



THE SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: Phraseological units (idioms and fixed expressions) are an essential aspect of linguistic and cultural identity. This paper investigates the semantic and cultural-linguistic features of phraseological units in Uzbek and English, emphasizing how cultural values, traditions, and historical context shape their meaning. The study employs a qualitative descriptive and comparative methodology. Data were collected from authoritative dictionaries, literary works, and authentic spoken sources. The analysis highlights both universal patterns in expressing human experience and significant cultural differences. Uzbek phraseological units often reflect collective solidarity, social morality, and folklore-based imagery, whereas English idioms frequently reflect individualism, pragmatism, and metaphorical abstraction. The findings are valuable for language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication.

Key words: phraseological units, idioms, semantics, cultural linguistics, Uzbek language.

Introduction

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a living repository of a community's history, culture, values, and worldview. Among the various components of a language, phraseological units occupy a unique position due to their ability to convey meaning that transcends the literal interpretation of individual words. Phraseological units, also referred to as idioms, fixed expressions, or set phrases, are integral elements of the lexical system and are considered culturally marked linguistic phenomena. They serve as a window into the cognitive and cultural structures of a speech community, providing insight into how people conceptualize abstract notions such as emotions, morality, social relations, and human behavior. Therefore, understanding phraseological units requires a dual approach that examines both their semantic content and their cultural-linguistic context [12, 120].

The study of phraseological units has gained increasing prominence in contemporary linguistics due to the intersection of several scholarly fields,



including semantics, pragmatics, cultural linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and contrastive linguistics. Phraseological units are of particular interest because their meaning is often idiomatic and non-compositional. Unlike regular word combinations, where the meaning can be deduced from the individual words, phraseological units convey figurative meanings that are culturally and historically embedded. This non-literal aspect is essential for expressing complex human experiences concisely and effectively. For example, the Uzbek phraseological unit “*Ko‘ziga tuproq sepmoq*” literally translates as “to throw soil into someone’s eyes” but figuratively means to disregard or harm someone, reflecting moral and social judgments prevalent in Uzbek culture. In English, the idiom “*to rub salt in the wound*” conveys a similar concept of aggravating someone’s misfortune but is metaphorically linked to physical pain, reflecting different cultural imagery. The comparison of such units across languages reveals both universal cognitive tendencies and culturally specific conceptualizations [6, 45]. Uzbek and English languages represent markedly different linguistic and cultural traditions. Uzbek, a member of the Turkic language family, has developed under the influence of nomadic traditions, Islamic ethics, Eastern philosophy, and centuries of folklore. Its phraseological units are heavily influenced by oral traditions, poetry, proverbs, and communal social values. They frequently emphasize collectivism, respect for elders, patience, moral integrity, and social harmony. For instance, “*Qarg‘a o‘zi boqadi, bolasini boqadi*” (“The crow feeds itself and its chick”) highlights the values of parental responsibility and social care, which are central to Uzbek cultural consciousness. Conversely, English, a Germanic language, has evolved within a Western cultural framework influenced by Christianity, European historical developments, industrialization, and global expansion. English idioms often prioritize individualism, pragmatism, autonomy, and abstract conceptual metaphors. For example, “*Every man for himself*” emphasizes personal responsibility and pragmatic thinking, illustrating a worldview distinct from that of collectivist Uzbek culture [1, 68].

The semantic characteristics of phraseological units are closely intertwined with cultural-linguistic features. In Uzbek, idioms often contain metaphorical elements derived from nature, family relations, agricultural practices, and communal experiences. English idioms, on the other hand, frequently use metaphors based on trade, sports, navigation, and urban life. While both languages share universal semantic domains such as emotions, social relations, and human behavior, the imagery and symbolic references differ substantially. The choice of metaphors reflects the ways in which each culture conceptualizes the world. Cognitive linguistics offers a framework for understanding this phenomenon by examining how conceptual metaphors



