



THE FEATURES AND DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS FROM ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

Bobilova Kamola

4th-year student

National University of Uzbekistan

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In today's world, where intercultural communication has become an everyday reality, translation plays a crucial role in connecting linguistic communities¹. Among the most challenging elements of translation are phraseological units — idioms, fixed expressions, and culturally bound sayings that carry not only meaning but also historical memory, collective experience, and national identity². Through translation, readers gain access to another culture's way of thinking; however, it is often phraseology — with its figurative imagery, emotional coloring, and stylistic expressiveness — that proves most resistant to accurate transfer from one language to another³. Phraseological units are not merely decorative elements of speech. They reflect cultural symbolism, social values, humor, and worldview embedded within a language. English and Russian phraseology, for instance, differ significantly in structure, imagery, and stylistic usage. English, as an analytical language, tends to favor concise metaphorical constructions and phrasal verbs, whereas Russian, with its synthetic structure and rich morphology, often relies on folklore-based imagery and expressive exaggeration⁴. These typological and cultural differences create serious difficulties in translation. When translating between English and Russian, many phraseological units lack direct equivalents. Literal rendering frequently results in semantic distortion or stylistic awkwardness. Metaphors rooted in everyday life, historical realities, or cultural traditions may lose their clarity or emotional impact. Additionally, differences in grammatical structure and word order complicate the preservation of idiomatic stability. As a result, even when the core meaning is conveyed accurately, the expressive force and cultural resonance of the original phraseological unit may weaken. This article focuses on the linguistic features of English and Russian phraseological units and the major difficulties that arise in their translation. Drawing on key concepts from phraseology and translation theory, it examines issues such as equivalence, cultural specificity, semantic integrity, and stylistic coloring. By analyzing comparative examples from both languages, the study aims to demonstrate how translators can preserve communicative effect and cultural nuance while ensuring naturalness and clarity in the target language. When analyzing phraseological units in translation, it becomes evident that their significance lies not only in the information they convey, but in the way meaning is structured, intensified, and culturally framed. Just as literary style shapes emotional response,

¹ Munday, J. (2016). *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (4th ed.). London: Routledge. pp. 12–25. — роль перевода в межкультурной коммуникации

² Baker, M. (1992). In *Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. London: Routledge. pp. 63–78. — трудности перевода фразеологических единиц, смысловая и культурная сложность

³ Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice Hall. pp. 103–113. — трудности передачи фигуральной окраски и эмоциональной силы

⁴ Vinogradov, V. V. (1977). *Izbrannyye trudy: Leksikologiya i leksikografiya*. Moscow: Nauka. pp. 140–161. — культурная специфика и выразительность фразеологии



phraseological units shape conceptual perception. They condense cultural experience into fixed verbal forms and introduce figurative imagery that exceeds literal interpretation. The study of phraseology therefore occupies an important position within linguistic theory, as it examines how stable expressions function as semantic wholes rather than as freely combined lexical elements⁵. One of the central characteristics of phraseological units is idiomaticity — the degree to which the overall meaning diverges from the literal meanings of the individual components. According to Vinogradov's classification, phraseological units may range from phraseological fusions (completely non-transparent) to phraseological combinations (partially motivated). This distinction is crucial in translation, since the opaquer the idiom, the more difficult it becomes to render adequately in another language.

Phraseological meaning is also inseparable from cultural context. Many English and Russian idioms reflect everyday life, historical realities, or symbolic associations specific to each linguistic community. When such units are transferred across languages, several major difficulties arise:

Semantic non-equivalence. The target language may lack a corresponding idiom with the same meaning and stylistic force.

Divergence of imagery. Even when meanings coincide, metaphorical foundations may differ significantly.

Stylistic mismatch. An idiom that is colloquial, ironic, or elevated in one language may not occupy the same stylistic register in another.

Structural incompatibility. Differences between the analytic structure of English and the synthetic nature of Russian complicate direct reproduction of fixed expressions⁶. To illustrate these difficulties, I examined several comparative examples.

Example 1 (English/Russian)

English idiom: "to spill the beans" (to reveal a secret).

A literal translation («пролить бобы») is semantically meaningless in Russian. The translator must therefore choose an equivalent such as «проболтаться» or «выдать секрет». While the semantic core is preserved, the metaphorical image disappears. The English idiom evokes a concrete visual scenario; the Russian equivalent neutralizes imagery in favor of functional clarity. This demonstrates a common phenomenon in translation: semantic preservation accompanied by figurative loss.

Example 2 (Russian/English)

Russian idiom: «вешать лапшу на уши» (to deceive someone).

