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ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AND THE PROBLEMS OF THEIR TRANSLATION

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Abstract: Phraseological units are an essential part of every language because they reflect national culture, historical experience, traditions, and ways of thinking. English phraseological units frequently create difficulties for translators because their meanings cannot always be understood from the meanings of their individual words. The purpose of this study is to examine the main characteristics of English phraseological units and identify the most common problems that arise in their translation into Uzbek. The study applies descriptive, comparative, and contextual methods. English idioms and their Uzbek translations were analyzed according to their semantic, structural, and cultural features. The results show that phraseological units can be translated through complete equivalents, partial equivalents, descriptive translation, lexical substitution, and contextual adaptation. The findings also indicate that cultural differences, polysemy, figurative meaning, and the absence of direct equivalents are the main causes of translation difficulties. The study concludes that an effective translation should preserve not only the general meaning of a phraseological unit but also its emotional, stylistic, and cultural value.

Keywords: phraseological unit, idiom, translation, equivalence, culture, figurative meaning, English, Uzbek.

Introduction

Phraseology is an important branch of linguistics that studies stable combinations of words. Phraseological units are widely used in both spoken and written communication. They make language more expressive, emotional, imaginative, and culturally meaningful. Proverbs, idioms, fixed expressions, collocations, and sayings can all be studied within the field of phraseology.

A phraseological unit is generally defined as a stable combination of two or more words whose overall meaning is partly or completely different from the literal meanings of its individual components. For example, the English expression *to spill the beans* does not mean dropping beans on the ground. It means revealing a secret. Similarly, *to be under the weather* means to feel ill, while *to break the ice* means to make people feel more comfortable in a social situation.

Phraseological units are especially difficult to translate because they are closely connected with the culture and worldview of a particular nation. Literal translation may create an unnatural, unclear, or completely incorrect expression in the target language. Therefore, translators must understand not only the vocabulary and grammar of both languages but also their cultural and stylistic systems.

English and Uzbek belong to different language families. English is a Germanic language, while Uzbek is a Turkic language. Their grammatical structures, cultural associations, figurative images, and historical backgrounds differ considerably. As a result, many English phraseological units do not have direct Uzbek equivalents.

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The aim of this article is to analyze English phraseological units and determine the major problems involved in translating them into Uzbek.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the main characteristics of English phraseological units?
2. What difficulties occur when translating them into Uzbek?
3. Which translation methods are most effective?
4. How can translators preserve the cultural and stylistic meaning of phraseological units?

Materials and Methods

This study used descriptive, comparative, semantic, and contextual methods. A selection of commonly used English phraseological units was analyzed and compared with their possible Uzbek translations.

The research materials included English idioms, fixed expressions, proverbs, and figurative combinations frequently found in everyday speech, literary texts, newspapers, films, and educational materials.

The analysis was conducted in three stages.

First, the semantic meanings of the selected English phraseological units were identified. Both their literal and figurative meanings were considered.

Second, the phraseological units were compared with corresponding expressions in Uzbek. The level of equivalence between the source-language unit and its target-language translation was evaluated.

Third, the translation methods were classified into the following categories:

- translation through a complete phraseological equivalent;
- translation through a partial equivalent;
- descriptive translation;
- lexical substitution;
- literal translation;
- contextual adaptation.

The examples were analyzed according to their meaning, imagery, emotional tone, stylistic function, and cultural background.

Results

Complete Phraseological Equivalents

A complete phraseological equivalent has approximately the same meaning, structure, imagery, and stylistic function in both languages.

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For example:

English: *Time is money.*
Uzbek: *Vaqt — pul.*

Both expressions have the same lexical structure and communicate the idea that time is valuable.

Another example is:

English: *Better late than never.*
Uzbek: *Hechdan ko‘ra kech yaxshi.*

The English and Uzbek versions are similar in both meaning and communicative purpose. Such equivalents are relatively easy to translate because they preserve the original idea and stylistic effect.

