



LINGUOCULTURAL AND PRAGMATIC
FEATURES OF IDIOMS USED IN ENGLISH AND
UZBEK LITERARY TEXTS (BASED ON THE WORKS
OF J. GALSWORTHY AND G'. G'ULOM)

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates idioms as carriers of cultural meaning and as pragmatic tools in English and Uzbek literary discourse, taking the prose of John Galsworthy and G'afur G'ulom as the focus of analysis. Relying on the principles of phraseology, linguoculturology and pragmatics, the study identifies the cultural codes encoded in idiomatic units (social status and property, emotional restraint, hospitality, kinship, religion, folk wisdom), describes the conceptual and imagery bases of idioms in the two languages, and analyzes their pragmatic functions in literary communication: characterization, expression of evaluation and irony, politeness and face-saving, euphemism, and the creation of a narrator's stance. The results show that the English text tends to use idioms for understatement, social distancing and ironic evaluation, while the Uzbek text uses idioms mainly for expressive emotional coloring, folk humor and the construction of collective moral judgment. Translation implications of the differences are discussed.

1. Introduction

Idioms occupy a special place in the lexicon of any language. They are stable, figuratively motivated combinations whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of their components, and they accumulate in compressed form the experience, values, stereotypes and imagery of the speech community. In phraseological research it is usually emphasized that the



study of such units cannot be limited to the description of their structure and semantics; a full account requires attention to their cultural and pragmatic aspects [1, 2]. This shift of emphasis has been especially visible in the modern research of figurative language, where idioms are examined as a window onto cultural conceptualization and as resources used by speakers to achieve communicative aims [3].

Literary prose is a particularly productive material for such a study. In a literary text, idioms are not simply a part of the lexical background; they are selected by the author to create the voice of the narrator, to characterize the speech of heroes, to shape the reader's attitude and to express cultural identity. The works of John Galsworthy and G'afur G'ulom provide a suggestive contrast. Galsworthy's chronicle of the Forsyte family [4] depicts the English upper-middle class with its ideology of property, propriety and reserve, and its language is marked by irony and understatement. G'ulom's autobiographical narrative *Shum bola* [5] presents Uzbek village and town life through the humorous and observant perception of a child, and its language is saturated with folk expressions, popular sayings and vivid idiomatic speech.

In spite of the abundance of studies on English and Uzbek phraseology, comparative linguocultural and pragmatic analysis of idioms in literary texts of the two languages remains insufficiently developed. The aim of the present article is to identify and compare the linguocultural and pragmatic features of idioms in English and Uzbek literary discourse on the example of the works of J. Galsworthy and G'. G'ulom. The tasks are: to clarify the theoretical foundations of the research; to describe the cultural codes and imagery bases of idioms in the two literary traditions; to analyze the pragmatic functions of idioms in literary communication; and to consider the implications for translation and for teaching.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Idioms as phraseological units

The classification of phraseological units into phraseological fusions, unities and combinations, proposed by Vinogradov on the basis of the degree of semantic cohesion, remains an influential frame of reference in post-Soviet linguistics [6]. In English studies, the corpus-based research of Moon has demonstrated that fixed expressions and idioms are extremely varied in form, are frequently subject to lexical and syntactic variation and perform important discourse functions, which has weakened the traditional view of idioms as completely frozen units [7]. Fernando's work on idiomaticity similarly stresses the roles of idioms in the expression of attitudes and in the organization of discourse [8]. Psycholinguistic studies collected by Cacciari and Tabossi show that the understanding of idioms depends on their degree of compositionality and on the context [9]. In this article the term idiom is used in a broad sense for a stable, reproducible and figuratively motivated expression that is characterized by the non-additive meaning and that has an evaluative or expressive potential.



