

## TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF IDIOMS DENOTING “HUMAN APPEARANCES” IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

**Mukhtorova Difuza**

*UNIVERSITY OF EXACT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES*

*Faculty of Philology Foreign Language and Literature Department Student*

**Abstract.** Idioms are culturally-bound expressions that often resist literal translation. When idioms denote aspects of human appearance, they become even more challenging due to cultural differences, metaphorical meaning, and contextual usage. This article explores the major translation issues of idioms related to human appearances, using English and Uzbek as a case study, and discusses strategies to address these challenges.

**Key words:** idioms, translation problems, cultural non-equivalence, linguistic competence

**Аннотация.** Идиомы — это культурно обусловленные выражения, которые часто не поддаются буквальному переводу. Когда идиомы обозначают аспекты внешности человека, они становятся еще более сложными из-за культурных различий, метафорического значения и контекстного использования. В этой статье рассматриваются основные проблемы перевода идиом, связанных с внешностью человека, на примере английского и узбекского языков, а также обсуждаются стратегии решения этих проблем.

**Ключевые слова:** идиомы, проблемы перевода, культурная неэквивалентность, лингвистическая компетенция

**Annotatsiya.** Idiomalar madaniy jihatdan bog'langan iboralar bo'lib, ular ko'pincha so'zma-so'z tarjimaga qarshilik ko'rsatadi. Idiomalar inson qiyofasining tomonlarini bildirganda, ular madaniy farqlar, metaforik ma'no va kontekstual foydalanish tufayli yanada qiyinlashadi. Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillaridan misol tariqasida inson ko'rinishi bilan bog'liq idiomalarni tarjima qilishning asosiy masalalari o'rganiladi va bu muammolarni hal qilish strategiyalari muhokama qilinadi.

**Kalit soʻzlar:** idiomalar, tarjima muammolari, madaniy noekvivalentlik, lingvistik kompetensiya

Idioms are integral to natural language use, yet they pose significant challenges in translation. Idioms related to human appearance-such as “to turn heads” or “as thin as a rake”-do more than describe physical traits; they carry cultural and figurative meanings. Accurate translation requires not just linguistic competence but also cultural awareness.

Idioms are a vibrant and expressive part of any language, often reflecting a culture’s unique worldview, history, and social norms. Among the most vivid idiomatic expressions are those that describe human appearances, which not only convey physical traits but also imply judgments, emotions, and attitudes. Idioms like “as fit as a fiddle”, “butterface”, or “to turn heads” are common in English, yet they are rarely translatable word-for-word into another language without risking a loss of meaning or cultural relevance.

Translating such idioms presents a particular challenge, as it involves more than linguistic equivalence-it requires cultural and contextual sensitivity. While some languages may offer a close idiomatic equivalent, others may lack a matching expression, forcing the translator to choose between preserving form, function, or effect. This article explores the main issues that arise in translating idioms that denote human appearance, focusing on their metaphorical nature, cultural specificity, and the potential for misinterpretation. It also outlines translation strategies that can help maintain the communicative and stylistic impact of these expressions in the target language.

Idioms that describe human appearances are typically rich in metaphor and often draw on exaggerated imagery. They are not used simply to convey physical descriptions, but also to express admiration, criticism, humor, or sarcasm. For example, the English idiom “as thin as a rake” not only describes someone who is very slim, but also does so through an image that adds vividness and informality. Similarly, “to have a baby face” implies youthfulness and innocence, even if the person is an adult.

These idioms are often culture-bound and rely heavily on shared knowledge within a linguistic community. For instance, “eye candy” is used in English to refer to someone who is physically attractive but perhaps lacks substance. However, such idioms may have

no direct counterpart in other languages, or their connotative meaning may differ significantly.

