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Pragmatic Equivalence in English and Uzbek Milk Expressions

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between shared milk imagery and pragmatic equivalence in English and Uzbek phraseology and proverb translation. The material derives from three separately organised datasets in the author's doctoral research: 25 phraseological entries, 40 proverbial entries, and 50 English units with proposed Uzbek renderings. Semantic comparison, contextual interpretation, and descriptive tabulation are used to distinguish conventional meaning, evaluative stance, communicative function, translation strategy, and image retention. In the phraseological dataset, one entry is classified as fully equivalent and ten as adequately matched; the proverbial dataset contains no full equivalents and eleven adequate matches. Among the 20 figurative units within the translation dataset, the milk image is fully retained in three, replaced in six, paraphrased in ten, and partly retained in one. Close readings show that similar images may express different judgements, while different images may support comparable communicative purposes. The study proposes a context-sensitive translation procedure that assesses meaning and stance before deciding whether to preserve imagery. The counts describe selected research materials and author-assessed translation options rather than language-wide frequencies or experimentally established translation quality.

Keywords: phraseology; proverb translation; pragmatic equivalence; milk metaphor; English and Uzbek; cultural meaning

1 Introduction

Milk is both an everyday food and a productive resource for figurative expression. English *milk* and Uzbek *sut* can refer to the same biological substance, yet expressions containing these words do not necessarily make the same claim about a person or situation. The image may foreground nourishment, gentleness, purity, early upbringing, irreversible loss, or the extraction of profit. Translation therefore requires more than replacing the English noun with its Uzbek dictionary counterpart.

The practical difficulty is especially clear when two expressions share a conspicuous image. *Cry over spilt milk* concerns regret after an irreversible event. The Uzbek proverb *Sutdan og'zi kuygan, qatiqni puflab ichar*, literally "Someone whose mouth was burnt by milk blows on yoghurt", concerns caution shaped by an earlier harmful experience. A translator who matches these expressions because both involve milk changes the speaker's communicative purpose. Conversely, the figurative senses of *a milch cow* and *sog'in sigir* can converge on a continuing source of profit. The same lexical domain thus produces both plausible matches and misleading similarities.

This article develops the pragmatic and translation analysis presented in Chapter III of the author's dissertation. Its contribution is a coordinated account of three questions: how closely selected English and Uzbek expressions correspond; how their evaluation changes in context; and how the choice of translation strategy relates to the retention or replacement of the milk image. These questions require separate records. An expression can preserve the source image while

distorting its communicative function, or replace the image while retaining a contextually appropriate judgement.

The investigation is limited to documented dictionary and proverb entries and selected literary contexts. It does not attempt to measure how frequently all English or Uzbek speakers use milk expressions. Its central claim is that imagery, pragmatic equivalence, and the evidential status of a proposed translation should be assessed independently before they are brought together in a translation decision.

2 Theoretical background

A phraseological unit is treated here as a relatively stable expression with a conventional figurative meaning. This definition separates an idiom such as *cry over spilt milk* from a literal combination such as *cow's milk*. It also distinguishes a phrase used as part of a sentence from a proverb that formulates a more complete judgement. The distinction is functional: the proverbial sentence *It is no use crying over spilt milk* is related to the verbal expression but is not the same type of analytical unit. Paremiological research likewise provides grounds for considering semantic structure and contextual use together (Hrisztova-Gotthardt & Aleksa Varga, 2014).

Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005) relate idiom interpretation to the specific imagery underlying an expression, showing why a general conceptual mapping does not exhaust its meaning. This perspective is relevant to milk expressions because the same substance participates in several different scenes: nursing, spilling, milking, dilution, and colour comparison. The conceptual framework of Kövecses (2020), which differentiates levels of conceptual organisation and gives context a substantial role, also supports examining the particular scene activated in discourse rather than assigning every occurrence to an undifferentiated concept of milk.

For this study, semantic correspondence concerns the conventional content conveyed by an expression. Pragmatic correspondence concerns what a speaker accomplishes with that content in a specified context: consolation, warning, criticism, praise, explanation, or another discourse function. Evaluative stance concerns the attitude expressed toward the referent. These dimensions interact without being identical. Compassion can have a positive lexical value while being criticised by a character who regards it as an obstacle to ruthless action.

The equivalence categories used below are operational categories retained from the dissertation. "Full equivalent" requires a close correspondence in figurative meaning, image, and relevant evaluative function. "Adequate counterpart" denotes a conventional target expression that can preserve the principal meaning and function despite a changed image or form. "Analogue" denotes partial semantic or functional overlap that does not justify unrestricted substitution. "No established counterpart" means that the consulted material did not supply an appropriate conventional match. The last category indicates a limitation of the documented comparison, not an inability to communicate the meaning in the target language.