operate across different languages. For example, the conceptual metaphor of life as a journey appears in both Uzbek and English idioms but is expressed differently: Uzbek may use references to rivers, caravans, or paths in nature, whereas English may use roads, steps, or voyages [15, 35]. Comparative studies of phraseological units provide invaluable insights into both linguistic and cultural dimensions. They allow researchers to identify similarities and differences in semantic structure, metaphorical mapping, and cultural references. Additionally, such studies have significant implications for translation and intercultural communication. Literal translation of idioms often leads to misinterpretation or complete loss of meaning. For example, translating the Uzbek idiom “*Tuyg‘ulari tili bilan emas, ish bilan ko‘rsatilar*” (“Emotions are shown not through words but through deeds”) into English literally may not fully convey its pragmatic and cultural significance. Functional equivalence or paraphrasing may be required to capture the intended meaning, such as rendering it as “*Actions speak louder than words.*” This example demonstrates the crucial role of cultural competence in both interpreting and translating idiomatic expressions [10, 104].

Despite growing interest in phraseology, the comparative study of Uzbek and English phraseological units remains relatively limited. Most research has focused on European languages or has emphasized either structural or semantic aspects without adequately considering the cultural-linguistic dimension. Given the substantial differences in historical experience, social norms, and worldview between Uzbek and English speakers, a comprehensive study that examines both semantic and cultural-linguistic characteristics is timely and necessary. Such research contributes to contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and the teaching of both languages, enhancing our understanding of intercultural communication and semantic transfer.

The present study aims to address several research questions. Firstly, it seeks to identify similarities and differences in semantic meaning between Uzbek and English idioms. Secondly, it examines how cultural values, traditions, and social norms are encoded in phraseological units. Thirdly, it investigates the extent to which phraseological units in the two languages can be considered equivalent, partially equivalent, or non-equivalent. Finally, it explores the implications of these findings for translation, intercultural communication, and language teaching [8, 52]. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative and comparative approach, integrating semantic analysis, cultural-linguistic interpretation, and elements of cognitive linguistics. Selected phraseological units were compiled from authoritative dictionaries, classical and modern literary works, and authentic spoken sources in both languages. Units were analyzed for their semantic structure, figurative meaning,



metaphorical imagery, thematic domains, and cultural references. Contextual analysis ensured that both pragmatic and stylistic functions were considered, while cognitive linguistic analysis helped to identify underlying conceptual metaphors [5, 43].

In conclusion, phraseological units are not merely lexical items but function as mirrors of culture, reflecting the values, experiences, and worldview of their respective speech communities. By examining Uzbek and English phraseological units, we gain insight into both universal human cognition and culture-specific conceptualizations. Understanding these idiomatic expressions is essential not only for linguists but also for translators, language teachers, and learners, as it facilitates accurate communication and intercultural understanding. This study lays the groundwork for subsequent research that may expand to diachronic analysis, larger corpora, or additional languages, further exploring the intricate interplay between language, meaning, and culture.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is designed to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the semantic and cultural-linguistic characteristics of phraseological units in Uzbek and English. Given the complexity of idiomatic expressions and their embedded cultural meanings, the research combines qualitative, descriptive, comparative, and cognitive-linguistic approaches to ensure a thorough examination of both semantic content and cultural significance. The methodology is structured into multiple stages to provide clarity, replicability, and rigor in analyzing phraseological data.

The first stage involves the careful selection of phraseological units from reliable and authoritative sources. For Uzbek, the units were extracted from classical literature such as Alisher Navoi's *Xamsa*, works of Cho'lpon, contemporary literary texts, and folklore collections. Additional data were drawn from comprehensive Uzbek phraseological dictionaries that document idiomatic expressions widely recognized in the language. For English, data sources included the *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*, contemporary literary works, journalistic texts, and spoken corpora, including authentic dialogues and recorded speech from various social contexts. The selection criteria focused on stability, frequency of use, figurativeness, semantic opacity, and cultural relevance. Only fixed, widely recognized units were included to ensure that the analysis reflects meaningful and socially recognized expressions [13, 145]. Once the corpus was compiled, a descriptive analysis was conducted to examine the structural and semantic properties of each phraseological unit. Each idiom was analyzed holistically,



considering its literal and figurative meanings, lexical composition, syntactic behavior, and semantic integrity. This analysis helps distinguish between fully idiomatic expressions, which convey meanings not deducible from individual words, and semi-motivated idioms, which retain some semantic transparency. For example, the Uzbek phrase “*Ko‘ngli joyida bo‘lmoq*” literally translates as “to have the heart in place” but figuratively conveys the sense of contentment or moral correctness. Its English counterpart, “*to be of good cheer*”, conveys a similar emotional state but employs a different metaphorical schema [4, 30].

