



THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO UZBEK:  
SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL CHALLENGES

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**Annotation:** *Currently, the number of language learners around the world is increasing significantly, and one of the main factors contributing to language learning is vocabulary. In this process, language learners face not only semantic but also cultural challenges, especially when translating idioms. Because literal translation of English idioms often affects the meaning of the word, making it meaningless or funny. This article analyzes the semantic and cultural challenges that arise in the process of translating English idioms into Uzbek. The article covers semantic problems such as literal translation issues, loss of equivalence, polysemous words, lexical-semantic mismatch, as well as cultural problems including national-cultural features, religious differences, and food-related idioms. Comparative examples from English and Uzbek languages are provided for each type of problem.*

**Keywords:** *Idioms, translation, semantic challenges, cultural challenges, equivalence, phraseology, conceptual metaphor*

Main part:

Currently, the number of language learners around the world is increasing significantly, and one of the main factors contributing to language learning is vocabulary. In this process, language learners face not only semantic but also cultural challenges, especially when translating idioms. Because literal translation of English idioms often affects the meaning of the word, making it meaningless or funny.

Translation theorist Benjamin (1968) in his work "The Task of the Translator" emphasizes that the main task of the translator is not to preserve the meaning of the original text, but to preserve its place in "the life of language." According to him, any translation is the "afterlife" of the original. This idea is particularly important in translating idioms because idioms constitute the living, figurative layer of language, and through their translation, the "afterlife" of the original language continues (Benjamin, 1968, pp. 69-82).

Hatim and Mason (1997) in "The Translator as Communicator" study translation as a communicative process and emphasize that the translator is a mediator not only between languages but also between cultures. According to them, the translator must consider the pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of the text (Hatim & Mason, 1997). This is especially important in translating idioms because idioms often express culture-specific





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concepts, and their translation plays a decisive role in the success of intercultural communication.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in "Metaphors We Live By" proved that metaphors form the basis not only of language but also of our thought and action. According to their conceptual metaphor theory, idioms are often linguistic expressions of basic metaphorical concepts. For example, the idiom "to see the light" is based on the conceptual metaphor "KNOWING IS SEEING" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This theory is important in explaining the different meanings of idioms.

Cowie (1998) in "Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Applications" deeply analyzed the theoretical foundations of phraseology and developed important principles for classifying idioms. He emphasizes that idioms are an important part of the language system, and learning and correctly translating them is of great importance for language learners. Cowie (1998) comprehensively covered the semantic features of phraseological units, their use in context, and interlingual translation problems. According to him, when translating idioms, it is not the meaning of the words in their composition, but the holistic meaning and stylistic features of the entire expression that should be considered.

Gibbs (1994) in "The Poetics of Mind: Figurative Thought, Language, and Understanding" investigated the relationship between figurative thought and language. His scientific research shows that idiomatic expressions form a fundamental part of human thought and understanding them requires abstract thinking ability.

According to Gibbs (1994), the process of translating idioms requires not only linguistic knowledge but also a deep understanding of conceptual thought and cultural context. His empirical studies have shown that people rely on metaphorical bases when understanding idioms, and this process is more cultural than universal.

### Semantic Challenges

#### 1. Literal Translation Problem

Literal translation of English idioms often leads to loss of meaning or humorous situations. As Hatim and Mason (1997) note, the translator must consider the communicative situation and preserve the pragmatic meaning of the text. Cowie (1998) also emphasizes the importance of preserving the holistic meaning of phraseological units when translating them.

For example, the idiom "Love me, love my dog" if translated literally into Uzbek as "meni sev, mening itimni sev" conveys an unusual meaning. Actually, the correct version of this expression means "Accept me as I am" or "If you love me, you should love my loved ones as well."

#### 2. Loss of Equivalence

Some English idioms may not have an exactly corresponding variant in Uzbek. According to Benjamin (1968), it is important not to strive for literalism in translation, but to preserve the "intention" of the original text. Gibbs (1994) emphasizes that the conceptual bases of idioms may differ across languages.





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For example, the idiom "To cost an arm and a leg":

- Literal: "Bir qo'l va bir oyoq narxiga tushmoq" (meaningless)
- Meaning: To be very expensive
- Uzbek equivalent: "Juda qimmat", "Odamni qarzga botiradigan", "Kapitalni yutadigan"

### 3. Polysemous Words

Some idioms can have several different meanings depending on the context. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory helps explain this polysemy. Gibbs (1994) has proven through empirical research that the polysemy of idioms is related to their metaphorical nature.

For example, the idiom "To see the light":

- Meaning 1: To understand, to realize (KNOWING IS SEEING metaphor)
- Meaning 2: To be born
- Meaning 3: To achieve religious enlightenment
- Meaning 4: To be published (about a book)

This polysemy is the result of various metaphorical extensions of the concept of "SEEING" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 1994).

