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PHRASEOLOGICAL EQUIVALENCE, PRAGMATICS AND CONTEXTUAL MEANING IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. This study investigates how phraseological equivalence operates across languages when shaped by pragmatic intent and contextual meaning, focusing on English and Uzbek expressions within contemporary translation scholarship. Rather than treating multiword expressions as static lexical items with fixed counterparts, the paper examines why literal substitution frequently distorts communicative force, emotional nuance, or cultural presuppositions. Grounded in functional-pragmatic translation models, dynamic equivalence, and empirical findings on contextual idiom processing, the article presents a structured qualitative comparison of English idioms and Uzbek phraseological units. The analysis demonstrates that achieving adequate interlingual transfer requires aligning illocutionary force and surrounding discourse context with target-language idiomatic norms, particularly when direct formal equivalents are absent.

Keywords: phraseological equivalence, pragmatics, contextual meaning, idioms, English-Uzbek translation, dynamic equivalence, stylistic register, semantic non-compositionality.

Introduction. Multiword figurative expressions including idioms, comparative set phrases, proverbs, and culturally entrenched locutions – pose persistent analytical and practical challenges in interlingual translation. Unlike compositional syntactic strings whose meanings follow directly from constituent words and grammatical rules, phraseological units carry consolidated figurative values rooted in historical memory, social practices, and collective imagery. As John Sinclair famously observed, an idiom is a "group of two or more words which are chosen together in order to produce a specific meaning or effect in speech or writing" (Sinclair, 1991, P.172; cited in Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.261). Because that intended effect is tightly bound to cultural conventions and discourse environment, translating phraseology requires far more than swapping dictionary entries between source and target languages.

When translators or automated systems rely on surface-level word-for-word rendering, figurative expressions often lose their rhetorical punch or become opaque to target readers. Highlighting this recurring vulnerability in computational and cross-linguistic work, researchers note that "literal translation errors of idioms remain a major issue in automated translation, requiring novel evaluation metrics to assess their accuracy" (Baziotis et al., 2023; cited in Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.261). In specialized and literary discourse alike, phraseology anchors register, stance, and textual cohesion; Rodriguez underscores that "phraseology serves as a fundamental intraparameter that ensures the proper transfer of the source language and its respective specialist terminology" (Rodriguez, 2024, P.118; cited in Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.259).

Although structural typologies of idioms have long been investigated, less attention has been given to how pragmatic intent and immediate textual context interact when rendering expressions between typologically distinct languages such as English and Uzbek. English – an analytic Germanic language with rich phrasal and comparative idioms – differs markedly from Uzbek, an agglutinative Turkic language characterized by verb-final syntax, rich evidential/modal morphology, and deeply rooted somatic and natural metaphors. This paper examines how phraseological equivalence is negotiated through pragmatic function and contextual meaning across English and Uzbek, pursuing three objectives: (1) to synthesize theoretical perspectives linking equivalence, pragmatics, and

context; (2) to analyze concrete English and Uzbek phraseological examples across translation strategies; and (3) to evaluate how discourse context either clarifies or complicates idiomatic transfer.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework. Classical and contemporary translation theory provides complementary lenses for examining non-compositional expressions. A foundational benchmark is Eugene Nida's distinction between formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence, where dynamic equivalence aims for "the closest natural equivalent in the target language" (Nida, 1964, P.166; cited in Alzobidy, 2026, P.954). In idiomatic translation, prioritizing naturalness and reader reception often requires substituting an unfamiliar source image with an idiomatic target expression that performs a comparable communicative role rather than mimicking literal syntax.

Scholars working on phraseology emphasize that cross-linguistic correspondence is rarely symmetrical across all dimensions of meaning. Reviewing multiword expression scholarship, Noriega-Santiáñez and Corpas Pastor note that interlingual correspondence spans full, partial, or zero equivalence (Corpas Pastor, 2001, 2003; cited in Noriega-Santiáñez & Corpas Pastor, 2025), while Dobrovol'skij cautions that "there are practically always certain semantic, pragmatic, and collocational differences that must be discovered and described" (Dobrovol'skij, 2013, P.214; cited in Noriega-Santiáñez & Corpas Pastor, 2025, P.126-127). Even when two expressions appear conceptually similar, differences in frequency, stylistic register, or presupposition can alter their pragmatic effect in discourse.

Pragmatic approaches clarify why figurative units act as rhetorical intensifiers, evaluative markers, or interpersonal cues rather than bare propositional statements. Discussing comparative phraseology, Mellado Blanco observes that such units convey "a pragmatic meaning in order to intensify a quality, action or state expressed by an adjective or verb" (Mellado Blanco, 2023, P.314; cited in Noriega-Santiáñez & Corpas Pastor, 2025, P.131). "In contrast to a literal translation, an idiom involves far more than a perfect semantic relation; it necessitates the integration of context and cultural customization that any AI powered translation systems must incorporate" (Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.261).

