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CROSS-LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENCE IN THE TRANSLATION OFSOMATIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract: This article is the third in a series examining how English idiomatic expressions are rendered into Uzbek, following companion studies of general idioms and of business and economic idioms , and it turns to a subclass those studies had flagged but not examined in depth: somatic phraseological units (SPUs), idioms built on body-part vocabulary such as head, heart, hand, eye, and tongue. Drawing on two detailed empirical studies of English-Uzbek somatic phraseology (Jumanazarov, 2025a, 2025b) together with recent work on connotative loss in somatic-idiom translation (Ruzikulova, 2025) and on the comparative structure of somatic phraseology across the two languages (Akhmedov, 2026), the article compiles a twenty-item bidirectional corpus of somatic idiom-translation pairs and codes it under the same five-strategy scheme used in the two companion studies. Full equivalence is found to be markedly more frequent for somatic idioms (45%) than for general idioms (10%) or business idioms (16.7%), a pattern consistent with the view, associated with embodied-cognition accounts of metaphor, that idioms grounded in shared bodily experience transfer across languages with less loss than idioms grounded in culturally local institutions or history. At the same time, the corpus documents systematic points of divergence, English and Uzbek do not always select the same body part to encode a given meaning (eye versus eye-and-ear for vigilance; tongue versus teeth for enforced silence), which the article analyses using Ruzikulova's (2025) three-way distinction between semantic distortion, pragmatic omission, and emotional-intensity shift. The article closes by arguing that somatic idioms, precisely because of their high but imperfect equivalence, offer an unusually clear window onto the balance between universal embodiment and language-specific metaphorical convention.

Keywords: somatic phraseological units; body-part idioms; embodiment; equivalence; English-Uzbek translation; phraseology; connotative loss

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the many subclasses of idiomatic expression, none is more consistently singled out in the cross-linguistic literature as a special case than the somatic phraseological unit (SPU): an idiom built around a body-part word, such as head, heart, hand, eye, tongue, or foot, used figuratively to denote emotion, character, cognition, or social relation. Jumanazarov (2025a) defines SPUs as expressions that "reflect figurative meanings rooted in culture and cognition" and notes that, because every human language is produced by embodied speakers, body-part vocabulary is among the most productive sources of metaphor in any language. Akhmedov (2026) makes the comparative claim explicit, arguing that English and Uzbek "demonstrate universal anthropocentric tendencies in phraseological nomination" while still differing "significantly in metaphorical models" and cultural symbolism. This tension between a universal, body-grounded source domain and language-specific conventions for exploiting it is the central problem this article investigates.

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The question has a direct bearing on two companion studies by the present author. Israilova (2026a) examined twenty general-purpose English idioms translated into Uzbek and found that full formal equivalence, in which the Uzbek rendering keeps the same central image as the English source, was rare (10%), available mainly for idioms grounded in shared subsistence activities such as hunting and poultry-keeping. Israilova (2026b) extended the analysis to business and economic idioms and found full equivalence slightly more common (16.7%) but paraphrase dominant (44.4%), attributing the latter to the culturally local, institutionally specific imagery (sports, accounting conventions, board games) on which many business idioms depend. Neither study, however, contained more than a handful of genuinely somatic idioms, and the one dedicated source available at the time, Jumanazarov (2025b), could only be consulted at abstract level. The present article closes that gap by analysing Jumanazarov's two full studies (2025a, 2025b) together with two further sources specific to English-Uzbek somatic phraseology (Ruzikulova, 2025; Akhmedov, 2026), in order to test directly the hypothesis, raised but not tested in Israilova (2026a), that idioms grounded in universal bodily experience achieve higher cross-linguistic equivalence than idioms grounded in culturally local institutions or history.