However, complete equivalents are not very common because languages often use different images to express the same concept.

Partial Phraseological Equivalents

A partial equivalent has the same or similar meaning but differs in lexical form, grammatical structure, or imagery.

For example:

English: *When pigs fly.*
Uzbek: *Tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda.*

Both expressions refer to something that will never happen. However, the English idiom uses the impossible image of flying pigs, while the Uzbek expression refers to a camel’s tail touching the ground.

Another example is:

English: *Kill two birds with one stone.*
Uzbek: *Bir o‘q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq.*

The English expression uses birds, whereas the Uzbek version uses rabbits. Despite this lexical difference, the meaning is the same: achieving two results through one action.

Partial equivalents are effective because they preserve the figurative and emotional effect of the source expression, even when the images differ.

Descriptive Translation

Descriptive translation is used when the target language does not have an appropriate phraseological equivalent. In this method, the meaning of the phraseological unit is explained through an ordinary phrase or sentence.

For example:

English: *To spill the beans.*
Uzbek: *Sirni oshkor qilmoq.*

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A literal translation such as *loviyani to‘kmoq* would be meaningless in Uzbek. Therefore, the figurative meaning must be expressed directly.

Another example is:

English: *To be under the weather.*
Uzbek: *O‘zini yomon his qilmoq.*

The Uzbek translation explains the meaning, but it does not preserve the original image. The translation is accurate semantically, although part of the stylistic expressiveness is lost.

Descriptive translation is useful for clarity, but it may reduce the emotional and figurative power of the original expression.

Lexical Substitution

Lexical substitution involves replacing a phraseological unit with a single word or a simple expression that conveys the same general meaning.

For example:

English: *He kicked the bucket.*
Uzbek: *U vafot etdi.*

The English idiom is informal and euphemistic, while the Uzbek translation is neutral. The basic meaning is preserved, but the stylistic tone changes.

Another example is:

English: *She has a heart of gold.*
Uzbek: *U juda mehribon.*

The English phrase uses a figurative image, while the Uzbek version communicates the meaning through an adjective.

Lexical substitution can make the translation clear and natural, but the translator must consider whether the emotional and stylistic tone has been preserved.

Literal Translation

Literal translation may be possible when the image and meaning of a phraseological unit are understandable in the target language.

For example:

English: *To play with fire.*
Uzbek: *Olov bilan o‘ynamoq.*

Both expressions mean taking a serious risk. The image is familiar in both cultures, so literal translation is appropriate.

Another example is:

English: *To add fuel to the fire.*
Uzbek: *Olovga moy sepmoq.*

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The Uzbek expression uses oil rather than fuel, but the image and meaning are almost identical.

However, literal translation is dangerous when the target-language reader cannot understand the figurative meaning. For instance, translating *It is raining cats and dogs* word for word would create an absurd expression in Uzbek. The correct translation would be *Jala quyayapti* or *Yomg‘ir juda kuchli yog‘ayapti*.

Contextual Adaptation

The meaning of a phraseological unit may change depending on the context. Therefore, the translator should analyze the complete sentence or situation before selecting an equivalent.

For example:

English: *Break a leg!*

Literally, this expression appears to express a negative wish. In theatrical culture, however, it means “good luck.”

A suitable Uzbek translation may be:

Uzbek: *Omad tilayman!*

The translation does not preserve the original image, but it communicates the intended meaning.

Another example is:

English: *He finally broke the ice.*

Depending on the context, it may be translated as:

Uzbek: *U nihoyat suhbatni boshlab berdi.*

or

Uzbek: *U nihoyat noqulay vaziyatni yumshatdi.*

The correct translation depends on the communicative situation.

3.7. Main Translation Problems

The analysis identified several major problems in the translation of English phraseological units.

Absence of Direct Equivalents

Some English expressions do not have corresponding phraseological units in Uzbek. In such cases, translators must use explanation, substitution, or adaptation.

