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NATIONAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Annotation: This article provides a comparative analysis of phraseological units in English and Uzbek, focusing on their national and cultural characteristics. It explores how idioms reflect each nation's worldview, history, and social values through figurative language. The study identifies both universal human concepts and culturally specific imagery embedded in idioms. English phraseological units often reveal individualism, humor, and pragmatism, while Uzbek ones highlight morality, collectivism, and emotional expressiveness. The analysis shows that similar meanings may be expressed through different symbols depending on each nation's cultural background. The findings emphasize that phraseological units are linguistic reflections of cultural mentality. Understanding such differences enhances intercultural communication and translation competence.

Keywords: phraseology, idiom, culture, English, Uzbek, comparison, metaphor, worldview, translation, mentality.

INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units, or idiomatic expressions, form one of the most colorful and culture-bound layers of a language. They are stable combinations of words with meanings that cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of their components. Studying phraseological units is crucial not only for understanding linguistic structure but also for revealing the national and cultural mentality of a people. Every language reflects the worldview, traditions, lifestyle, and historical experience of its speakers, and phraseology serves as a mirror of that reflection.

This article explores the national and cultural features of phraseological units in English and Uzbek, focusing on how idioms embody the cultural values and worldview of each nation. The comparative approach helps to reveal similarities and differences in conceptual metaphors, imagery, and symbolic meanings. The study also highlights the influence of environment, religion, customs, and history on the formation of phraseological units.

In modern linguistics, the term phraseological unit (PU) refers to a set expression whose meaning is partially or completely figurative. According to A.V. Kunin, phraseological units are stable combinations of words with a fully or partially transferred meaning. They differ from free word combinations by their structural stability, semantic integrity, and idiomatic meaning.

Phraseological units are formed uniquely in every language. In Uzbek, they often originate from folk oral creativity – proverbs, riddles, and fairy tales – whereas in English, they frequently arise from historical, religious, and social contexts. Therefore, the phraseological expressions of each language represent the national spirit and worldview through linguistic means. The process by which these phraseological units emerge is deeply connected to the cultural, historical, and social development of a given nation. In the Uzbek language, for example, the influence of centuries-old oral traditions can be seen in the abundance of colorful expressions drawn from popular sayings, epic tales, humorous anecdotes, and ancient myths. Such phraseological units not only enrich the vocabulary of the spoken language, but also preserve the wisdom, customs, beliefs, and ethical values of the people, passing them down from generation to generation.

In contrast, English phraseological units often reflect the impact of significant historical events, religious beliefs (such as biblical references), and evolving social norms. Many English idioms and set expressions have their roots in literature, historical episodes, or religious traditions, thus

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serving as linguistic markers of key cultural developments. The diversity and evolution of such expressions highlight the dynamic nature of the English language and its openness to new influences over time.Altogether, phraseological expressions in both Uzbek and English serve as an invaluable linguistic resource that embodies the worldview, mentality, unique humor, and philosophy of their speakers. This makes the study of phraseological units essential for a deeper understanding of any language, as they offer insights into the national identity and collective experience of its people.

Language and culture are inseparable; culture shapes the way speakers conceptualize their environment. English phraseological units often reflect the maritime and commercial history of Britain, while Uzbek phraseology is deeply connected to agrarian life, nomadic traditions, and Islamic moral values. For example, in English we encounter idioms such as “to weather the storm” (to survive difficulties) or “to sail close to the wind” (to take risks), which reflect the seafaring past of the British Isles. In contrast, Uzbek uses expressions like “ko‘pni ko‘rgan kema qirg‘oqqa yetar” (a ship that has seen much will reach the shore), expressing wisdom through similar metaphorical imagery, though tied to moral endurance rather than maritime skill.

The comparison of English and Uzbek phraseological units provides deep insight into how each language encodes human experience through culturally specific images. Although idioms in both languages often express universal ideas such as honesty, hard work, fate, or friendship, the figurative mechanisms and symbolic imagery differ according to national worldview, historical background, and traditional lifestyle. Below is a detailed discussion of several groups of idioms that demonstrate these contrasts and parallels.

To begin with, animal imagery plays a significant role in both languages, serving as a mirror of human behavior. The English idiom “to let the cat out of the bag” means to reveal a secret unintentionally. The image originates from medieval markets, where dishonest traders might replace a piglet with a cat in a bag. When the cat was released, the trick was exposed. In Uzbek, a similar meaning is expressed by “tilini tiymaydi” (literally “cannot hold one’s tongue”). While both idioms refer to revealing secrets, the English expression derives from a humorous historical anecdote, whereas the Uzbek version emphasizes a moral failure of self-control. This reflects a key cultural difference: English culture often tolerates and even celebrates humor and wit, while Uzbek culture values restraint and verbal discipline.