Methodology. This research adopts a qualitative comparative and functional-pragmatic analytical design. Because surface-level lexical overlap metrics frequently penalize valid idiomatic substitutions or cultural adaptations (Li et al., 2023), qualitative discourse-sensitive evaluation is essential for capturing pragmatic adequacy and contextual fit. The study synthesizes theoretical frameworks and empirical observations documented in contemporary phraseological and machine-translation literature – specifically Kalaš and Lipták, Noriega-Santiáñez and Corpas Pastor, Helal, Alzobidy and pairs them with illustrative English and Uzbek phraseological units analyzed across three dimensions:

- Equivalence Typology: distinguishing full/direct idiomatic counterparts, analogous/functional equivalents, and non-idiomatic or descriptive renderings.
- Pragmatic Force and Register: examining how intensification, reproach, sympathy, warning, or politeness is retained or shifted across languages.
- Contextual Meaning and Integration: assessing how surrounding clauses disambiguate literal versus figurative readings and constrain grammatical or stylistic adaptation.

Results and Discussion

Phraseological Equivalence Across English and Uzbek. Cross-linguistic comparison between English and Uzbek reveals that exact structural and metaphorical alignment is selective. While certain universal or widely shared human experiences yield close counterparts, many idioms rely on culture-specific imagery – such as weather, food, or body parts – that resists mechanical calquing. Consider the English idiom ***"to bite the bullet"*** (to accept a difficult or unpleasant situation bravely and decisively), which aligns pragmatically with the Uzbek expression ***"tavakkal qilmoq"*** or contextually with ***"achchiq haqiqatga ko'nmoq / qiyinchilikka bardosh bermoq."*** A literal

translation of *"to bite the bullet"* into Uzbek (*"o'qni tishlamoq"*) would sound bizarre and obscure the speaker's resolve. Conversely, the Uzbek somatic idiom ***"ko'ngli bo'sh"*** (literally "whose heart/inner self is soft/loose") functions pragmatically to characterize someone easily moved to pity or emotional sympathy, corresponding functionally to English ***"soft-hearted"*** or ***"tender-hearted"*** rather than a literal word-for-word rendering. Similarly, Uzbek ***"tili uzun"*** (literally "long-tongued") carries a pragmatic evaluation of speaking out of turn, being overly outspoken, or lacking tact/restraint in a given social hierarchy; depending on context, English may render its pragmatic force through *"outspoken," "sharp-tongued,"* or *"having a loose tongue,"* with the translator adjusting the degree of reproach to match interpersonal dynamics.

Pragmatic Force and Cultural Evaluation. As theoretical work on comparative and figurative idioms indicates, multiword expressions frequently operate as pragmatic intensifiers and evaluative devices rather than neutral descriptions (Noriega-Santiáñez & Corpas Pastor, 2025). In English, ***"as cool as a cucumber"*** intensifies calm composure under pressure; in Uzbek, a translator aiming for natural pragmatic resonance might select ***"xotirjamligini yo'qotmaslik / sovuqqonlik saqlamoq"*** or a context-fitting idiomatic equivalent such as ***"qovog'ini ham uyirmaslik"*** when emphasizing unshakeable calm in the face of provocation. Conversely, Uzbek ***"qovog'idan qor yog'moq"*** (literally "snow is falling from one's brow") vividly encodes visible displeasure, sternness, or simmering anger. If translated literally into English as "snow falls from his brow," the figurative pragmatic warning of anger is lost; instead, English captures the pragmatic and behavioral state through *"to look like thunder," "to scowl darkly,"* or *"to be in a black mood,"* chosen according to narrative tone.

Contextual Meaning: Disambiguation and Discourse Constraints. Context governs both semantic disambiguation and syntactic-pragmatic integration. Many word sequences can be read literally or idiomatically depending on surrounding discourse, and embedding an idiom inside a full sentence alters how meaning is processed. Empirical evidence from Kalaš and Lipták illustrates this tension vividly: "Without context, 91% of the idioms (n=91) were correctly translated. With context, accuracy declined to 77% (n=77)." (Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.262) Explaining why context can introduce pitfalls even as it clarifies meaning, Kalaš and Lipták note that in specific instances – such as *"cry wolf"* – placing an idiom inside a broader sentence triggered a literal rendering that obscured its figurative warning of a false alarm (Kalaš & Lipták, 2025, P.263). Parallel contextual sensitivity arises in English – Uzbek translation: for example, English ***"break the ice"*** in a tense negotiation or awkward social gathering shifts pragmatically from a literal physical act to easing initial tension (***"dastlabki tortinchoqlikni ketkazmoq / muloqotga yo'l ochmoq"***), while Uzbek ***"og'zidan bol tommoq"*** (literally "honey drips from one's mouth") in dialogue may signal genuine sweetness of speech or, in an ironic context, overly flattering persuasion (***"juda shirin so'zlamoq / maqtov yog'dirmoq"***).

Conclusion. Translating phraseological units across languages demands an integrated grasp of equivalence, pragmatic force, and contextual meaning. Because idiomatic expressions derive their communicative value from cultural conventions and discourse environment rather than isolated word meanings, prioritizing formal or literal correspondence frequently impairs naturalness and distorts speaker intent. Drawing on dynamic equivalence principles, cross-linguistic phraseological research, and comparative English–Uzbek examples, this study shows that effective translation aligns illocutionary force, register, and contextual cues with target-language norms. For translation practice and post-editing, treating context as an active constraint rather than an afterthought helps prevent literal pitfalls while preserving expressive vividness. Future research should expand parallel English-Uzbek literary and journalistic corpora to systematically catalog pragmatic shifts and support both human translators and bilingual language technologies.

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