3 Materials and method

The material is a purposively selected set of records developed for three related analytical tasks. The phraseological set comprises 17 English and eight Uzbek entries or expression families. The proverbial set comprises 20 entries in each language. The English-to-Uzbek translation set contains 50 distinct source units within that set: 30 lexical, terminological, compound, or verbal uses, followed by 20 phraseological or conventional figurative uses. These sets have different

inclusion principles and overlap in content; they are not added together to produce a total number of unique expressions.

Table 1 Composition and analytical purpose of the material

Dataset	Source direction	Entries	Purpose
Phraseological entries	English → Uzbek Uzbek → English	17 + 8 = 25	Equivalence
Proverbial entries	English → Uzbek Uzbek → English	20 + 20 = 40	Equivalence
Translation units	English → Uzbek	50	Strategy
Figurative subset of the translation units	English → Uzbek	20 of 50	Image retention

The English phraseological records principally draw on Kunin (1984), with Uzbek entries and possible counterparts drawn from Rahmatullayev et al. (2022). The proverb comparison uses the English collections edited by Wilson (1970) and Speake (2008), and the Uzbek collection by Mirzayev et al. (2005). These are the documented sources of the dissertation's research records. Kunin's English–Russian dictionary supplies evidence about English expressions; its Russian translations are not treated as evidence that an Uzbek counterpart is conventional. Literary contexts examined in this article are Christie's *The Man in the Brown Suit* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Orthographic or grammatical variants are not automatically counted as separate entries. The form *milch* in *a milch cow* is retained as a historically related form explicitly included in the source inventory. The term "proverbial entries" accommodates both complete proverbs and historically recorded proverb-like expressions; the inventory should not be mistaken for forty structurally uniform sentences. Translation comparisons are directional: the nearest target expression selected for an English entry need not itself belong to the Uzbek milk inventory.

Each record is examined for its conventional meaning, underlying image, evaluative orientation, and relevant communicative function. Candidate translations are then assigned an equivalence category. The separate translation set is classified by its dominant strategy: lexical equivalent, descriptive paraphrase, structural adjustment, functional counterpart, full phraseological equivalent, or calque with explicitation. "Dominant" is necessary because an idiomatic replacement may also require grammatical adjustment. Finally, image retention is coded separately for the twenty figurative units.

Translation provenance is also distinguished. Of the fifty target renderings, ten are directly supported by Uzbek dictionary counterparts, seventeen are choices informed by dictionary material, nineteen are the author's explanatory or functional proposals, and four are interpretations based on literary or religious contexts. These categories describe the basis for the proposed wording; they are not quality scores. Unless a published translation is explicitly identified, a complete Uzbek rendering discussed below is an author-proposed translation, even when it contains a dictionary-attested idiom.

Counts and percentages summarise the dissertation's classifications. The denominator is stated for each table, and no inferential statistical test is applied. The equivalence assessments and proposed renderings have not been subjected to an independent rating study in the reported material. Accordingly, the analysis evaluates defensible translation options and documents their rationale; it does not claim experimentally demonstrated equivalence or reader response.

4 Results

Distribution of equivalence categories

Table 2 Equivalence classifications in the selected inventories

Category	Phraseological entries n = 25	Proverbial entries n = 40
Full equivalent	1 (4%)	0 (0%)
Adequate counterpart	10 (40%)	11 (27.5%)
Analogue	2 (8%)	7 (17.5%)
No established counterpart	12 (48%)	22 (55%)
Total	25 (100%)	40 (100%)

Full equivalence is exceptional under the adopted criteria. The sole full match in the phraseological inventory is the figurative pairing *a milch/milking cow* and *sog'in sigir*, both used for a continuing source of material benefit (Kunin, 1984; Rahmatullayev et al., 2022). Their close correspondence depends on the figurative reading. A literal statement about a dairy animal does not by itself instantiate the phraseological comparison. When the referent is a person, the potentially demeaning representation of that person as an exploitable resource also requires attention.

Adequate counterparts are more numerous than full equivalents in both inventories. They preserve a central meaning or discourse purpose while permitting a different image. This result gives a practical reason to search beyond the target language's milk expressions. The absence of an established counterpart in 12 phraseological and 22 proverbial records, meanwhile, supports consideration of paraphrase or contextually delimited analogy. It does not establish a lexical gap across the entire language.

