

Intercultural Pragmatics of English Phraseological Units: Idioms in Cross-Cultural Communication and Translation

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Abstract: The study explores the intercultural pragmatics of English phraseological units, with particular attention to idioms and their functions in cross-cultural communication and translation. Idioms, as culturally embedded expressions, present significant challenges in interpretation and transfer, often leading to semantic shifts and pragmatic mismatches when translated into other languages. This research combines comparative analysis of English idioms with their Russian and Uzbek equivalents, corpus-based investigation of idiomatic use in discourse, and pragmatic evaluation of their communicative functions. Findings indicate that literal translations frequently result in semantic distortion, while functional equivalents preserve both meaning and pragmatic value more effectively. Moreover, descriptive paraphrasing, though semantically accurate, tends to reduce idiomaticity and cultural resonance. The study highlights the necessity of pragmatic awareness in both language learning and translation practices, underscoring that phraseological competence is an essential component of intercultural communication. By examining idioms as discourse units rather than isolated lexical items, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural values are embedded in language and how phraseological adaptation shapes modern communicative practices. The results have pedagogical implications for English as a foreign language instruction in Uzbekistan and beyond, as well as practical applications in translation studies, where preserving pragmatic equivalence remains a central challenge.

Keywords: English phraseology; idioms; intercultural pragmatics; phraseological units; translation studies; Russian; Uzbek; functional equivalence; discourse analysis; cross-cultural communication.

Introduction

Phraseological units, and idioms in particular, constitute one of the most culturally loaded aspects of language. Their figurative meanings are often inseparable from the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they arise. Consequently, idioms pose considerable challenges in cross-cultural communication and translation, where the interplay between linguistic form and cultural meaning can result in misinterpretation, loss of nuance, or communicative breakdown. In an era of globalisation and increased intercultural contact, the pragmatic functions of idioms deserve special attention, since they are not only stylistic embellishments but also tools for humour, persuasion, solidarity, and identity construction.

The relevance of this research is highlighted by the fact that English, as a global lingua franca, is increasingly used in intercultural contexts where speakers from different cultural backgrounds negotiate meaning. When idioms are used in English discourse, their interpretation depends heavily on the cultural competence of interlocutors. A phrase such as *spill the beans* or *kick the*

bucket may be transparent to native speakers but opaque or misleading to learners and translators from other linguistic traditions. This pragmatic gap underscores the importance of exploring idioms not merely as lexical units but as culturally situated phenomena that reflect shared values, metaphors, and collective memory.

The actuality of the topic is also tied to translation studies. Translators frequently face the dilemma of whether to preserve the original idiom, substitute it with an equivalent from the target language, or rephrase it descriptively. Each strategy carries pragmatic consequences for how meaning is conveyed and how cultural resonance is maintained. For instance, rendering the English idiom *the last straw* into another language may involve finding a culturally parallel metaphor or risking loss of idiomatic force. The translator's decisions directly influence the reception of a text and its ability to achieve communicative goals in the target culture.

In this respect, the study is both theoretical and applied. Theoretically, it draws on intercultural pragmatics, phraseological theory, and cognitive linguistics to examine how idioms function as semiotic carriers of cultural meaning. Practically, it investigates real cases of idioms in communication and translation to identify recurrent challenges and effective strategies. The subject of the research is English idioms as phraseological units, while the object is their pragmatic role in cross-cultural communication and translation processes.

The novelty of the study lies in its attempt to combine corpus-based analysis with intercultural pragmatic evaluation, thereby linking the frequency and context of idiom use to the strategies employed in translating or adapting them across languages. This approach allows us to see not only how idioms function within English discourse but also how they travel across cultural boundaries.

The aim of the article is to analyse the intercultural pragmatic functions of English idioms and to identify effective strategies for their transmission in cross-cultural communication and translation. The tasks of the research include: (1) reviewing theoretical foundations of phraseology and intercultural pragmatics; (2) classifying English idioms according to their pragmatic functions; (3) examining cases of idioms in cross-cultural discourse and translation; and (4) evaluating translation strategies in terms of pragmatic adequacy.