2.2. The cognitive and linguocultural approach

Cognitive linguistics has shown that the figurative meaning of idioms is often motivated by conceptual metaphors and metonymies grounded in bodily and social experience [10, 11]. Kövecses's analysis of the language of emotions has demonstrated that the conceptual metaphors used for anger, joy and sadness, such as the pressure of a fluid in a container, are partly universal and partly culture-specific [12]. Linguoculturology, as developed in the Russian-language tradition, considers language units as carriers of cultural information and as a means of the objectification of the national mentality; within this approach phraseology is regarded as one of the most culturally marked areas of language [13, 14]. Wierzbicka's research of key words underlines that the vocabulary and the set expressions of a language reflect the central values and the ways of thinking of its culture [15]. The dimensions of cultural variability, including individualism and collectivism and the tolerance of power distance described by Hofstede, are often used as a background for interpreting the differences in communicative styles [16], although they should be applied with caution and not as a mechanical explanation of language data.

For the Uzbek language, the explanatory dictionary of phraseology compiled by Rahmatullayev has become a basic source for the description of the phraseological stock and its semantic and stylistic characteristics [17]. Uzbek phraseology is distinguished by an abundance of somatic expressions, units with religious and ritual connotations, units reflecting the traditions of hospitality and kinship, and expressions connected with agricultural and craft practice.

2.3. The pragmatic approach

Pragmatics offers the tools for studying how idioms function in communication. Speech act theory, formulated by Austin and developed by Searle, makes it possible to treat many idioms as conventional means for the performance of speech acts such as evaluation, complaint, advice, refusal or reproach [18, 19]. Grice's theory of conversational implicature explains how idioms can be used to flout the maxims of manner and quantity in order to convey additional meanings, for example irony [20]. Leech's principles of pragmatics and the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson help in describing idioms as means of softening or intensifying the force of utterances and of managing face [21, 22]. In Uzbek linguistics, the development of pragmalinguistics has been connected with the analysis of the speaker's intention, the context and the communicative effect of units of language [23]. In the study of literary discourse, one additionally has to differentiate between the levels of communication: the author and the reader, the narrator and the narratee, the characters among themselves.

These approaches are complementary. The linguocultural approach answers the question of what cultural meanings are stored in an idiom, the cognitive approach explains how the figurative meaning is motivated, and the pragmatic approach shows what the idiom does in a



particular communicative situation. The combination of the three perspectives provides the analytical framework of the study.

3. Materials and Methods

The study is theoretical and analytical in character. The following methods were used: descriptive and contrastive analysis of idiomatic units; conceptual analysis aimed at revealing the imagery bases and cultural codes of idioms; pragmatic and contextual analysis for identifying the functions of idioms in literary discourse; and translational comparison for the evaluation of equivalence. The stylistic and thematic profile of the works of the two authors was described on the basis of the literary-critical and biographical literature [24] and of the authors' texts themselves. The idiomatic units cited in the article serve as illustrations of the analytical categories and of the typical correspondences between the two languages; they are not presented as the results of a statistical count. A quantitative corpus-based study, with the systematic extraction of idioms from the full texts and their annotation by cultural and pragmatic features, is envisaged as the next stage of the research.

4. Linguocultural Features of Idioms in the Two Literary Traditions

4.1. The cultural background of the two authors

John Galsworthy, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1932, was a critic of the values of the English propertied classes, and the theme of possession, which is announced already in the title of the first novel of the Forsyte cycle, *The Man of Property*, determines the vocabulary and the imagery of the narration [4, 24]. The cultural codes of this world include property and money, social position and reputation, family solidarity, and the demand for self-control. G'afur G'ulom, one of the classics of Uzbek literature of the twentieth century, depicts a different cultural world: the community of the mahalla and the village, the extended family, hospitality and mutual help, religious and folk beliefs, and the harsh circumstances of the period of social change [5]. Its cultural codes include kinship, respect for elders, the honor of the family, humor as a way of surviving difficulties, and the collective moral evaluation expressed through proverbs and set expressions.