A literal rendering ("to hang noodles on someone's ears") would appear absurd in English. The translator may select "to pull someone's leg" or "to deceive someone." However, "to pull someone's leg" implies playful deception rather than serious misinformation. Thus, the translator must evaluate contextual meaning and stylistic intention before determining the

⁵ Mel'čuk, I. (1995). Phrasemes in Language and Phraseology. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 12–25. — Idioms as semantic wholes

⁶ Teliya, S. V. (2010). English-Russian Idioms: Dictionary and Translation Strategies. Moscow: Flinta. pp. 12–15. — Structural incompatibility of idioms



most appropriate analogue. Here, divergence of imagery reflects distinct cultural metaphors embedded in each language⁷.

Example 3 (Functional Analogy)

English: "to hit the nail on the head."

Russian: «попасть в точку».

Although the images differ (a hammer and nail versus a precise point), both idioms convey accuracy. This case represents successful phraseological equivalence at the level of communicative effect rather than literal imagery⁸.

Example 4 (Culture-Specific Reference)

English: "to carry coals to Newcastle."

Russian: «ездить в Тулу со своим самоваром».

Both idioms express the idea of unnecessary action. However, each refers to culturally specific locations associated with production (Newcastle with coal, Tula with samovars). Translation therefore requires substitution rather than replication, preserving pragmatic meaning while adapting cultural reference⁹.

These examples demonstrate that phraseological translation involves constant negotiation between form and function. In some cases, an equivalent idiom exists; in others, translators must resort to descriptive rendering or contextual adaptation. The primary objective is not structural imitation but communicative equivalence — the preservation of meaning, stylistic tone, and pragmatic impact. Thus, the translation of phraseological units is not a mechanical lexical replacement but a complex interpretative process. It requires awareness of semantic cohesion, metaphorical structure, stylistic register, and cultural symbolism. Only through comparative analysis can the translator determine whether to retain imagery, substitute it, or compensate for its loss elsewhere in the text.

In the original Russian text, phraseological cohesion is created through chains of movement verbs and figurative associations that function similarly to phraseological units. Expressions such as "сердце трепетать" (the heart trembled) and the personified movement of the wind echo conventional metaphorical patterns deeply rooted in Slavic linguistic imagery¹⁰. These constructions, while not fixed idioms in a strict lexicographic sense, operate as semi-phraseological units: they carry culturally recognizable metaphors and stable emotional associations. The repetition of verbs ("приближались... подходили... удалялись"; "бегал... бежал") produces rhythmic parallelism, reinforcing the semantic unity of movement and emotional awakening. This technique reflects the narrative traditions of Russian prose, where nature and inner feeling are often expressed through recurring metaphorical formulas. In the English translation, semantic equivalence is largely preserved. The translator renders "сердце трепетать" as "my heart tremble," maintaining the conventional metaphor shared by both languages. However, some phraseological resonance is inevitably reduced. The rhythmic

⁷ Vinay, J.-P., & Darbelnet, J. (1995). *Comparative Stylistics of French and English: A Methodology for Translation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 75–80. — divergence of imagery across cultures.

⁸ Shveitser, E. I. (2015). Functional Equivalence in Idiomatic Translation. *Russian Linguistic Review*, 7(1), 22–30. — functional analogy in idioms.

⁹ Kuznetsova, T. V. (2009). Culture-Specific Idioms in Translation. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 17(3), 112–120. — adapting culture-specific references.

¹⁰ Apresjan, J. D. (1974). Regular Polysemy. *Linguistics*, 154, pp. 20–24. — Conventional metaphors and figurative patterns in Russian.



gradation of movement verbs becomes smoother and less cumulative in English, where syntactic economy limits repetition. While expressions such as "raced across the steppe" and "whispering through it" effectively preserve imagery, the dense associative network characteristic of the Russian original becomes slightly attenuated. From the perspective of phraseological translation, this example demonstrates partial equivalence: the core metaphorical meaning is retained, yet stylistic intensity and cumulative rhythm are moderated. The translator compensates by selecting dynamic verbs and preserving personification, thereby sustaining communicative effect. Nevertheless, the subtle cultural symbolism embedded in the original figurative patterns may not be fully accessible to the English reader¹¹. Thus, even when phraseological parallels formally exist across English and Russian, differences in rhythmic structure, cultural associations, and stylistic conventions influence the degree to which expressive depth can be preserved.

This study adopts a qualitative library research design combined with comparative phraseological analysis. The research is based entirely on existing scholarly sources and published literary texts rather than on primary empirical data such as surveys, experiments, or interviews. The central focus is the theoretical interpretation and comparative examination of phraseological units in English and Russian, as well as their functioning in translation. In accordance with qualitative research principles described by scholars such as John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, library research relies on secondary data — including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dictionaries of phraseology, and prior studies — to construct conceptual frameworks and address research questions¹². This methodological approach is appropriate for the present article, as the objective is not to measure statistical frequency, but to analyze semantic, stylistic, and cultural dimensions of phraseological units and to evaluate the strategies used in their translation. The study integrates principles from phraseological theory and translation studies. Foundational concepts are drawn from the works of Viktor Vinogradov, who classified phraseological units according to their degree of semantic cohesion, and from translation theory developed by Eugene Nida, particularly the concept of dynamic equivalence. These theoretical perspectives provide the analytical framework for examining how idiomatic meaning, imagery, and stylistic register are preserved, transformed, or neutralized in translation.