By addressing these issues, the study contributes to both phraseological research and practical translation studies, offering insights into how culturally bound expressions continue to shape and sometimes complicate intercultural communication in English.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology with elements of contrastive and pragmatic analysis in order to investigate the role of English idioms in intercultural communication and translation. The research design combined corpus data, authentic translated materials, and discourse samples to ensure a balanced representation of idioms in both native and intercultural contexts. Data were drawn from three main sources: (1) the *British National Corpus* (*BNC*) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (*COCA*), which provided examples of idiomatic usage in natural English discourse; (2) a selection of literary texts and journalistic articles originally written in English and their published translations into Uzbek and Russian, chosen because they contain a high density of idiomatic expressions; and (3) classroom and conversational data collected from advanced Uzbek learners of English, where idioms frequently arose in intercultural communicative situations. Altogether, approximately 500 idiomatic expressions were collected and examined, of which 200 were directly analysed in terms of translation and intercultural use.

The idioms were selected according to two main criteria: first, their figurative meaning had to be at least partly opaque to non-native speakers; and second, they needed to demonstrate cultural specificity, whether through imagery, historical allusion, or metaphorical extension. Well-known expressions such as *kick the bucket*, *spill the beans*, and *the last straw* were included alongside less transparent idioms such as *throw in the towel* or *cross the Rubicon*. For each idiom,

instances were retrieved from corpora to establish contextual usage in English, after which their translations into Uzbek and Russian were compared. The translations were analysed according to three strategies: literal rendering, functional equivalence, and descriptive paraphrase.

The analytical procedure followed three stages. First, idioms were categorised according to their pragmatic functions, including humour, irony, emphasis, mitigation, and solidarity. Second, intercultural communication data were examined to determine whether these functions were preserved, altered, or lost when idioms were used by non-native speakers or translated into another language. Finally, the adequacy of different translation strategies was assessed, with particular attention to whether pragmatic meaning was maintained across cultural boundaries. For example, the idiom *the ball is in your court* was evaluated not only in terms of its semantic transfer but also its pragmatic impact, such as how it structures politeness or agency in communication.

To ensure reliability, the classification of idioms and translation strategies was independently verified by two linguists specialising in phraseology, resulting in a ninety per cent inter-rater agreement. Lexicographic sources such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Cambridge Idioms Dictionary* were consulted to confirm idiomatic meanings and etymologies, while Russian and Uzbek idiom dictionaries were used to identify potential equivalents. Although the study provides a broad overview, it is limited by the selection of languages, as only Russian and Uzbek translations were analysed; future research could extend this investigation to other cultural contexts where English idioms circulate.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that English idioms, while deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts, remain highly dynamic elements of communication that both facilitate and complicate intercultural discourse. One of the most striking observations is that idioms serve not merely as decorative linguistic devices but as pragmatic tools that signal group identity, shared knowledge, and communicative intent. When transferred across cultural boundaries, however, these same idioms become sites of tension, where meaning can be partially lost, altered, or negotiated anew.

A comparison of idiom usage across corpora, translations, and learner interactions reveals that pragmatic functions such as humour, irony, and emphasis are particularly vulnerable to distortion in intercultural contexts. For instance, while English idioms such as *kick the bucket* or *spill the beans* carry light humorous undertones in native discourse, their literal translation into Uzbek or Russian often strips away this pragmatic nuance, resulting either in a neutral or overly literal interpretation. This suggests that pragmatic equivalence, rather than semantic equivalence, should be prioritised when dealing with idiomatic translation.

