldi” (“now it’s your turn”).

Such examples show that translating phraseological units is not mechanical but requires creative thinking, cultural knowledge, and stylistic sensitivity.

Conclusion: Translating English phraseological units into Uzbek is a complex task that lies at the intersection of language and culture. Phraseological units are linguistic mirrors reflecting the life, values, and worldview of a society. Successful translation demands more than bilingual skills; it requires cultural awareness and creative problem-solving to preserve both meaning and stylistic flavor. As globalization continues to bring languages and cultures into closer contact, the ability to navigate these cultural nuances becomes increasingly vital. For translators working between English and Uzbek, understanding the cultural underpinnings of phraseological units is essential for crafting translations that resonate, inform, and connect across cultural boundaries.

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