The source directions remain relevant. In the English-origin phraseological records, the four categories occur in the sequence 1, 6, 1, and 9; in the Uzbek-origin records, they occur as 0, 4, 1, and 3. The corresponding proverb distributions are 0, 5, 2, and 13 for English-origin entries and 0, 6, 5, and 9 for Uzbek-origin entries. Since the phraseological set is unequal in size and both sets are purposive, these differences do not rank the expressive capacity of the two languages.

Similar imagery and different communicative purposes

The contrast between *cry over spilt milk* and *Sutdan og'zi kuygan, qatiqni puflab ichar* illustrates false equivalence created by a shared lexical component. The English expression discourages ineffective regret; the Uzbek proverb explains or warns about caution after a painful

experience. In a consolatory context, *O'tgan ishga salovat* is a closer Uzbek counterpart to the English judgement. In the reverse comparison, *Once bitten, twice shy* more closely reflects the warning or explanation conveyed by the Uzbek proverb. These are functional comparisons, not claims that their images or cultural associations are identical (Kunin, 1984; Mirzayev et al., 2005; Speake, 2008).

A second contrast concerns learning and persistence. *Drink something in with one's mother's milk* represents the acquisition of attitudes or knowledge from earliest childhood. The Uzbek proverb *Sut bilan kirgan, jon bilan chiqadi*, literally "What enters with milk leaves with life", presents an acquired quality as enduring throughout life. Early acquisition and lifelong persistence are related propositions, but neither guarantees the other. The proverb is therefore an analogue rather than an unrestricted replacement for the English verbal expression. A rendering with *ona suti bilan singimoq* can preserve the acquisition image; *singdirmoq* is appropriate when the context foregrounds someone instilling an attitude in another person. The grammatical choice follows the participants' roles.

Milk imagery also permits different personal evaluations. The gentleness expressed by *mild as milk* cannot be equated with the whiteness or moral purity suggested by *sutdek oq*. Likewise, *ona sutini oqlamoq* invokes fulfilment of an obligation associated with maternal care. The explanatory English proposal "fulfil one's filial duty to one's mother" communicates that relation but should not be presented as a conventional English idiom. The comparison separates a translatable cultural judgement from the availability of a fixed target expression (Rahmatullayev et al., 2022).

Context and evaluative stance

In Chapter XII of Christie's novel, Sir Eustace Pedler questions the apparently harmless character of Chichester: "He looks mild as milk. But looks are deceptive" (Christie, 1924). The second sentence qualifies the first; the passage does not simply praise gentleness. The author-proposed Uzbek rendering *U qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagandek ko'rinadi. Ammo tashqi ko'rinish aldamchi* preserves the movement from an appearance of innocence to doubt. The target idiom is documented in Uzbek phraseology, while its deployment in this complete sentence is a translation proposal. Milk imagery is replaced, but the contrast between appearance and suspicion remains available.

Shakespeare's *the milk of human kindness* requires a related distinction. In *Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 5, Lady Macbeth regards her husband's compassion as an impediment to achieving his ambition through violence (Shakespeare, n.d.). The expression's association with human kindness does not make the speech an unqualified compliment. The proposed Uzbek paraphrase *insoniy mehr-shafqat* conveys the central quality, but the surrounding sentence must also preserve Lady Macbeth's judgement that there is too much of it for her purpose. A translation that renders the phrase as purity or honesty alone shifts the relevant character trait.

The two passages demonstrate why the unit of pragmatic checking must extend beyond the isolated expression. A dictionary can identify a conventional meaning, but a neighbouring clause, the speaker's objective, and the dramatic situation can change the expression's evaluative force. Image replacement and paraphrase are therefore defensible strategies only when assessed within the sentence or passage in which the judgement is made.

Translation strategies and image retention

Table 3 Dominant strategies in the English to Uzbek translation set

Strategy	Entries	Share of n = 50
Lexical equivalent	19	38%
Descriptive paraphrase	18	36%
Structural adjustment	5	10%
Functional counterpart	6	12%
Full phraseological equivalent	1	2%
Calque with explicitation	1	2%
Total	50	100%

Lexical equivalence and descriptive paraphrase have similar overall shares because the fifty-unit set includes different kinds of material. Literal combinations such as *cow's milk* permit established lexical correspondence. Figurative expressions and extended verbal uses more often require a target phrase that makes the intended relation explicit. The overall 38% share of lexical equivalence must therefore not be transferred to the idiomatic material alone.

Within the twenty figurative units, descriptive paraphrase accounts for eleven choices (55%) and functional counterparts for six (30%). Structural adjustment, full phraseological equivalence, and calque with explicitation each account for one choice (5%). This distribution concerns the preferred solutions recorded in the analysis, not the frequency with which professional translators use these strategies.