The analysis also indicates that translators and language learners adopt different strategies in resolving the challenge of idiom transfer. Translators often prefer functional equivalents where possible, as in rendering *the last straw* into Russian as *последняя капля* or into Uzbek as *oxirgi tomchi*, which successfully preserve both semantic and pragmatic force. However, when no equivalent exists, descriptive paraphrase is used, which tends to preserve meaning but dilute idiomaticity. Learners, on the other hand, frequently resort to literal translations, which, while creative, sometimes result in pragmatic misfires. For example, an Uzbek learner's literal rendering of *the ball is in your court* as *to 'p sizning maydoningizda* was comprehensible but pragmatically awkward, lacking the idiomatic resonance of responsibility transfer that native speakers associate with the phrase.

These findings align with previous research in phraseology and intercultural pragmatics, which emphasises that idioms cannot be fully understood without reference to the cultural and historical frameworks from which they emerge [3, 6]. The results also highlight that intercultural communication involving idioms requires not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic and cultural competence. This supports the view that phraseology should be central to advanced

foreign language teaching, where idioms are not treated as lexical ornaments but as core units of discourse.

At the theoretical level, the study contributes to understanding idioms as sites of linguistic negotiation in intercultural pragmatics. The shift in function observed – where idioms lose humour or emphasis and gain a neutral explanatory tone in translation – demonstrates how phraseology evolves in cross-cultural settings. In this respect, idioms serve as a window into the broader process of linguistic adaptation and cultural exchange, reflecting how languages interact and influence each other through discourse.

Nevertheless, the study's scope is limited to English idioms translated into Russian and Uzbek. Given the global circulation of English, further research across additional languages and cultural contexts would enrich our understanding of how idiomatic meaning is transformed worldwide. Moreover, quantitative corpus-based studies of idiom frequency and collocation patterns could complement this qualitative approach, offering a more systematic view of idiomatic adaptation across cultures.

Overall, the discussion underscores the importance of approaching idioms not simply as fixed linguistic fossils but as living, adaptable units of discourse that require careful cultural and pragmatic mediation in intercultural communication.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that English idioms function not merely as fixed lexical items but as culturally loaded and pragmatically rich discourse units whose meanings shift significantly when transferred across languages. The analysis revealed that idioms often lose or transform their pragmatic functions – such as humour, irony, or emphasis – when rendered into Russian and Uzbek, with literal translations frequently causing semantic distortion or pragmatic mismatch. Functional equivalents, where they exist, provided the most successful means of preserving both semantic accuracy and pragmatic resonance, while descriptive paraphrasing tended to safeguard meaning but at the expense of idiomaticity.

These findings confirm that idiomatic expressions are inseparable from the cultural frameworks in which they originate, and therefore their use in intercultural communication demands not only advanced linguistic competence but also heightened cultural and pragmatic awareness. For language learners, the study highlights the necessity of integrating phraseological competence into curricula, ensuring that idioms are not taught as isolated lexical ornaments but as integral components of discourse carrying cultural and pragmatic significance. For translators, the results underscore the importance of pragmatic equivalence over literal accuracy, particularly in contexts where idioms perform vital interpersonal or rhetorical functions.

At a broader level, the study illustrates how phraseological units embody the dynamics of intercultural pragmatics: they reveal how languages negotiate meaning, adapt cultural knowledge, and reshape discourse when in contact. In this sense, idioms act as both barriers and bridges in communication, capable of causing misunderstanding but equally capable of enriching dialogue across cultures when interpreted and adapted thoughtfully.

Future research should extend beyond Russian and Uzbek contexts to explore idiomatic translation and use across a wider range of languages and cultural settings. Additionally, combining corpus-based frequency analysis with pragmatic discourse studies could yield a more systematic understanding of idiomatic adaptation and fossilisation processes.

In conclusion, idioms should be regarded not as peripheral linguistic features but as central to the negotiation of meaning in global communication. Their intercultural study not only enhances our knowledge of phraseology and translation but also contributes to the development of more effective pedagogical approaches and deeper intercultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

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