4.2. Cultural codes in English idioms of the Galsworthy type

Several groups of English idioms connected with the cultural codes of this literary world can be distinguished. The first is the group of idioms of property, money and trade, which reflect the commercial and calculating attitude to life: expressions that relate to value, price, profit and loss are used in the description of relations that are not commercial at all. The use of the lexicon of property for the evaluation of people and of marriage is a stylistic feature that connects the narrative with the ideology criticized in it. The second group comprises the idioms of reserve and control, among which the figures of the face, the lip, and the temperature of feelings are particularly important. The cultural ideal of keeping one's composure and not showing one's feelings in public is expressed in the images of coolness, stiffness and holding back. The third group is formed by the idioms of social judgment and reputation, which refer to appearances, to



what is done and what is not done, and to the opinion of others. Together they create a picture of a society that is governed by conventions and where the emotional life is hidden behind the façade.

It is significant that in English literary discourse idioms often appear in a modified or ironic form. The author plays with the literal and figurative meanings, replaces a component or places the idiom in a context that contradicts it. Such language play is a manifestation of the narrator's distance from the described world and a source of the humor and satire that are typical of the English realist novel.

4.3. Cultural codes in Uzbek idioms of the G'ulom type

The idioms that characterize Uzbek literary speech of this type are strongly connected with the body, the family and the community. Somatic expressions with the components of the heart, eye, face, tongue, head, hand and nose are used to describe the whole range of states and relations: joy, grief, shame, pride, courage, cunning and stubbornness. The cultural importance of shame, honor and face is reflected in numerous expressions about the face, the eyes and the neck. The second group includes idioms connected with hospitality, food and hospitality rituals, which reflect the high value of the guest and of generosity. The third group comprises idioms with a religious and ritual background: invocation of God, blessing, curse and oath formulas, which are used for the expression of attitudes, wishes and emotions. The fourth is represented by the idioms drawn from animal husbandry, agriculture and crafts, as well as zoonymic idioms, which build a figurative picture of the world on the basis of the rural way of life.

The stylistic function of idioms in the Uzbek text is closely related to orality. Idioms and proverbs are the language of the street, the bazaar and the courtyard, and they bring into the text the voices of the community. In a narrative told from the point of view of a child, the use of such expressions makes the narration vivid and authentic, and contributes to the humorous effect resulting from the contrast between the child's naïve perception and the idiomatic language of adults.

4.4. Comparison of imagery and cultural meanings

The comparison of English and Uzbek idioms reveals three types of relations. The first is full or nearly full equivalence, when both languages use the same or a very similar image to express the same meaning. This happens mostly in the idioms based on universal bodily experience, for instance, the images of the head as the seat of reason or of the heart as the seat of feelings. The second is partial equivalence, when the meaning is similar but the images are different, or when the same image has different connotations. The third is non-equivalence, when an idiom reflects a culture-specific reality or an experience that does not have a direct counterpart in the other culture. Table 1 gives illustrative examples of the first two types.



Table 1. Illustrative correspondences between English and Uzbek idioms

English idiom	Uzbek counterpart	Cultural and pragmatic comment
to keep a stiff upper lip	dardini ichiga yutmoq	Both express restraint of feelings; the English image is tied to the ideal of public self-control, the Uzbek one stresses silent endurance of grief
to give someone the cold shoulder	yuz o'girmoq	Both denote demonstrative rejection; the English image uses temperature, the Uzbek image uses the turning away of the face
to hold one's tongue	tilini tishlamoq	Both mean keeping silent; the Uzbek unit is more often connected with caution or regret
to lose one's head	boshini yo'qotmoq	Near-complete equivalence based on the universal image of the head as the seat of reason
to turn up one's nose	burnini ko'tarmoq	Partial equivalence; both denote arrogance but the gestures that motivate the images are different
to laugh in one's sleeve	ichida kulmoq	Both denote hidden amusement; the English image is more concrete and more ironic

The differences in the imagery are not accidental. English idioms very often use the sphere of trade, sport, navigation and weather, which correspond to the history and the everyday experience of the English-speaking community. Uzbek idioms to a greater degree draw upon the body, the household, the livestock and the farm, and the social space of the neighborhood. In both languages the sphere of emotions is organized through the body, but the preferred organs differ in the frequency and in the semantics: in the Uzbek tradition the heart and the liver, as well as the chest and the face, are often used for the expression of feelings and relationships, while in the English tradition the heart and the head dominate, and the contrast between them is a favorite theme.

