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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TRANSLATING IDIOMS IN THE CONTEXT OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: Idioms jocularly embody the culture of a society. Their interpretation is a puzzling task because they contain multilayered semantics. The objective of the research is to develop adequate models for translating idioms from English into Uzbekistan by employing functional equivalence, Skopos theory, and taxonomy by Vinay and Darbelnet. Under this goal, it investigates common problems: structural, cultural, and semantic, providing context-sensitive strategies like adaption, paraphrase, substitution, and omission. This work's contribution is showing how a translator can balance idiomaticity and culture while following target language rules.

Keywords: idioms, translation strategies, English, Uzbek, functional equivalence, paraphrase, adaptation

Introduction. Paraphrastic Idioms are phrases that possess fixed or semi-deterministic clauses which are idiomatic expressions. Translating idioms require more than just bi-licency etymological awareness, it requires sociolinguistic depth. Working in English and Uzbek languages, the differences in syntactic freeze, chronological evolution, and underlying metaphoric architecture escalate the complications.

Literature review. Translation scholars including Eugene Nida, Mona Baker, Peter Newmark, and Christiane Nord have proposed methodologies for tackling idiomatic expressions. Each of them contributes to the understanding that idioms resist direct translation and instead require flexible, culturally informed strategies. This article explores these theories and applies them to English-Uzbek idiom translation, supported by examples, classification, and strategic analysis.

One of the foundational concepts in idiom translation is Eugene Nida's theory of dynamic or functional equivalence, which emphasizes reproducing the same effect on the target language (TL) reader as intended for the source language (SL) reader (Nida, 1964). According to Nida, "translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message" (p. 166). This means that literal translation of idioms is often inadequate because it risks semantic distortion and loss of cultural meaning.

In contrast, Skopos theory, as developed by Vermeer and elaborated by Nord (1997), places the translator's goal at the center of the process. It defines translation as a purposeful activity that serves the target audience in a specific communicative situation. This approach is particularly valuable when idioms in the source culture have no direct counterpart in the target language.

Mona Baker (1992) classifies idiom translation strategies into four major categories:
1. Using an idiom of similar meaning and form
2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form

3.   Translating by paraphrase

4.   Translating by omission

These models provide a practical foundation for translating idioms from English into Uzbek and vice versa. In this article, these strategies will be demonstrated and analyzed through contextual examples.

Each idiomatic expression must be treated individually, based on context, audience, and translation purpose. Below we can see common strategies supported by translation theorists and illustrated with English-Uzbek pairs.

1. Literal Translation

Literal translation is feasible when both languages share a similar conceptual metaphor. For instance, the English idiom "bite one's tongue" and the Uzbek "tilini tishlamoq" both mean to stop oneself from speaking. In this case, direct translation works because the idiomatic imagery overlaps.

2. Paraphrase

Discussion. When no equivalent idiom exists in the target language, paraphrasing is often necessary. For example, "kick the bucket", meaning "to die," has no metaphorical match in Uzbek, so it is translated as "vafot etmoq" (to pass away) to retain the intended meaning.

3. Functional Substitution

In some cases, a similar idiom exists in the target language but uses different words or metaphors. For example, the English "break the ice" (to initiate a conversation) may be translated as "suhbatni boshlamoq", a more neutral form lacking imagery but functionally equivalent.

4. Cultural Adaptation

This involves replacing an idiom with a culturally appropriate expression in the TL. For instance, "burn the midnight oil" (to work late into the night) might be rendered in Uzbek as "tunlari uxlamay ishlamoq" (to work through the night).

Below is a selection of English idioms with their literal meanings, Uzbek equivalents, and the translation strategies used:

Table 1: Examples of English-Uzbek Idioms and Their Translations

English Idiom	Literal Meaning	Uzbek Equivalent	Strategy
Kick the bucket	To die	Vafot etmoq	Paraphrase
Bite one's tongue	Hold back from speaking	Tilini tishlamoq	Direct equivalence
Break the ice	Ease social tension	Suhbatni boshlamoq	Paraphrase
Spill the beans	Reveal a secret	Sirni oshkor qilmoq	Paraphrase
Burn the midnight oil	Work late	Tunni tongga ulamoq	Cultural Adaptation
A dime a dozen	Very common	Itdayam, bitdayam	Functional Substitution

		bor	
Armed to the teeth	Heavily armed	Tishigacha qurollangan	Direct equivalence
Raining cats and dogs	Heavy rain	Yomg'ir quyib yog'moqda	Paraphrase/Adaptation

This table highlights how idioms are not merely linguistic elements but culturally and semantically rich expressions. Each strategy involves assessing the communicative function and pragmatic context of the original expression, not just its words.