Three research questions guide the analysis: (RQ1) what proportion of English somatic idioms achieve full, image-preserving equivalence in Uzbek, compared with the general and business idioms analysed in the companion studies; (RQ2) where equivalence is partial or absent, what specific kind of divergence occurs, a different body part being selected, a shift in emotional intensity, or the loss of the image altogether; and (RQ3) does the pattern hold in the reverse direction, from Uzbek somatic idioms into English, or is high equivalence for this subclass an artefact of looking only at English-to-Uzbek translation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Data sources and corpus

The corpus for this study was built primarily from two empirical articles by Jumanazarov (2025a, 2025b), both published in the European Journal of Pedagogical Initiatives and Educational Practices and both devoted specifically to English-Uzbek somatic phraseology; between them these two studies supply seventeen of the twenty idiom-translation pairs analysed here, each drawn directly from the published text with its Uzbek rendering as given by the source. A further two pairs are drawn in the reverse direction, Uzbek somatic idioms for which the source articles report no natural English idiomatic counterpart, which allows the corpus to test equivalence bidirectionally rather than only from English into Uzbek, unlike the two companion studies. One item ("an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth") was added by the author to represent a class of somatic expression, those of shared scriptural and legal-historical origin, that the two primary sources do not happen to discuss but that is well attested in both languages; this item is marked as author-compiled in Table 1. Two further theoretical sources were used to interpret the corpus rather than to supply examples: Ruzikulova (2025), whose study of connotative loss in English-Uzbek somatic-idiom translation proposes a three-way distinction between semantic distortion, pragmatic omission, and emotional-intensity shift; and Akhmedov (2026), whose comparative-structural study frames the overall relationship between the two languages' somatic phraseology as one of shared anthropocentric tendency combined with divergent metaphorical convention.

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2.2 Theoretical framework

The coding scheme is the same five-category framework used in the two companion studies, retained here for comparability: full equivalence (the Uzbek rendering is idiomatic and preserves the same central image, here specifically the same body part performing the same figurative function), functional equivalence (the Uzbek rendering is idiomatic and matches the source in meaning but uses a different image or a different body part), paraphrase (the Uzbek rendering is a non-idiomatic, descriptive statement of the meaning, with no body-part image retained), cultural substitution (the English body-part image is replaced by a different, target-culture-specific image, whether or not that image is itself somatic), and non-equivalence (no natural rendering is attested, so that only an approximate paraphrase, or, in one direction, no rendering at all, is available). To this is added, for the discussion of partial-equivalence cases only, Ruzikulova's (2025) distinction among semantic distortion (the target expression denotes something measurably different from the source), pragmatic omission (a contextual nuance, such as register or formality, is lost), and emotional-intensity shift (the target expression is felt as stronger or weaker than the source without a change in its core denotation).

2.3 Coding procedure

Each of the twenty idiom pairs was assigned to one of the five categories under the criteria in section 2.2, and, where the assigned category was functional equivalence or cultural substitution, was further tagged with the relevant type of divergence from Ruzikulova's (2025) typology. Coding followed the explicit commentary given in the source studies wherever available; for example, Jumanazarov (2025a) explicitly notes that "boshida aql bor" is typically applied to elders in Uzbek even though its English counterpart, "to have a good head on one's shoulders," carries no such age restriction, which was coded as a pragmatic omission under functional equivalence, and that "yuragi ezildi" is "emotionally more intense" than "broken-hearted," which was coded as an emotional-intensity shift. Because both Jumanazarov studies address the same idiom ("heart of stone" and, in different renderings, "to bite one's tongue") from slightly different angles, both attestations are recorded in Table 1's source column, and where the two studies proposed different renderings for the same English idiom ("to bite one's tongue" as both "tilini tishlab turmoq" and "tishini tishiga qo'ymoq"), both are retained as separate corpus entries, since the divergence between them is itself informative about the range of body-part imagery available to an Uzbek translator for the same underlying meaning.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the full bidirectional corpus of twenty somatic idiom-translation pairs.

Table 1. Corpus of somatic phraseological units and their translations

№	English idiom	Body part	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
1	To lose one's head (act irrationally)	Head	Boshini yo'qotmoq	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
2	To keep one's head / not lose one's head	Head	Boshini yo'qotmaslik	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a

