

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN**Abduvaxobova Mubinaxon Azizbek kizi**

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ABSTRACT: Idiomatic expressions are language-specific, culturally loaded units of meaning that pose unique challenges in translation, second language acquisition, and cross-cultural communication. This study presents a comparative analysis of idiomatic expressions in English and Russian, focusing on semantic classification, cultural specificity, translation challenges, pedagogical implications, and pragmatic functions. By examining similarities and differences between the two languages, the research highlights both universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific imagery underlying idioms. The findings demonstrate that while English and Russian share conceptual metaphors rooted in human experience, they differ significantly in historical references, figurative models, and pragmatic usage. These differences create challenges in translation and second-language acquisition, emphasizing the importance of cultural competence and metaphor awareness in linguistic research and education.

KEYWORDS: Idiomatic expressions, phraseology, conceptual metaphor, English-Russian comparison, translation strategies, semantic classification, language acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic expressions are fixed or semi-fixed multi-word combinations whose overall meaning cannot be fully derived from the meanings of their individual components. For example, the English idiom “*kick the bucket*” means “to die”, while the Russian expression “*бить баклуши*” literally translates as “to beat wooden blanks” but means “to idle” or “to avoid work”. In both cases, literal interpretation fails to reveal the actual meaning.

Idioms function as semantic units that enrich communication, express emotions, create imagery and reflect cultural identity. They are deeply embedded in everyday speech, literature, media, and political discourse. However, idioms also present serious challenges for language learners and translators due to their figurative and culturally conditioned nature.

The purpose of this research is to conduct a comparative study of idiomatic expressions in English and Russian, with particular attention to their semantic types, cultural foundations, equivalence patterns, translation strategies, and pedagogical implications.

Semantic Classification

Idioms in English and Russian can be classified according to their semantic domains. This classification reveals the conceptual areas most frequently used in figurative language.

1.1. Somatic (body-based) Idioms

Body parts serve as universal metaphorical sources.

English examples:

- *Loose your head* (panic)
- *Cold feet* (fear)
- *Keep an eye on* (watch carefully)

Russian examples:

- *Потерять голову* (panic)
- *Язык без костей* (talk excessively)
- *Золотые руки* (skilled person)

The presence of similar body-based metaphors in both languages suggests universal embodied cognition. However, specific expressions differ in imagery and usage frequency.

1.2. Animal-based idioms

English:

- *A wolf in sheep's clothing*
- *As busy as a bee*
- *Let the cat out of the bag*

Russian:

- *Волк в овечьей шкуре* (direct equivalent)
- *Как белка в колесе* (extremely busy)
- *Медвежья услуга* (harmful help)

Some animal metaphors overlap, while others are culturally specific, reflecting different symbolic traditions.

1.3. Nature-based Idioms

English:

- *Out of the blue*
- *Storm in a teacup*

Russian:

- *Как гром среди ясного неба*
- *Буря в стакане воды*

These examples show semantic equivalence despite lexical variation.

2. Cultural Specificity of Idioms

Idioms reflect national history, traditions, and cultural priorities.

2.1. Historical Influences

Russian idioms often reference agrarian life and labor: “*тянуть лямку*” (pull the strap-heavy labor). English idioms frequently reflect maritime culture: “*learn the ropes*” (to learn how to do something), “*three sheets to the wind*” (inf. completely drunk).

2.2. Social Values

Russian idioms emphasize endurance and collective effort. English idioms often highlight individual responsibilities and pragmatism.

For instance:

- English: stand on your own two feet.
- Russian: встать на ноги.

Both promote independence but differ slightly in usage context.

3. Translation Challenges and Strategies

3.1. Challenges

- I. Literal translation leads to misunderstanding.
- II. Cultural references may not exist in the target language.
- III. Stylistic tone can change in translation.
- IV. Idioms may have emotional or humorous connotations difficult to preserve.

3.2. Translation Strategies

- I. Idiomatic substitution – replace with equivalent idiom.
- II. Paraphrasing – explain meaning in neutral terms.
- III. Borrowing – rare, usually in cultural contexts.
- IV. Compensation – add expressive element elsewhere.