Another illustrative example concerns deception and manipulation. In English, “to pull someone’s leg” means to tease or deceive playfully. The expression’s humorous tone aligns with the English cultural tendency toward irony and understatement. The Uzbek equivalent “burunidan yetaklamoq” (to lead someone by the nose), however, conveys a much more negative connotation. It depicts deliberate deceit and domination, an immoral act condemned in Uzbek society. The contrast demonstrates how humor in English can soften the notion of deception, whereas Uzbek idioms often attach a moral dimension, highlighting the ethical aspect of human behavior.

When addressing hard work and diligence, both cultures admire perseverance but differ in how they conceptualize effort. The English idiom “to burn the midnight oil” comes from pre-electric times, referring to studying or working by lamplight until late at night. It underscores intellectual or scholarly effort. The Uzbek equivalent “ko‘z qorasi ketguncha mehnat qilmoq” (to work until one’s eyesight fades) carries a more physical and emotional tone, evoking endurance and sacrifice. This difference reflects cultural environments: the English image arises from a literate, industrialized society, while the Uzbek image is rooted in agrarian labor and collective struggle.

In matters of fate and destiny, English uses the poetic expression “written in the stars”, derived from astrological beliefs. The idiom portrays destiny as something cosmic and romantic. In contrast, the Uzbek phrase “taqdirda bor” (it is written in fate) stems from Islamic theology, where destiny (taqdir) is determined by divine will. Both express the idea of predetermination, but their imagery reveals different sources: Western secular cosmology versus Eastern religious fatalism. This shows how spiritual and philosophical traditions shape idiomatic thought.

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Concerning experience and wisdom, both languages contain equivalent expressions that warn against repeated mistakes. The English “once bitten, twice shy” and the Uzbek “bir kuygan, ikki puflaydi” (one who has been burned blows twice) both describe a cautious person who has learned from experience. However, the Uzbek idiom employs a concrete sensory image—fire and blowing—making the moral lesson more vivid and emotionally resonant. The English version, more abstract, demonstrates the tendency toward conciseness and metaphorical generalization in Western phraseology.

The concept of cooperation and unity also appears in both traditions. The English saying “two heads are better than one” emphasizes the intellectual benefits of collaboration, a reflection of pragmatic problem-solving common in Western culture. This idiom suggests that pooling ideas, perspectives, and skills frequently leads to more effective and creative solutions than working alone. It is often cited in educational, professional, and everyday settings as an encouragement to seek advice, share tasks, and value the input of others. The Uzbek “ko‘pdan kuch chiqadi” (strength comes from many), on the other hand, stresses collective power and social harmony. This proverb is rooted in the communal values of traditional Uzbek society, where cooperation is seen not just as advantageous but as essential for survival, resilience, and prosperity. It reveals a worldview in which the welfare of the group is paramount, and shared responsibility helps overcome challenges, especially in communal life, agriculture, or family matters. Both proverbs illustrate the critical importance of working together, yet they express this through culturally specific lenses: the English idiom highlights rational cooperation and the pooling of intellect, while the Uzbek one underscores moral solidarity, unity, and the indispensability of community support for achieving common goals. Thus, although both traditions recognize the value of cooperation, they nuance it in ways that reflect their distinct cultural priorities.

Idioms about time and laziness also reveal cultural attitudes. The English phrase “to kill time” portrays time as a measurable commodity – something one can use, save, or waste. This reflects the Western capitalist notion of time as a resource. Conversely, the Uzbek “vaqtni suvga oqizmoq” (to let time flow away like water) personifies time as a living, natural element – precious and irretrievable. The agrarian culture of Uzbekistan, dependent on water and seasons, turns time into a metaphor of life’s flow rather than an economic asset.

In discussing wealth and social status, both languages employ imagery of precious materials. The English idiom “to be born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth” alludes to aristocratic privilege, as silver spoons were a symbol of upper-class baptismal gifts. Uzbek has a parallel expression “oltin beshikda tug‘ilgan” (born in a golden cradle), which likewise denotes being born into luxury. However, the Uzbek version carries a more poetic exaggeration typical of Eastern expression, emphasizing beauty and grandeur rather than literal wealth. This illustrates differing aesthetic traditions – restrained elegance versus symbolic flourish.