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№	English idiom	Body part	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
3	Heart of stone (no empathy)	Heart	Yuragi tosh	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a; 2025b
4	To open one's heart	Heart	Yuragini ochmoq	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
5	An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth	Eye/tooth	Ko'zga ko'z, tishga tish	Full equivalence	Author-compiled (shared scriptural origin)
6	To give someone a hand	Hand	Qo'l bermoq	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a
7	To wash one's hands of something	Hand	Qo'lini yuvmoq	Full equivalence (needs gloss)	Jumanazarov 2025b
8	To stick one's nose into	Nose	Burnini suqmoq	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
9	To bite one's tongue (stay silent)	Tongue	Tilini tishlab turmoq	Full equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
10	Broken-hearted	Heart	Yuragi ezildi	Functional equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a
11	To keep an eye on	Eye	Ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq	Functional equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
12	To bite one's tongue (alt. rendering)	Tongue/teeth	Tishini tishiga qo'ymoq	Functional equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a
13	To have a big mouth	Mouth	Og'zi bo'sh	Functional equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
14	To have a good head on one's shoulders	Head	Boshida aql bor	Functional equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a
15	Butterflies in the stomach	Stomach	Hayajondan ichi qizib ketdi	Paraphrase	Jumanazarov 2025a
16	To pull someone's leg	Leg	Hazillashmoq	Paraphrase	Jumanazarov 2025b

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№	English idiom	Body part	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
17	To put one's foot in one's mouth	Foot/mouth	Og'zidan chiqib ketdi	Cultural substitution	Jumanazarov 2025a
18	To get cold feet	Feet	Qo'rqib qolmoq	Non-equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
19	Bosh egmoq (Uzbek → English)	Head	(no idiomatic English match)	Non-equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025b
20	Ko'ngli ko'tarildi (Uzbek → English)	Ko'ngil (heart/soul)	(no idiomatic English match)	Non-equivalence	Jumanazarov 2025a

Table 2 summarises the frequency distribution of strategies across the corpus.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of translation strategies (n = 20)

Strategy	N	%
Full equivalence	9	45%
Functional / partial equivalence	5	25%
Paraphrase / descriptive translation	2	10%
Cultural substitution / adaptation	1	5%
Non-equivalence	3	15%
Total	**20**	**100%**

3.1 Full equivalence

Full equivalence was by far the largest category, covering 9 of 20 cases (45%): "to lose one's head" / "not to lose one's head" → "boshini yo'qotmoq" / "boshini yo'qotmaslik" (head), "heart of stone" → "yuragi tosh" (heart), "to open one's heart" → "yuragini ochmoq" (heart), "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" → "ko'zga ko'z, tishga tish" (eye/tooth), "to give someone a hand" → "qo'l bermoq" (hand), "to wash one's hands of something" → "qo'lini yuvmoq" (hand), "to stick one's nose into" → "burnini suqmoq" (nose), and "to bite one's tongue" → "tilini tishlab turmoq" (tongue). In every one of these pairs, the same body part performs the same figurative function in both languages: the head as the seat of composure, the heart as the seat of feeling, the hand as the instrument of help or responsibility, the nose as the organ of intrusion, the tongue as the organ of speech that can be physically restrained. This is a substantially higher rate of full equivalence than either of the two companion studies recorded, 10% for general idioms and 16.7% for business idioms, and it is consistent with Akhmedov's (2026) claim that English and Uzbek phraseology shares an underlying "anthropocentric" organisation: because both languages' speakers have heads, hearts, hands, noses, and

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tongues that function identically as physical organs, the metaphorical extension from organ to meaning is available to draw on independently in both languages, without requiring contact or borrowing between them.

3.2 Functional equivalence and its subtypes

Functional equivalence, in which an idiomatic Uzbek rendering exists but relies on a different image, accounted for 5 of 20 cases (25%). Applying Ruzikulova's (2025) typology to these five cases distinguishes three distinct kinds of divergence. First, a different body part is substituted for the source body part: "to keep an eye on" → "ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq" replaces the single organ of vigilance in English (the eye) with a paired eye-and-ear image in Uzbek, and "to bite one's tongue" is alternatively rendered "tishini tishiga qo'ymoq" (literally, "to put tooth to tooth"), substituting the teeth for the tongue as the organ of enforced silence; both are coded here as instances of pragmatic rather than semantic divergence, since the communicative outcome, restrained speech or heightened watchfulness, is unchanged. Second, register or scope narrows in translation without the core meaning changing: Jumanazarov (2025a) reports that "boshida aql bor," the Uzbek rendering of "to have a good head on one's shoulders," is conventionally applied to elders, whereas the English source carries no such restriction, a clear case of pragmatic omission in Ruzikulova's (2025) terms. Third, emotional intensity shifts without a change in the underlying denotation: "broken-hearted" corresponds to "yuragi ezildi" (literally, "the heart is crushed"), which Jumanazarov (2025a) explicitly characterises as carrying greater emotional force in Uzbek than its English source, an emotional-intensity shift rather than a semantic distortion, since crushed and broken both denote the same event, romantic or emotional devastation, at different points on the same intensity scale. The fifth case, "to have a big mouth" → "og'zi bo'sh" (literally, "the mouth is loose/empty"), keeps the same organ (the mouth) but changes the descriptive dimension applied to it, size in English, looseness in Uzbek, which is coded here as a minor semantic distortion, since "loose-mouthed" foregrounds indiscretion rather than sheer volubility.

