



PHRASEOLOGICAL LACUNAE IN THE ENGLISH-UZBEK LANGUAGE PAIR: A COGNITIVE-CONTRASTIVE TYPOLOGY AND COMPENSATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract. The article develops a cognitive-contrastive account of phraseological lacunae in the English-Uzbek language pair. Whereas classical lacunology described gaps primarily at the lexical level, the present study argues that the phraseological level is the site at which cross-linguistic gaps are most consequential, because a phraseological unit encodes not only a meaning but an image, an evaluation and a culturally anchored inferential route. On the basis of material drawn from authoritative English and Uzbek phraseological dictionaries, a four-step identification procedure is proposed and a five-type typology is established: absolute, relative (vehicle-based), stylistic-connotative, associative-evaluative and reverse lacunae.

Keywords: phraseological lacuna; lacunology; contrastive phraseology; English; Uzbek; conceptual metaphor; source domain; linguoculturology; translation strategy; functional analogue

Introduction

The observation that languages differ not only in what they say but in what they leave unsaid is older than the terminology now used to describe it. Ch. Hockett's comparison of Chinese and English introduced the notion of a systematic 'gap' in the inventory of one language relative to another [1], and the concept was subsequently elaborated within the Russian-language tradition of lacunology, where Yu. Sorokin and I. Markovina defined the lacuna as a signal of the non-coincidence of two national-cultural conceptual systems, detectable precisely at the points where a text resists translation [2]. Parallel work by E. Vereshchagin and V. Kostomarov established the culturally loaded lexeme as the operational unit of such analysis [3].

Most of this tradition, however, has concentrated on the lexical level: untranslatable nouns, culture-bound realia, terminological voids. The phraseological level has received markedly less systematic attention, although it is arguably where the phenomenon is most acute. A phraseological unit is not merely a lexeme with a complex form. Following V. Telia, it is a sign whose meaning is inseparable from its inner form, its evaluative charge and its culturally sanctioned scenario [13]; in A. Kunin's terms, its stability is simultaneously structural, semantic and pragmatic [12]. When two languages fail to match at this level, what is lost is therefore not only reference but imagery, evaluation and the inferential route by which the hearer arrives at the intended sense.

Cognitive linguistics supplies the explanatory apparatus that classical lacunology lacked. If, as G. Lakoff and M. Johnson argued, figurative language is the surface manifestation of conceptual mappings from source to target domains [4], then a phraseological gap between two languages is the visible trace of a difference in the inventory or the elaboration of source domains available to each culture. Z. Kövecses's work on metaphor variation makes this prediction explicit: the target concept may be shared while the preferred vehicle differs

according to cultural experience [5]. A. Wierzbicka's analyses of culture-key words provide the complementary semantic argument — that certain concepts are so densely elaborated in one language and so thinly represented in another that no single-word correspondence is possible [6].

The English–Uzbek pair is a productive testing ground for this claim: the two languages are genetically unrelated, typologically distinct and culturally distant, yet both possess richly developed phraseological systems. Existing English–Uzbek contrastive work has tended either to catalogue equivalents without a typology of non-equivalence, or to treat non-equivalence as a translation problem rather than a linguocultural datum. The present study addresses that gap.

The aim of the article is to establish a cognitively motivated typology of phraseological lacunae in the English–Uzbek language pair and to determine the strategies by which such lacunae are compensated.

The objectives are: (1) to define the phraseological lacuna operationally and to distinguish it from mere absence of a dictionary equivalent; (2) to formulate a replicable four-step identification procedure; (3) to construct and illustrate a typology of phraseological lacunae; (4) to establish the source-domain asymmetries that motivate the largest class of lacunae; (5) to describe and evaluate the compensation strategies available to the translator and the lexicographer.

The object of research is the phraseological systems of English and Uzbek in their contrastive projection; the subject is the typology, cognitive motivation and compensation of phraseological lacunae in this pair.

The scientific novelty of the study consists in (a) the reorientation of lacuna analysis from the lexical to the phraseological level with an explicitly cognitive criterion of classification — the source domain rather than the referent; (b) the introduction of the category of relative (vehicle-based) lacuna as the principal class in this pair, previously subsumed under 'partial equivalence'; (c) the demonstration that the Uzbek ko'ngil complex constitutes a systemic lacuna zone with respect to English rather than an isolated lexical gap.

Materials and Methods

The empirical basis consists of phraseological units extracted from authoritative lexicographic sources in both languages. For English: the Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms [16] and the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms [17]. For Uzbek: Sh. Rahmatullayev's explanatory phraseological dictionary of the Uzbek language [14] and the five-volume Annotated Dictionary of the Uzbek Language [15]. Only units registered in at least one of these sources were admitted to the analysis; occasional or author-specific figurative expressions were excluded, since their non-correspondence would not constitute a systemic lacuna.

A phraseological lacuna is defined here as a systemic absence in language B of a phraseological unit that matches a unit of language A simultaneously in (i) denotative meaning, (ii) inner form or vehicle, (iii) evaluative-stylistic charge and (iv) combinatorial and discursive behaviour. Non-correspondence in any one of these parameters yields a lacuna of the corresponding type. This definition deliberately excludes the trivial case of an absent dictionary gloss: a lacuna is a property of the system, not of a particular dictionary. Each unit was processed in four steps. Step 1 — semantic explication: the meaning of the source unit is restated in non-figurative language, following the componential procedure of phraseological semantics [12]. Step 2 — vehicle identification: the inner form is described in terms of its source

domain [4; 5]. Step 3 — counterpart search: the target-language dictionaries are searched for a unit matching the explication, and the match is evaluated against the four parameters of 2.2. Step 4 — classification: the pair is assigned to a lacuna type, or to the class of full equivalents if all four parameters coincide.