Idioms depicting clumsiness and foolishness also offer interesting parallels, revealing the way language and culture blend to express common human experiences through vivid imagery. A well-known example is the English saying “like a bull in a china shop,” which describes someone who is not only awkward, but also potentially destructive, especially when dealing with delicate or sensitive situations. The phrase suggests a powerful, uncontrollable force entering a fragile environment, emphasizing the mismatch between the individual’s behavior and the context.Similarly, in Uzbek, the idiom “fil do‘konga kirganday” (like an elephant entering a shop) carries the same meaning. However, instead of a bull, the image features an elephant, a creature that is perhaps even larger and more conspicuous. This adaptation is rooted in cultural familiarity and local symbolism: while bulls were a common sight in European rural life, elephants are deeply woven into the Eastern imagination, often symbolizing size, power, and, in this case, overwhelming clumsiness. The substitution of the animal not only localizes the metaphor but also highlights how each culture adapts universal ideas to its own environment and traditions.Despite the differing animals and context-specific imagery, the underlying message in both idioms remains the same.

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Through the comic and exaggerated comparison, both serve to illustrate a universal observation of human nature: that people can, regardless of culture, sometimes find themselves out of place, acting awkwardly or even disastrously in situations that require delicacy and care. These idioms, therefore, reveal both the creativity of language and the shared human tendency to capture folly and clumsiness through colorful, relatable analogies.

Finally, when expressing friendship and loyalty, both languages share an identical moral concept. The English "a friend in need is a friend indeed" and the Uzbek "do'st boshga kulfat tushganda bilinadi" (a friend is known when trouble comes) emphasize the test of true friendship in adversity. This demonstrates that moral wisdom transcends cultural boundaries, even if the linguistic expressions differ.

In summary, the comparative analysis of English and Uzbek phraseological units reveals both shared human values and distinct cultural mindsets. English idioms often reflect humor, practicality, and individualism, while Uzbek idioms embody moral evaluation, collectivity, and emotional vividness. Each idiomatic pair encapsulates the historical, social, and philosophical experience of its people. Thus, phraseological comparison not only highlights linguistic diversity but also serves as a valuable tool for understanding how different nations perceive and articulate the human condition.

From these examples, we can observe that English phraseology tends to draw imagery from:Seafaring life (e.g., to weather the storm),Commerce and money (e.g., time is money), Christianity and the Bible (e.g., the prodigal son). In contrast, Uzbek phraseology is influenced by: Agrarian and nomadic life (e.g., yer haydagan – non topadi); Islamic values and Eastern philosophy (sabrning tagi oltin – patience leads to gold); Family and community-centered values (qo'shnining haqqi bor – a neighbor has a sacred right).

Thus, the imagery of phraseological units reveals the historical experience and national worldview of each people. English idioms often emphasize individual action and pragmatism, while Uzbek idioms highlight morality, patience, and collectivism.

Translating phraseological units between English and Uzbek presents several challenges. Many idioms lack direct equivalents, requiring contextual adaptation rather than literal translation. For instance, translating "to kick the bucket" literally would confuse Uzbek readers; instead, the equivalent "jon taslim qilmoq" (to give up the soul) conveys the same meaning. Similarly, "to make a mountain out of a molehill" corresponds to "pashshadan fil yasamoq" – both idioms exaggerate a minor problem. These parallels show that despite linguistic and cultural differences, human psychology and humor often converge.

Phraseological units carry both universal and national features. Universality lies in shared human emotions and experiences –love, fear, work, friendship– while national specificity arises from geography, religion, and history. These linguistic expressions, often in the form of idioms, proverbs, or set phrases, serve as reflections of how people understand and interact with the world, conveying cultural norms, values, and worldviews. For instance, English idioms related to weather ("every cloud has a silver lining") reflect not only the cloudy British climate but also a general cultural tendency to find hope and optimism in adversity.

Similarly, Uzbek idioms about bread ("non topmoq" – to earn bread) not only symbolize the agrarian economy and the sacredness of sustenance but also highlight the importance of hospitality and sharing food within Uzbek society. Through such idiomatic expressions, everyday concepts are endowed with deeper meaning, shaped by each nation's unique experiences, traditions, and priorities. Thus, these examples reveal that the linguistic picture of the world differs from one nation to another, even though the underlying human experience – love, struggle, nature, survival – is common to all. The study of such phraseological units offers valuable insights into both the universalities and particularities of human thought, demonstrating how language not only communicates information but also preserves cultural identity and heritage across generations.

Conclusion

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Phraseological units are linguistic artifacts of culture. They encapsulate the mentality, humor, and moral code of a nation, forming an integral part of its linguistic heritage. The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek idioms demonstrates that while both languages share universal human experiences, they encode them through culturally specific images and metaphors.

English phraseology reflects individualism, pragmatism, and maritime heritage, while Uzbek phraseology embodies collectivism, moral depth, and agrarian-Islamic traditions. Understanding these differences not only aids translation and intercultural communication but also fosters appreciation of the rich diversity of human expression.

In conclusion, phraseological units serve as a linguistic bridge between language and culture, revealing how each nation perceives life, values, and the world around it. Their study enhances intercultural competence and enriches both linguistic and cultural awareness.

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