For example:

English: *A couch potato.*

This refers to a person who spends a great deal of time sitting and watching television. Uzbek does not have a fully equivalent idiom, so it can be translated descriptively as:

Uzbek: *Vaqtini televizor qarshisida bekor o‘tkazadigan odam.*

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Cultural Differences

Phraseological units may contain culture-specific references. English idioms can reflect British and American traditions, history, literature, sports, food, or social customs.

For example:

English: *The ball is in your court.*

This idiom comes from tennis and means that it is another person's responsibility to act or make a decision.

A natural Uzbek translation may be:

Uzbek: *Endi navbat sizda.*

The sporting image is removed, but the communicative meaning is preserved.

Polysemy and Ambiguity

Some phraseological units may have several meanings depending on the context.

For example, *to take off* can mean removing clothing, an aircraft leaving the ground, becoming successful, or leaving quickly. The translator must identify the intended meaning from the surrounding text.

Stylistic Differences

A phraseological unit can be formal, informal, humorous, ironic, rude, or old-fashioned. A semantically correct translation may still be inappropriate if it changes the register.

For example, *kick the bucket* is humorous and informal. Translating it as *vafot etmoq* preserves the meaning but not the style. In a literary text, an informal Uzbek euphemism may be more suitable.

Loss of Figurative Meaning

Descriptive translation often communicates the basic meaning but removes the original metaphor.

For example:

English: *To have butterflies in one's stomach.*
Uzbek: *Hayajonlanmoq.*

The translation is understandable, but the image of butterflies is lost.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that the translation of phraseological units is not a simple process of replacing individual words. It requires semantic, cultural, stylistic, and contextual analysis.

A translator must first determine whether an expression is literal or phraseological. Failure to recognize an idiom may result in a completely incorrect translation. For example, the sentence *He let the cat out of the bag* should not be interpreted as an action involving an animal. It means that someone revealed a secret.

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The most effective method is usually the use of a complete or partial phraseological equivalent. These methods preserve meaning, imagery, emotional effect, and naturalness. For example, *kill two birds with one stone* can be successfully translated as *bir o'q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq*.

When no equivalent exists, descriptive translation becomes necessary. Although this method may reduce expressiveness, it prevents misunderstanding. Accuracy should be prioritized when the literal image would be meaningless or misleading.

Context is also essential. The same expression may require different translations in different situations. Translators should consider the speaker, audience, genre, tone, and purpose of the text. A phraseological unit in a comedy may require a humorous translation, while the same unit in a formal article may require neutral wording.

Literary translation presents an especially difficult challenge. Writers use idioms not only to communicate information but also to characterize speakers, create humor, produce irony, and reflect social identity. Therefore, translators should attempt to preserve both the semantic content and the artistic function of phraseological units.

Foreign-language learners also face difficulties with phraseological units because idioms are often unpredictable. Learning isolated vocabulary is not sufficient. Students should study expressions in context and compare them with equivalent expressions in their first language.

Teachers can use films, literary texts, dialogues, newspapers, and social media materials to demonstrate how phraseological units function in real communication. Comparative exercises can help students understand cultural differences and avoid literal translation.

Conclusion

English phraseological units are an important part of vocabulary and communication. They make speech expressive, memorable, emotional, and culturally meaningful. At the same time, they create serious challenges for translators because their figurative meanings are often different from their literal forms.

The main problems in translating English phraseological units into Uzbek include the absence of direct equivalents, cultural differences, polysemy, contextual variation, stylistic differences, and the possible loss of figurative meaning.

The analysis shows that phraseological units can be translated through complete equivalents, partial equivalents, descriptive translation, lexical substitution, literal translation, and contextual adaptation. No single method is appropriate for every situation.

A successful translator must understand the meaning, context, style, and cultural background of the original expression. The best translation is not always the closest word-for-word version. It is the version that creates a similar meaning and effect for the target-language reader.

Therefore, the translation of phraseological units requires not only strong linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness, creativity, and careful contextual interpretation.

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