### 4. Lexical-Semantic Mismatch

Words in an idiom may not exist in another language or may have completely different meanings. Hatim and Mason (1997) connect this problem with cross-cultural differences. Cowie (1998) emphasizes the national-cultural features of phraseological units and stresses the need to consider the cultural component when translating them.

Example: "Black sheep"

- Literal: "Qora qo'y"
- Meaning: The worst, disgraced member of a family or group
- Problem in Uzbek: In Uzbek culture, "qora qo'y" means an ordinary sheep, no negative meaning. Instead, "qora yuz" or "yuzi qora" (black-faced) is used.

Example: "Let the cat out of the bag"

- Literal: "Mushukni qopdan chiqarib yubormoq"
- Uzbek: "Sirni oshkor qilmoq", "Og'zidan sir chiqarib qo'ymoq", "Sirni to'kib solmoq"
- Analysis: While English uses the images of cat and bag, Uzbek uses images related to "mouth" and "secret". According to Gibbs (1994), such differences in imagery stem from differences in the conceptual systems of nations.

Another example: "Spill the beans"

- Literal: "Loviyalarni to'kib yubormoq"
- Uzbek: "Gapni to'kib solmoq", "Sirni to'kmoq"

### Cultural Challenges

#### 1. National-Cultural Features

Idioms reflect the lifestyle, traditions, and values of a people. As Hatim and Mason (1997) emphasize, the translator as an intercultural mediator must consider the





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differences between two cultures and adapt the text to the target culture. Cowie (1998) specifically emphasizes the cultural component of phraseological units and stresses the importance of an ethnolinguistic approach when studying and translating them.

Example: "Don't bring coals to Newcastle"

- Literal: "Nyukaslga ko'mir olib borma"
- Meaning: To bring something unnecessary, to add something to a place where it is already abundant
- Cultural basis: Newcastle is a city in England that produces coal
- Uzbek equivalents:
  - "Toshkentga oshiq olib borma" (Don't bring wooden spoons to Tashkent - Tashkent has many wooden spoons)
  - "Buxoroga somsa olib borma" (Don't bring samsa to Bukhara - Bukhara samosas are famous)
  - "Qashqadaryoga qovun olib borma" (Don't bring melons to Kashkadarya - a region that grows melons)

### 2. Religious Differences

Differences in religious beliefs are natural because the Uzbek people mainly follow Islam, while in Western regions, Christianity and Buddhism are more widespread. According to Benjamin (1968), translation should strive to preserve the "sacredness" of the original text, but at the same time be understandable in the target language. Gibbs (1994) emphasizes that conceptual differences are particularly pronounced in the translation of idioms related to religious concepts.

Example: "For Christ's sake"

- Literal: "Iso Masih uchun"
- Meaning: Same as "For God's sake" (meaning please, begging)
- Uzbek equivalent: "Xudo haqqi", "Olloh uchun"

### 3. Food-Related Idioms

Each nation's national dishes find their expression in idioms. According to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) metaphor theory, food-related idioms can be seen as metaphorical extensions of our daily experiences. Cowie (1998) specifically researched the national-cultural features of food-related phraseological units.

Example: "Greatest thing since sliced bread"

- Literal: "Kesilgan nondan keyingi eng yaxshi narsa"
- Meaning: A wonderful invention, the best thing
- Cultural basis: In Western culture, the invention of sliced bread was considered an important event
- Uzbek equivalent: "Eng zo'r ixtiro", "Ajoyib narsa"





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**Conclusion:**

This article has analyzed the semantic and cultural challenges that arise in the process of translating English idioms into Uzbek. The research led to the following conclusions:

Semantic challenges include loss of meaning due to literal translation, lack of equivalence, polysemous words, and lexical-semantic mismatch. Cultural challenges manifest in national-cultural features, religious differences, and food-related idioms.

The views of translation theorists Benjamin (1968), Hatim and Mason (1997), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Cowie (1998), and Gibbs (1994) show that translating idioms is a complex and multifaceted process that involves not only language but also thought, culture, and communication. Benjamin's idea of the "afterlife of the original text," Hatim and Mason's concept of the "translator as communicator," Lakoff and Johnson's "conceptual metaphor" theory, Cowie's phraseological analyses, and Gibbs's empirical research on figurative thought serve as important theoretical foundations for understanding the process of translating idioms.

For successful translation of English idioms into Uzbek, the translator needs not only perfect knowledge of both languages but also a deep understanding of the culture, history, traditions, religious views, and worldview of both peoples. At the same time, the translator must be able to correctly analyze the context and approach each idiom individually, using methods such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, and dynamic equivalence when necessary to fully preserve the meaning.

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