

MEANING EQUIVALENCE PROBLEMS IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: This article investigates the challenges of achieving meaning equivalence in translating English idioms into Uzbek. Idioms represent deeply culture-bound linguistic expressions whose meanings cannot be understood from their individual components. The study analyzes the theoretical bases of equivalence in translation, identifies the major semantic and pragmatic problems that arise during idiom translation, and suggests appropriate strategies for ensuring communicative equivalence. The findings demonstrate that due to linguistic and cultural divergence between English and Uzbek, total equivalence is rarely possible. However, through cultural adaptation and functional substitution, translators can convey idiomatic meaning effectively to Uzbek audiences.

Keywords: idioms, translation equivalence, linguistic culture, semantic loss, pragmatic meaning, cross-cultural communication, Uzbek translation studies.

Introduction

Idioms are an integral part of any language, reflecting the collective experience, worldview, and humor of a culture. Translating them requires not only linguistic proficiency but also deep cultural awareness. English idioms, shaped by Western history and literature, often contain metaphors unfamiliar to Uzbek speakers. Conversely, Uzbek idioms (*maqollar va iboralar*) stem from the region's oral traditions, nomadic life, and moral values. Achieving equivalence between such different linguistic and cultural systems is one of the most difficult challenges in translation studies. This article aims to examine the problems of meaning equivalence in translating English idioms into Uzbek, to identify the main sources of difficulty, and to suggest effective translation strategies.

1. Theoretical Framework of Equivalence in Translation

The notion of equivalence is central to translation theory. According to Eugene Nida (1964), equivalence is divided into two main types: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on the form and content of the source text, while dynamic equivalence aims to evoke the same response in the target audience. Catford (1965) later expanded this theory by distinguishing between textual and functional equivalence, whereas Baker (1992) introduced the concepts of semantic and pragmatic equivalence. In the context of idiom translation, achieving total equivalence is almost impossible, because idioms are culture-specific expressions that

depend on context and social background. Therefore, translators must seek functional adequacy rather than literal sameness — reproducing the meaning and emotional effect of the idiom rather than its form.

2. Cultural and Linguistic Specificity of Idioms

Idioms are expressions that cannot be understood literally. For example, the English idiom “to let the cat out of the bag” means “to reveal a secret.” If translated literally into Uzbek (“sumkadan mushukni chiqarish”), it becomes meaningless. Instead, translators should find culturally appropriate parallels such as “sirni oshkor qilmoq” or “og‘zidan chiqib ketmoq.” English idioms often reflect maritime, biblical, or historical imagery — such as “a Trojan horse,” “to turn the other cheek,” or “to weather the storm.” In contrast, Uzbek idioms are rooted in agrarian and moral imagery, e.g. “ko‘ngli tog‘dek,” “yetti o‘lchab bir kes,” or “ko‘z qulog‘i bilan eshitmoq.” This cultural difference means that direct translation often fails to capture idiomatic meaning, tone, or humor.

3. Common Meaning Equivalence Problems

In translating English idioms into Uzbek, several recurrent challenges occur:

- Lexical Non-Equivalence** — Certain idiomatic words or phrases have no single equivalent in Uzbek. Example: “to kick the bucket” → literally “chetiga tepmoq” (nonsensical); correct equivalent: “vafot etmoq.”
- Cultural Mismatch** — Idioms may refer to cultural elements unknown to Uzbek readers. Example: “the ball is in your court” (from tennis) → “endi sening qo‘lingda” or “navbat sendan.”
- Pragmatic Shift** — Even when meaning is conveyed, tone and style may change. Example: “a piece of cake” → “juda oson ish” — conveys meaning but loses informality and humor.
- Structural Differences** — English idioms often rely on phrasal verbs or nominal patterns that have no grammatical equivalents in Uzbek, which complicates preserving both form and flow.

4. Strategies for Translating Idioms

Translation theorists such as Baker (1992) and Newmark (1988) propose several methods for idiom translation. The most effective strategies include:

- Using an idiom of similar meaning and form — “Birds of a feather flock together” → “O‘xshashlar o‘xshashni topadi.”
- Using an idiom of similar meaning but different form — “Kill two birds with one stone” → “Bir o‘q bilan ikki quyonna urmoq.”
- Paraphrasing the meaning — “The tip of the iceberg” → “Muammoning kichik qismi.”
- Cultural substitution — Replacing an unfamiliar idiom with one familiar to Uzbek culture that carries similar pragmatic effect.

Example: “when pigs fly” → “hech qachon,” “mushuk sut ichsa.”

5. Omission (rarely used) — When an idiom’s meaning is redundant and cannot be preserved without distortion.

5. Comparative Examples

English Idiom	Literal Meaning	Uzbek Equivalent	Type of Equivalence
To burn the midnight oil	To work late into the night	Tun bo‘yi ishlamoq	Semantic
A blessing in disguise	Something good that seems bad	Yomonlikdan yaxshilik chiqdi	Functional
The last straw	Final irritation triggering reaction	Sabri tugamoq	Dynamic
Actions speak louder than words	Deeds matter more than talk	Ish so‘zdan muhim	Pragmatic
When pigs fly	Something impossible	Mushuk sut ichsa	Cultural

6. Discussion

The examples show that idioms require interpretative, not literal, translation. The translator must analyze both linguistic and cultural context. In Uzbek, idioms often convey moral or instructive tones, while English idioms are more metaphorical or humorous. Therefore, equivalence should be sought in effect and meaning, not in form. Another key challenge lies in polysemy—idioms can shift meaning depending on context. For instance, “to break the ice” may mean “to start a conversation” or “to overcome social tension.” Its correct Uzbek rendering (“gap boshlamoq,” “sokinlikni buzmoq”) depends on situational context.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that translating English idioms into Uzbek is a culturally complex process where total equivalence is rarely achievable. However, translators can achieve communicative success by focusing on dynamic and functional equivalence rather than literal translation.

To improve idiom translation quality:

- Translators should possess deep knowledge of both English and Uzbek cultural contexts.
- Translation education should emphasize pragmatic and cultural interpretation.
- Idiom databases and bilingual corpora should be developed for Uzbek translators.
- Further comparative studies should explore idiom translation across genres such as

literature, film, and media.

Ultimately, idiom translation bridges not only two languages but also two worldviews. Achieving meaning equivalence, therefore, is both a linguistic and cultural art.

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