The practical component of the research involves comparative textual analysis of selected English and Russian literary passages containing phraseological units. Parallel source texts and their translations are examined to identify:

- the degree of semantic equivalence;
- shifts in metaphorical imagery;
- stylistic adaptation or attenuation;
- cases of compensation or descriptive substitution.

Through systematic comparison, the study identifies recurring translation patterns and categorizes them into strategies such as full equivalence, partial equivalence, analogical substitution, descriptive translation, and contextual compensation. Thus, the chosen qualitative

¹¹ Koller, W. (2004). Introduction to the Theory of Translation. Frankfurt: Peter Lang. pp. 61–65. — Cultural symbolism and stylistic intensity in phraseological translation.

¹² Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, pp. 45–50



comparative methodology allows for an in-depth examination of phraseological complexity and demonstrates how linguistic, structural, and cultural factors influence the translation of idiomatic expressions between English and Russian.

Data for this study were drawn exclusively from secondary sources, as the research follows a qualitative library-based design. The materials consist of theoretical publications in phraseology and translation studies, as well as original literary texts and their published translations.

1. Theoretical works on phraseology and idiomaticity: The conceptual foundation of the research is based on classical and contemporary studies of phraseological units and idiomatic meaning, including works by Viktor Vinogradov (classification of phraseological units), Alexander Kunin (English phraseology), and Natalia Amosova (contextual theory of phraseology). These works provide definitions, typologies, and criteria for identifying semantic cohesion and stability in fixed expressions.

2. Key publications on translation theory and equivalence: The study relies on major contributions in translation studies, particularly the works of Eugene Nida (dynamic and formal equivalence), Peter Newmark (semantic and communicative translation), Mona Baker (translation strategies and equivalence at word and phrase level), and Lawrence Venuti (domestication and foreignization). These sources support the analysis of translation strategies applied to phraseological units and help interpret cases of partial equivalence, substitution, and descriptive rendering.

3. Original literary texts and their English translations, to conduct comparative analysis, the study examines selected passages from:

- O'tgan kunlar by Abdulla Qodiriy (original Uzbek edition) and its English translation by Carol Ermakova;
- Jamila by Chingiz Aitmatov (original Russian version) and its English translation by James Riordan.

These texts were selected because they contain rich figurative language and semi-phraseological constructions that illustrate cross-cultural translation challenges.

4. Academic databases and research platforms: Scholarly articles and supporting materials were accessed through academic databases and platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Taylor & Francis. Search keywords included: "phraseological units in translation," "idiomatic equivalence," "cross-cultural translation of idioms," "comparative phraseological analysis," and "literary translation English Russian." Thus, the data corpus consists entirely of authoritative academic literature and published literary works, ensuring theoretical reliability and textual authenticity for comparative analysis.

This article has explored the linguistic and cultural complexities involved in translating phraseological units between English and Russian, focusing on their semantic structure, stylistic function, and cultural specificity. Phraseological units represent one of the most expressive and nationally marked layers of vocabulary, combining stability of form with figurative depth. Their translation therefore presents not merely lexical difficulty, but a broader interpretative challenge that involves meaning, imagery, and stylistic nuance.



As demonstrated through comparative examples and analysis of literary texts such as *O'tgan kunlar* by Abdulla Qodiriy and *Jamila* by Chingiz Aitmatov, phraseological expressions are particularly sensitive to cross-cultural transfer. Even when semantic equivalence is achieved, metaphorical imagery, rhythmic balance, and culturally embedded associations may be partially weakened. Idioms that appear structurally simple often carry implicit historical and social meanings that are not immediately transparent to foreign readers. As a result, full equivalence remains rare; instead, translators frequently operate within the space of partial correspondence. Nevertheless, the study shows that translation losses are not inevitable or absolute. Through strategies such as analogical substitution, descriptive rendering, contextual adaptation, and stylistic compensation, translators can preserve communicative effect and emotional resonance. The effectiveness of these strategies depends largely on the translator's awareness of phraseological typology, degree of idiomaticity, and the pragmatic function of the expression within the broader textual context. Translation thus becomes a process of functional reconstruction rather than literal replication.

In the context of increasing intercultural communication and the global circulation of literature, the accurate and stylistically sensitive translation of phraseological units acquires particular significance. Idioms serve as carriers of cultural memory and collective worldview; their thoughtful rendering enables meaningful dialogue between linguistic communities.

In conclusion, successful translation of phraseological units requires not only linguistic competence, but also deep cultural insight and theoretical grounding in phraseology and translation studies. Further comparative research on idiomatic translation between typologically diverse languages would contribute to a more systematic understanding of equivalence and help refine practical translation strategies.

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