Additionally, idioms related to appearance may:

Reflect gender stereotypes (“trophy wife”, “silver fox”)

Be influenced by media and fashion culture

Carry social or emotional implications beyond physical description

Because of these features, translating idioms that describe appearance is not just a linguistic task-it also requires an understanding of sociocultural context and idiomatic conventions in both the source and target languages.

Translating idioms that describe human appearance presents multiple challenges, many of which arise from the figurative, culturally rooted nature of such expressions. These idioms often rely on shared cultural references and emotional connotations that may not exist in the target language, making literal translation ineffective or misleading.

### **Cultural Non-Equivalence**

One of the most significant issues is cultural non-equivalence, where the metaphor or image used in the source idiom has no meaningful parallel in the target culture. For example, the English idiom “as bald as a coot” may not make sense to a speaker of Uzbek, where the coot (a bird) may not carry the same associations. Without a cultural reference point, the figurative meaning can be lost.

### **Loss of Figurative Meaning**

A common mistake in translation is rendering idioms word-for-word, which often strips them of their idiomatic meaning. For instance, “to turn heads” means to attract attention due to one’s appearance, but a literal translation might confuse readers or suggest a physical action unrelated to the intended metaphor.

### **Register and Informality**

Many appearance-related idioms are informal, humorous, or even slang. Expressions like “eye candy” or “butterface” (slang for someone with an attractive body but an unattractive face) may be inappropriate or offensive if translated directly, especially in

formal or academic contexts. Translators must consider tone, social context, and audience expectations.

### **Ambiguity and Context Dependence**

Idioms are often context-sensitive, and their meaning can change depending on tone or situation. The idiom “a pretty face”, for instance, might be used sincerely or ironically. Without context, a translator may misjudge the speaker’s intention and produce an inaccurate translation.

Given the complexities involved in translating idioms related to human appearance, translators must choose carefully from several strategies to preserve meaning, tone, and cultural relevance. The choice depends on the availability of an equivalent idiom in the target language, the context, and the function of the expression in the original text.

When a culturally and semantically similar idiom exists in the target language, this is often the best solution. For example, the English idiom “as thin as a rake” may have an Uzbek counterpart such as “cho‘pdek ozg‘in” (thin like a stick), which preserves both imagery and tone. However, true equivalents are relatively rare.

If no equivalent exists, the translator can paraphrase the idiom to convey its meaning more clearly. For instance, “he turns heads wherever he goes” might be paraphrased as “he is very attractive and gets a lot of attention from people”. Though the figurative style may be lost, the intended message remains intact.

Sometimes it is possible to substitute the idiom with a different expression from the target language that evokes a similar reaction. For example, “eye candy” could be translated using an informal local term that similarly describes someone who is pleasant to look at, even if the literal meaning differs.

In cases where the idiom is culturally untranslatable or irrelevant to the context, omission or simplification may be necessary-particularly in formal, technical, or educational texts. While this may reduce expressiveness, it avoids confusion or misinterpretation.

In literary or academic translation, footnotes can be used to preserve the original idiom and explain its meaning to the reader. For example, the phrase “silver fox” (an

attractive older man) might be translated literally with an explanatory note to clarify the idiomatic use.

**Conclusion.** Translating idioms that describe human appearances requires more than a simple transfer of words from one language to another. These expressions are deeply embedded in cultural norms, metaphorical thinking, and social attitudes, making them particularly resistant to literal translation. A successful translation must preserve not only the meaning but also the tone, context, and emotional impact of the original idiom.

The main challenges-such as cultural non-equivalence, ambiguity, and shifts in register-demand flexible and creative translation strategies. Depending on the context, translators may use equivalent idioms, paraphrase, provide cultural substitutions, or even omit certain expressions when necessary. In literary or academic contexts, explanatory notes can be helpful for maintaining both clarity and cultural depth.

Ultimately, the translator's task is to balance fidelity to the source text with naturalness and clarity in the target language. By doing so, idioms describing human appearances can be effectively rendered without sacrificing their stylistic and communicative richness.

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