3.3 Paraphrase and cultural substitution

Paraphrase, in which the body-part image is dropped altogether, accounted for only 2 of 20 cases (10%), markedly lower than in either companion study: "butterflies in the stomach" → "hayajondan ichi qizib ketdi" (literally, "the inside grows hot from excitement") retains a reference to the stomach or interior ("ichi") but drops the insect imagery entirely, and "to pull someone's leg" → "hazillashmoq" ("to joke") drops the leg image altogether. A single case of cultural substitution was found (5%): "to put one's foot in one's mouth" → "og'zidan chiqib ketdi" (literally, "it slipped out of his mouth"), in which the foot-in-mouth image, itself already a somewhat surreal English idiom, is replaced by a still somatic but structurally simpler image centred on the mouth alone as the site of an inadvertent verbal slip.

3.4 Non-equivalence and directionality

Three cases (15%) were coded as non-equivalent, and this category is where the corpus's bidirectional design becomes informative. "To get cold feet," translated from English, has no natural Uzbek somatic counterpart; Jumanazarov (2025b) shows that a literal rendering ("uning oyoqlari sovuq bo'ldi," "his feet became cold") is simply nonsensical to an Uzbek reader, and that only a non-somatic paraphrase ("qo'rqib qolmoq," "to become afraid," or, in a fuller rendering, "oxirgi daqiqada cho'chib qoldi," "to flinch at the last moment") conveys the intended meaning. The remaining two non-equivalence cases run in the opposite direction: "bosh egmoq" (literally, "to bow the head," used of respectful submission or deference) and "ko'ngli ko'tarildi" (literally, "the ko'ngil rose," used of an

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improvement in mood or spirits) are both reported by Jumanazarov (2025a, 2025b) as lacking a natural, equally somatic English idiom. The second case is particularly instructive: "ko'ngil," often glossed as "heart" or "soul" but denoting a culturally specific inner faculty of mood, affection, and disposition that does not map cleanly onto either the English heart or the English mind, is a body-part term without a stable one-to-one English somatic counterpart, illustrating that the inventory of culturally salient "body parts" available for metaphor is not itself identical across the two languages, even where both languages richly exploit the body as a metaphorical source domain.

4. DISCUSSION

Table 3 places the present findings alongside the two companion studies.

Table 3. Strategy distribution compared across all three studies

Strategy	General idioms (Study 1)	Business idioms (Study 2)	Somatic idioms (present study)
Full equivalence	10%	16.7%	**45%**
Functional equivalence	30%	22.2%	**25%**
Paraphrase	30%	44.4%	**10%**
Cultural substitution	15%	11.1%	**5%**
Non-equivalence	15%	5.6%	**15%**

The comparison directly answers RQ1: full equivalence rises steeply across the three registers, from 10% for general idioms, through 16.7% for business idioms, to 45% for somatic idioms, while paraphrase falls correspondingly, from 30% through 44.4% down to 10%. This is precisely the pattern predicted by an embodiment-based account of idiomatic metaphor: general idioms draw on a wide range of source domains, some shared (hunting, poultry-keeping) and many not; business idioms draw disproportionately on narrow, culturally local institutions (sports, accounting conventions, specific corporate scenarios); somatic idioms draw on a source domain, the human body, that is by definition shared by every speaker of every language, so that the metaphorical extension from organ to meaning can arise independently and convergently in English and Uzbek without any need for historical contact or borrowing. Akhmedov's (2026) description of "universal anthropocentric tendencies" combined with divergent "metaphorical models" is thus not a vague generalisation but a reasonably precise summary of what Table 3 shows: the tendency to use the body metaphorically is universal and drives the high full-equivalence rate, while the specific mapping from a given organ to a given meaning is a matter of convention and drives the residual 55% of cases that are not fully equivalent.