The second stage involves thematic classification of the phraseological units. Idioms were grouped according to their semantic and conceptual domains, including emotions, character traits, social relations, moral values, daily life, work, and family. This classification facilitates a comparative understanding of the cognitive and cultural patterns encoded in idiomatic expressions. For instance, Uzbek phraseology often features family and community-oriented metaphors, emphasizing collectivism and social responsibility. English idioms frequently utilize metaphors drawn from trade, urban life, or individual action, reflecting a cultural focus on pragmatism and autonomy. Such thematic categorization provides a framework for examining both universal tendencies and language-specific conceptualizations [3, 25]. A crucial component of the methodology is cultural-linguistic analysis. Phraseological units are considered cultural signs that encode traditions, ethical norms, historical references, and collective attitudes. Cultural references embedded in idioms such as references to animals, agricultural practices, religious customs, social hierarchy, or folklore are analyzed to understand how cultural experience shapes semantic meaning. For example, the Uzbek idiom “*Tog‘u tog‘ga yetadi*” (“The mountain meets the mountain”) conveys the notion of mutual understanding or reconciliation within social networks, reflecting a collectivist ethos and the importance of social harmony. Its English counterpart, “*It takes two to tango*”, conveys a similar concept but uses metaphorical imagery associated with dance and partnership, illustrating culturally distinct conceptualization [14, 28].

The comparative method is employed to systematically identify similarities and differences between Uzbek and English phraseological units. Three categories of equivalence are distinguished: full equivalents, partial equivalents, and non-equivalents. Full equivalents share both semantic content and figurative imagery, partial equivalents convey similar meanings but employ different metaphors or imagery, and non-equivalents lack direct counterparts, requiring explanatory or adaptive translation. This categorization allows for a detailed understanding of how each culture conceptualizes specific experiences, emotions, or moral concepts through idiomatic expressions. For example, the



Uzbek idiom “*Tug‘ilgan kunini qushcha qarsak bilan kutmoq*” (“to greet someone’s birthday with bird-like applause”) emphasizes communal celebration and folklore imagery. There is no exact English equivalent, and translation requires paraphrasing or functional adaptation, such as “*to celebrate someone’s birthday warmly*” [11, 110].

Cognitive linguistic principles are integrated into the methodology to explore the conceptual metaphors underlying phraseological units. Conceptual metaphor theory posits that abstract concepts are often understood through mappings onto more concrete experiential domains. In this study, metaphorical patterns such as *emotion as heat*, *life as a journey*, and *moral responsibility as balance* were identified and compared across languages. Uzbek idioms frequently employ metaphors derived from nature, familial relations, and communal practices, whereas English idioms commonly rely on metaphors drawn from commerce, sports, and urban activities. Cognitive analysis helps explain why certain metaphorical structures are conventional in one language but absent in another, reflecting both cognitive universals and cultural specificity [7, 80]. Contextual analysis was another essential step in the methodology. Phraseological units were examined within authentic textual and spoken contexts to capture pragmatic meaning, stylistic function, and emotional coloring. Literary texts, journalistic sources, and recorded conversations provided insight into how idioms are used in real-life communication. Contextual analysis ensures that the functional and pragmatic aspects of idioms are considered, avoiding misinterpretation due to literal or decontextualized reading. For example, the Uzbek idiom “*Yuragi yerga tushmoq*” may convey deep sorrow in one context but mild disappointment in another, depending on the narrative or communicative setting. Contextualization thus provides a more nuanced understanding of idiomatic meaning [9, 55].