One of the most significant challenges in translating idioms lies in cultural specificity. Idioms often reflect the social norms, history, values, and shared knowledge of a particular community. The English idiom "raining cats and dogs", for instance, may sound bizarre when translated literally into Uzbek. It is believed to have originated from the conditions of 17th-century English housing, where storms would wash animals out of thatched roofs. Since this imagery has no cultural relevance in Uzbekistan, the idiom must be adapted into a phrase like "yomg'ir shiddat bilan/quyib yog'moqda" ("It is raining heavily") to make sense to the target reader.

Structural challenges also arise from grammatical differences. English idioms are often fixed in form and allow little or no grammatical variation (Baker, 1992). In contrast, Uzbek idioms, being part of an agglutinative language, exhibit morphological flexibility. For instance, "tilini tishlamoq" (to bite one's tongue) can appear in various conjugated forms in Uzbek, while its English equivalent remains relatively rigid.

These differences underscore the need for translators to think beyond literal semantics and instead focus on function, audience, and cultural resonance.

As Nida (1964) asserted, effective translation involves achieving the closest natural equivalent in terms of meaning and impact, not necessarily in form. This becomes critical when translating idioms because preserving cultural tone and emotional resonance often requires departing from a literal approach. For example, translating "a piece of cake" as "juda oson" in Uzbek maintains the idiom's function, expressing ease, even though the metaphor is lost.

Skopos theory complements functional equivalence by stressing that the purpose of the translation determines the strategy. If the goal is to inform (e.g., in educational contexts), paraphrase may be preferred. If the aim is to entertain (e.g., in literature), adaptation or creative substitution may be used to retain the stylistic tone.

This goal-oriented framework empowers translators to evaluate not just what is said, but why and how. For example, the idiom "break a leg", traditionally used to wish someone good luck in performance settings, must be rendered in a way that avoids confusion in Uzbek, where a literal rendering would sound negative. A translator might choose "Omad yor bo'lsin" (May luck be with you), thereby respecting the communicative purpose.

Skopos theory, therefore, shifts the translator's focus from language fidelity to functional suitability, allowing for flexibility when dealing with idioms that are culturally entrenched.

Translation is not purely linguistic, it is also pragmatic, meaning it involves interpreting speaker intention, contextual meaning, and reader expectations. Relevance theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson and applied to translation by Huang and Wang (2006), suggests that communication depends on contextual inferences. The translator must judge which meaning is most relevant for the target audience with minimal processing effort.

When translating idioms, relevance theory advises choosing expressions that provide adequate contextual effects, meaning that the reader should grasp the implied message without confusion. Consider the English idiom "to let the cat out of the bag", meaning to reveal a secret. If translated literally into Uzbek, it would cause confusion. Instead, using "sirni oshkor qilish" (to reveal a secret) provides clearer relevance and preserves meaning.

This also reflects how pragmatic translation focuses not just on lexical equivalence but on how language functions in real interaction. Translators must understand idioms as speech acts: some are used to express warning, others encouragement, sarcasm, or humor. For instance, translating "hit the sack" (to go to bed) literally would confuse an Uzbek reader, so a neutral paraphrase like "uyquga yotmoq" is appropriate.

Thus, pragmatics reinforces the idea that the best translation is one that resonates meaningfully within the social, linguistic, and cultural framework of the target audience.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the process of translating idioms between English and Uzbek is far more than a lexical exercise; it is a dynamic negotiation between cultures, functions, and linguistic systems. As Baker (1992) notes, idioms are "frozen patterns of language" that offer little flexibility in structure or form (p. 63). They often carry connotations, emotional force, and stylistic nuance that cannot be translated literally. This is particularly evident in cases like "raining cats and dogs", where literal translation would result in incomprehensibility unless adapted or paraphrased.

Nida's (1964) emphasis on functional equivalence reminds us that translation should recreate the intended response, not just replicate surface structure (p. 166). Nord (1997) similarly insists on purpose-driven choices, where translators consider audience, context, and communicative intent (p. 12).

Relevance theory contributes further by highlighting the need for cognitive effectiveness: the translator should ensure that idioms are rendered in ways that are easy to understand while preserving intended meanings (Huang & Wang, 2006).

The translator's role, then, is not simply to decode and re-encode, but to interpret, reconstruct, and mediate between worldviews. Translators must make informed decisions about when to paraphrase, adapt, substitute, or omit, based on purpose, audience, and idiomatic familiarity. Idioms, in this context, are not obstacles but opportunities for creative, informed, and strategic thinking.

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