RQ2 asked what kind of divergence occurs where equivalence is not full. The answer, developed in sections 3.2 and 3.3 using Ruzikulova's (2025) typology, is that divergence in this corpus is disproportionately pragmatic or organ-selectional rather than semantic: three of the five functional-equivalence cases involve either a different body part performing the same communicative function (eye-and-ear for eye; teeth for tongue) or a register restriction not present in the source (boshida aql bor for elders only), rather than the target expression denoting a different underlying concept. Only the

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emotional-intensity shift in "yuragi ezildi" and the descriptive-dimension shift in "og'zi bo'sh" involve a change internal to the meaning itself. This suggests a refinement to Ruzikulova's (2025) three-way typology when it is applied specifically to somatic material: because the source domain (the body) is itself shared, divergence tends to surface as a choice among a small set of culturally available organs and registers rather than as the wholesale semantic drift that can occur when idioms lose their figurative dress entirely, as happened more often with paraphrase in the two companion studies' non-somatic corpora.

RQ3 asked whether the high-equivalence pattern is an artefact of looking only at English-to-Uzbek translation. The two reverse-direction cases in this corpus, "bosh egmoq" and "ko'ngli ko'tarildi," both non-equivalent, indicate that the answer is no: bidirectionality does not erase the asymmetries between the two languages' somatic inventories, and the "ko'ngil" case in particular shows that Uzbek recognises at least one culturally elaborated inner "organ" of mood and affection that does not correspond neatly to any single English body-part term. A fully symmetric bidirectional corpus, larger than the one compiled here, would be needed to establish whether non-equivalence is equally likely in both directions or whether, as the very limited evidence here might suggest, Uzbek somatic phraseology draws on a slightly richer inventory of culturally specific inner-experience terms than English does; the present corpus, with only two reverse-direction items, can raise this question but cannot answer it.

Two limitations should be noted. First, seventeen of the twenty corpus items are drawn from two studies by a single author (Jumanazarov, 2025a, 2025b); while both studies were independently published and peer-reviewed, and while their overlapping treatment of "heart of stone" and "to bite one's tongue" provides a useful internal check, a corpus drawing on a wider range of independent sources, of the kind achieved for general idioms in Israilova (2026a), would strengthen confidence in the reported percentages. Second, the reverse-direction (Uzbek-to-English) portion of the corpus is too small (2 of 20 items) to support strong claims about directionality on its own, and is included here primarily to demonstrate that the method can, in principle, detect asymmetry, rather than to make a definitive claim about which language has the richer somatic inventory.

5. CONCLUSION

This article set out to test, with a dedicated bidirectional corpus, the hypothesis raised but not tested in the first study of this series, that idioms grounded in shared bodily experience achieve higher cross-linguistic equivalence than idioms grounded in culturally local institutions or history. Drawing on two detailed empirical studies of English-Uzbek somatic phraseology (Jumanazarov, 2025a, 2025b) and on complementary work on connotative loss (Ruzikulova, 2025) and comparative structure (Akhmedov, 2026), the analysis found full equivalence in 45% of a twenty-item corpus, compared with 10% for general idioms and 16.7% for business idioms in the two companion studies, confirming the hypothesis directly. Where equivalence was not full, divergence was disproportionately a matter of which body part or which register convention a given meaning is attached to, rather than a wholesale change in meaning, and two reverse-direction cases showed that non-equivalence, though rarer overall for this subclass, still occurs in both directions, including at least one case, "ko'ngil," where Uzbek appears to recognise a culturally elaborated inner faculty without a single stable English somatic counterpart.

Read together, the three studies in this series suggest a working generalisation for translator training and for further research: the translatability of an idiom into a typologically and culturally

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distant language is not a fixed property of idioms in general but varies systematically with the idiom's source domain, rising toward full equivalence as that domain approaches universal human experience (the body) and falling toward paraphrase as it approaches culturally local institutions and history (specific sports, specific accounting conventions, specific historical events). Future research should test this generalisation against further source domains not yet examined in this series, such as color terms, kinship terms, or weather phenomena, and should expand the present corpus, particularly its reverse-direction portion, using systematic elicitation from bilingual Uzbek-English speakers rather than relying, as this study necessarily did, on the examples already published in the available literature.

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