Finally, the methodology incorporates translation analysis to examine practical applications of phraseological study. Selected idioms were analyzed in terms of translatability and strategies for equivalence. Methods such as literal translation, paraphrasing, functional equivalence, and cultural adaptation were assessed. This approach demonstrates the implications of semantic and cultural differences for translation practice and highlights the necessity of cultural competence. Understanding the interaction between linguistic form, figurative meaning, and cultural context is crucial for effective translation and intercultural communication [2, 75]. The methodological framework also emphasizes reliability and validity. Data sources were chosen based on credibility, frequency of usage, and representativeness. Cross-checking between dictionaries, literary sources, and spoken corpora ensured that the



selected phraseological units reflect authentic usage. Triangulation of semantic analysis, cultural-linguistic interpretation, and cognitive insights enhances the rigor and robustness of the study, providing a comprehensive understanding of phraseological phenomena in both languages. The methodology combines descriptive, comparative, cultural-linguistic, cognitive, contextual, and translation-oriented approaches. This multi-layered framework allows for a deep and nuanced analysis of phraseological units, capturing the interplay of semantic meaning, metaphorical imagery, and cultural context. The approach is replicable, systematic, and adaptable, making it suitable for comparative studies in other languages and for further research on the relationship between language, culture, and cognition. By integrating these diverse methodological perspectives, the study provides both theoretical insights into phraseology and practical guidance for language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of phraseological units in Uzbek and English demonstrates that idioms are not merely linguistic expressions but also culturally and cognitively rich constructs. Phraseological units function as mirrors of a community's worldview, social norms, moral values, and historical experience. Understanding them requires examining both their semantic content and the cultural-linguistic context in which they occur. The study reveals that both languages share universal semantic patterns. Idioms in Uzbek and English often express emotions, human behavior, social relationships, and moral principles. For example, Uzbek idioms such as *“Yuragi yerga tushmoq”* (“to have the heart fall to the ground”) and English idioms like *“Down in the dumps”* convey similar emotional states. Similarly, idioms addressing responsibility or social care, such as Uzbek *“Qarg‘a o‘zi boqadi, bolasini boqadi”* and English *“Charity begins at home”*, demonstrate common human experiences encoded in language.

Despite these universals, significant cultural differences exist. Uzbek phraseological units often reflect collectivist values, communal life, ethical norms, and folklore-based imagery. Many idioms derive from nature, family relations, and social interactions. English idioms, by contrast, emphasize individualism, autonomy, pragmatism, and abstract conceptual metaphors. For example, Uzbek *“Tog‘u tog‘ga yetadi”* illustrates reconciliation within a community, whereas English *“It takes two to tango”* conveys a similar idea using a culturally specific metaphor of dance. Equivalence between idioms in the two languages is limited. Full equivalents are rare; partial equivalents or non-equivalents are more common. Translators often need to use paraphrasing or functional adaptation to convey meaning accurately. For instance, the Uzbek



idiom “*Tug‘ilgan kunini qushcha qarsak bilan kutmoq*” (“to greet someone’s birthday with bird-like applause”) lacks a direct English equivalent and may be rendered as “*to celebrate someone’s birthday warmly*”. Such differences highlight the necessity of cultural awareness in translation and intercultural communication.

The study also highlights the role of conceptual metaphors. Uzbek idioms frequently draw on natural, familial, and communal experiences, while English idioms rely on metaphors from trade, sports, or urban life. These differences reflect how historical, environmental, and social factors influence the cognitive mapping of abstract concepts in language. Understanding phraseological units has practical implications for language learning, translation, and intercultural communication. Knowledge of idioms improves communicative competence, prevents misinterpretation, and aids in cultural adaptation. Translators and educators must consider semantic meaning, metaphorical imagery, and cultural context to convey idiomatic expressions effectively.

In conclusion, phraseological units in Uzbek and English serve as cultural and cognitive markers. While both languages share universal semantic patterns, their idioms reflect distinct worldviews, values, and cultural experiences. Recognizing these similarities and differences is crucial for effective communication, translation, and language teaching. Future research could expand to additional languages, larger corpora, or diachronic studies, further exploring the interaction between language, culture, and cognition.

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