Example:

“*Break the ice*” – “растопить лед” (direct metaphorical equivalent).

“*Kick the bucket*” – “умереть” (neutral paraphrase).

“*Spill the beans*” – “проболтаться” (semantic equivalent)

4. Idioms in second Language Acquisition

Idioms are among the most challenging elements for foreign learners because they:

- Are unpredictable in meaning
- Often lack direct equivalents
- Require cultural background knowledge

4.1. Learning Difficulties

Learners frequently interpret idioms literally. For example, a Russian learner of English may misunderstand “hit the books,” assuming physical action rather than studying.

4.2. Teaching Approaches

- I. Teaching idioms in thematic clusters.
- II. Comparing idioms across languages.
- III. Using visual metaphors.
- IV. Encouraging contextual learning.

Comparative analysis between English and Russian can enhance retention and cultural awareness.

5. Case Studies: Common Idioms Compared

5.1. Idiom: *Hit the sack*

- Meaning: “go to bed”.
- Russian: “лечь спать”.
- Some idiomatic phrases like “отбой” (light out) may approximate.

5.2. Idiom: *Cost an arm and a leg*

- Meaning: “very expensive”.
- Russian equivalent: “обойтись в копейчку” (to cost a little coin – a different metaphor but similar meaning)

- Reflects cultural difference in imagery (body parts vs. money).

5.3. Idiom: *Wear your heart on your sleeve*

- Russian: “не скрывать чувств”
- Russian has other metaphoric expressions like “водой не разольёшь” (like water cannot be spilled – very close friends).

6. Pragmatic Functions of Idioms

Idiomatic expressions do not function merely as semantic units conveying figurative meaning, they also perform important pragmatic functions in discourse.

6.1. Express emotional intensity.

Idioms frequently intensify emotional expression. Compared to neutral vocabulary, idioms add imagery and emotional coloring, making speech more vivid and expressive.

Examples:

- “I’m over the moon.” - “на седьмом небе” (very happy)
- “He blew his top.” – “выйти из себя” (to lose temper)
- “She’s walking on air.” – “душа поёт” (deep happiness)

These idioms do more than describe emotions; they dramatize them. The metaphorical imagery (moon, heaven, soul, explosion) strengthens the speaker’s emotional stance and influences the listener’s perception.

6.2. Softening Taboo or Sensitive Topics (Euphemistic function)

Idioms are often used to mitigate socially sensitive topics such as death, illness or failure. This pragmatic function is closely connected with politeness strategies.

English:

- “Pass away” instead of “die”
- “Between jobs” instead of “unemployed”
- “Economical with the truth” instead of “lying”

Russian:

- ‘Отойти в мир иной’ (to die)
- “Не стало” (about death)
- “Приукрасить правду” (to embellish the truth)

In both languages, idioms reduce the emotional harshness of direct statements. Their pragmatic role is to preserve politeness, avoid discomfort, and maintain social harmony.

6.3. Humor and Irony

Idioms frequently contribute to humor, especially when used creatively or unexpectedly. Their figurative nature allows playful reinterpretation.

English:

- “Well, that went down like a lead balloon.”
- “He’s not the sharpest tool in the shed.”

Russian:

- “без царя в голове” (foolish)
- “смех сквозь слёзы” (ironic sadness)

Humorous idioms often rely on exaggeration, absurd imagery, or cultural stereotypes. Their pragmatic effect is to reduce tension or create irony in discourse.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of idiomatic expressions in English and Russian demonstrates both universal cognitive foundations and significant cultural differences. While many idioms in both languages rely on shared metaphorical concepts such as body imagery and nature symbolism, their specific lexical realizations and cultural associations differ.

Cultural specificity plays a central role in shaping idiomatic meaning, which creates challenges in translation and language acquisition. Effective interpretation of idioms requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural competence and metaphor awareness.

This research confirms that idioms function as linguistic reflections of national identity and worldview. Further research may focus on structural classification, corpus-based frequency analysis, and deeper cognitive modeling of idiomatic expressions.

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