Table 4 Treatment of imagery within the figurative subset

Image treatment	Entries	Share of n = 20
Fully retained	3	15%
Replaced by another image	6	30%
Meaning expressed through paraphrase	10	50%
Partly retained	1	5%
Total	20	100%

Image treatment and translation strategy provide different information. A descriptive rendering can make a source judgement explicit while removing the source image; a functional counterpart can replace that image with a familiar target-language one. Conversely, the full match

a milch cow—sog'in sigir preserves imagery and conventional figurative meaning together. The figures in Table 4 therefore do not form a scale from successful to unsuccessful translation.

Extended uses of the verb *milk* further show the importance of semantic precision. In *milk somebody or something dry*, the complement *dry* marks an endpoint: extraction leaves the source depleted. The proposed Uzbek wording *borini siqib olmoq* or a contextually explicit paraphrase such as *resursini batamom tortib olmoq* retains this excessive exploitation more clearly than a neutral expression meaning only "obtain benefit". The preferred wording will differ between literary narration and formal exposition. Preserving a vivid milking image is useful only if it also preserves the intended degree, attitude, and register.

5 Discussion

The findings support treating milk expressions as relations between a familiar substance and particular social judgements. Shared experience of milk makes an image accessible, but does not predetermine whether a language conventionalises that image as gentleness, moral purity, acquired character, or exploitation. A target expression should therefore be selected by its contextual proposition and function before a decision is made about retaining the noun *milk* or *sut*. This order reduces false matches while allowing image preservation where the correspondence is demonstrable.

Religious evidence adds a distinct cultural frame. Qur'an 16:66 presents milk as pure and pleasant to drink, whereas Qur'an 4:23 includes women who have nursed a person and milk-sisters among the relations specified in its marriage prohibitions (Qur'an, 16:66; 4:23). Milk is named directly in the first passage; nursing and the resulting kinship are the relevant relation in the second. Read together, these passages support an interpretation connecting nourishment, provision, family, and social norms. This is a cultural interpretation of the textual evidence. The passages alone do not establish the historical origin of any particular Uzbek idiom or demonstrate that all speakers activate a religious association whenever they use *sut*.

For translation practice, the analysis yields a sequence of decisions. First, establish whether the unit is literal, figurative, or proverbial in its actual use. Second, identify the proposition, evaluative stance, and communicative purpose. Third, check whether a conventional target expression preserves those features. Fourth, decide whether image retention, substitution, or explanation best serves the passage. Finally, read the proposed translation in its wider context and record whether the wording is dictionary-attested, adapted from documented material, or newly proposed. These stages organise the translator's judgement; they do not remove the need for contextual interpretation.

This procedure is useful for bilingual dictionary entries because it separates several kinds of information that a bare equivalent can conceal. An entry can give the figurative meaning, a usage or register restriction, a conventional counterpart where available, and a clearly labelled explanatory alternative. Literary examples can then show when the expression becomes ironic, critical, or consolatory. Such documentation would help a reader understand why a semantically plausible target phrase may still be inappropriate in a particular exchange.

6 Limitations

The material is small, purposefully selected, and partly historical. Dictionary inclusion does not demonstrate current frequency, and an older literary occurrence cannot establish present-day conversational use. The unequal phraseological inventories also limit direct numerical comparison

between the languages. Since several expressions appear in more than one analytical set, the tables describe different views of related material rather than independent samples.

The classifications contain interpretive decisions, particularly at the boundary between an adequate counterpart and an analogue. No independent annotator agreement or reader-response assessment is reported. Proposed renderings should therefore be treated as reasoned options, not empirically validated translations. Further work could apply the stated categories to a larger contemporary corpus, compare actual published translations, and obtain independent evaluations of both meaning and pragmatic effect. These steps would test the procedure beyond the selected examples.

7 Conclusion

The English and Uzbek materials show that a shared milk image provides insufficient grounds for translation equivalence. Full correspondence is rare in the selected inventories, while functional matches often involve a different image. Contextual readings of Christie and Shakespeare further show that apparent gentleness or kindness can participate in suspicion and criticism. Translation must therefore preserve the judgement made in the passage, not merely the conventional positive association of its vocabulary.

The study's practical contribution is the separation of equivalence classification, dominant translation strategy, image treatment, and translation provenance. This makes it possible to explain why an image is retained in one case and paraphrased in another without treating either choice as inherently superior. Within the scope of the documented material, the most defensible target rendering is the one that preserves the relevant meaning, stance, and communicative function while making its source basis explicit.

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