Methods. The study applies the comparative-contrastive method as its general frame; componential and definitional analysis for semantic explication; conceptual metaphor analysis for the identification of source domains [4; 5]; the linguoculturological method for the interpretation of evaluative charge [13]; and the classification of translation procedures established by J.-P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet [9] and refined for non-equivalence by M. Baker [7] and P. Newmark [8] for the description of compensation strategies. All Uzbek and English units cited below are dictionary-registered. Literal renderings are given in single quotation marks and serve to expose the inner form; they are not translation proposals. The study is qualitative and typological: no frequency statistics are claimed, since neither language pair possesses a balanced parallel corpus of sufficient size for reliable quantification — a limitation discussed.

Results

Application of the procedure yielded five types, ordered below by increasing degree of correspondence between the languages. The unit of language A has no counterpart in language B either in form or in function, because its inner form rests on a referent absent from the target culture — a toponym, an anthroponym, a historical event or an institutional practice. Such units are not merely hard to translate; they are culturally opaque, and a literal rendering communicates nothing at all to the Uzbek reader (Table 1).

Table 1. Absolute lacunae: English units with culture-bound inner form

English unit	Inner form (literal)	Meaning	Motivating referent
to carry coals to Newcastle	'to bring coal to Newcastle'	to do something superfluous	British coal-mining geography
to meet one's Waterloo	'to meet one's Waterloo'	to suffer a decisive defeat	European military history
to keep up with the Joneses	'to keep pace with the Joneses'	to compete with neighbours in consumption	Anglo-American anthroponymy and suburban culture
to throw in the towel	'to throw the towel into the ring'	to admit defeat, to give up	boxing ritual
to take a rain check	'to take a rain voucher'	to decline now but accept later	North American baseball practice
Dutch courage	'Dutch courage'	boldness induced by alcohol	early modern Anglo-Dutch rivalry
a baker's dozen	'a baker's dozen'	thirteen	medieval English bread-trade regulation

A parallel set exists at the lexical periphery of phraseology: English privacy, small talk, fair play and understatement have no single Uzbek correspondent, each requiring a descriptive expansion. This confirms Wierzbicka's thesis that the density of elaboration of a concept is itself a cultural fact [6].

Here the two languages converge on the same target concept but reach it through different source domains. The function is equivalent; the image is not. This class is the largest and the most theoretically instructive, since it demonstrates that the lacuna is located in the vehicle, not in the meaning — exactly the variation pattern predicted by Kövecses [5] (Table 2).

Table 2. Relative lacunae: shared concept, divergent vehicle

Concept	English unit (vehicle)	Uzbek unit (literal inner form)	Source-domain shift
NEVER	when pigs fly 'pigs in flight'	tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda 'when the camel's tail touches the ground'	farmyard animal → pastoral animal
EXTREME JOY	to be over the moon 'above the moon'	boshi osmonga yetdi 'his head reached the sky'	celestial motion → bodily elevation
HARMLESSNESS	wouldn't hurt a fly 'would not harm a fly'	qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagan 'has not taken a straw from a sheep's mouth'	insect → livestock husbandry
CUNNING	as sly as a fox 'fox-like'	ilonning yog'ini yalagan 'one who has licked the fat of a snake'	wild predator → reptile and bodily ingestion
DISCLOSING A SECRET	to let the cat out of the bag 'to release the cat'	og'zidan gullab qo'ymoq 'to let it flower out of one's mouth'	domestic animal / container → speech organ and plant growth
UNIMAGINABLE	never in one's wildest dreams	yetti uxlab tushiga kirmagan 'did not enter the dream even after sleeping seven times'	dream intensity → ritual numeral seven
ARROGANCE	to look down one's nose 'to look downward along the nose'	burnini ko'tarmoq 'to raise one's nose'	downward gaze → upward gesture (same organ, reversed vector)
FAILURE / EMPTY RETURN	to come away empty-handed	ikki qo'lini burniga tiqib qaytmoq 'to return with both hands stuck in one's nose'	absence of object → grotesque bodily posture

Two units in this set deserve separate comment. The pair to look down one's nose / burnini ko'tarmoq shows that an identical somatic component does not guarantee equivalence: both languages select the nose as the organ of arrogance, but English encodes the evaluation through the direction of the gaze and Uzbek through the elevation of the organ itself. The vector is reversed while the evaluation is preserved — a configuration that is invisible to referential analysis and appears only when the inner form is made explicit. Conversely, og'zi qulog'ida 'his mouth is at his ears' and English to grin from ear to ear coincide in meaning, vehicle and

evaluation alike, and therefore fall outside the lacuna set: full equivalence is possible where the source domain is the universally available human body in an unmarked configuration.

Denotative meaning and vehicle coincide, but the units occupy different registers or carry different intensities of evaluation, so that substitution distorts the tone of the text. English to kick the bucket denotes death with a markedly irreverent, colloquial charge; the Uzbek units of the same denotative field are distributed between a solemn, euphemistic pole and a coarse one, with no member occupying the same position on the register scale as the English unit. The translator who selects on denotation alone will therefore produce either an inappropriate solemnity or an inappropriate crudeness. The same asymmetry affects evaluative intensity: a unit that is mildly ironic in one language may be openly insulting in the other, which makes this type the most dangerous in practice precisely because a dictionary will present the pair as equivalent.

Conclusion: The article has argued that the phraseological level, rather than the lexical one, is the principal site of cross-linguistic lacunarity, because a phraseological unit encodes meaning, image, evaluation and inferential route simultaneously, and any of these may fail to correspond. A four-step identification procedure was proposed and applied to dictionary-registered material from English and Uzbek, yielding a five-type typology: absolute, relative (vehicle-based), stylistic-connotative, associative-evaluative and reverse lacunae.

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