4.5. Culture-specific idioms and the problem of non-equivalence

The most interesting cases for linguocultural analysis are idioms that have no counterpart in the other language because they refer to realities that are specific to one culture. In the English tradition such units are connected with the class system, with the institutions of law and



property, with sport and with the rituals of social life. In the Uzbek tradition they are connected with the institutions of the mahalla, with the customs of weddings, funerals and hospitality, with the practices of the bazaar and of farming, and with religious concepts. Such idioms are important carriers of cultural memory. Their meaning cannot be understood without the knowledge of the background, and their translation inevitably involves the loss or the explication of cultural information. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen have pointed out that the cross-cultural comparison of figurative units should take into account not only their meaning but also their imagery, their connotations and their degree of cultural embeddedness [3].

A related problem is the different cultural evaluation of the same image. Animals, colors, numbers and body parts are present in the idioms of both languages, but the evaluations connected with them may differ or even be opposite. A zoonym that has a negative evaluation in one culture can be neutral or positive in another, and the same applies to colors and to gestures. This is why a literal comparison of images without the cultural context may be misleading, and why the analysis of idioms should always be accompanied by an examination of the cultural associations and of the typical contexts of use.

5. Pragmatic Features of Idioms in Literary Discourse

5.1. Idioms in the characterization of the speech of heroes

One of the main functions of idioms in a literary text is the characterization of the speaker. The choice of an idiom indicates the social origin, the education, the temperament and the situation of the character. In the English novel of manners, the speech of the representatives of the propertied class is marked by conventional and measured expressions, formulas of politeness and idioms of understatement, while the less polished speech of the lower classes contains more colloquial and vivid expressions. In the Uzbek text, the idiomatic speech differentiates the village elder, the artisan, the bazaar trader, the woman at the gate and the child, and the diversity of idiomatic voices creates a polyphonic image of the community. The manner of using idioms thus has a sociolinguistic meaning that has to be recognized by the reader and, in translation, preserved as far as possible.

5.2. Evaluation, irony and understatement

Idioms are among the most economical means of the expression of evaluation. By choosing an idiom, a speaker not only describes an object or an action but also takes up an attitude toward it. In the English text, this evaluation is often implicit and ironic. The Gricean maxims of quantity and manner are deliberately violated: the speaker says less than is meant or uses a conventional expression in an unexpected context, and the hearer is expected to infer the real attitude [20]. Understatement and irony are, in the English tradition, a culturally preferred way of expressing criticism and emotions without breaking the rules of reserve. In the Uzbek text, the evaluation more often has an explicit and emotional character: it is expressed by hyperbolic and imagery-rich units, exclamations, comparisons and blessings or curses that openly show the attitude. Humor and mocking are often based on the exaggeration of physical and behavioral



features. The difference should not be absolutized, since both traditions know implicit and explicit evaluation, but the dominant tendencies are noticeable.

5.3. Politeness, face and euphemism

From the point of view of politeness theory, idioms serve as a means of mitigating threats to face [22]. When a refusal, a reproach or an unpleasant truth has to be communicated, an indirect idiomatic expression softens the force of the speech act. In the English text, the preference for indirectness and negative politeness corresponds to the value of personal autonomy and privacy. In the Uzbek text, politeness is strongly connected with respect toward the elder and the guest, with the observance of the hierarchy of kinship and age, and with the preservation of the honor of the family. This is reflected in a large stock of formulaic expressions of respect, blessings and wishes, as well as in euphemistic expressions for such sensitive topics as death, illness and sexual relations. Euphemistic idioms are particularly important because they allow the author to speak about taboo or painful matters without violating the norms of decency.

5.4. Idioms and the narrator's stance

Idioms also work on the level of the relation between the narrator and the reader. In Galsworthy's narration the idiom is frequently an element of the ironic commentary: the narrator seems to borrow the language of the described society in order to expose its limits. This is a form of polyphony in which the voice of the character is quoted and evaluated at the same time. In G'ulom's narration the narrator's voice is closer to the voice of the folk and often merges with it: the idiom signals shared knowledge, creating a sense of closeness between the narrator, the characters and the reader who belongs to the same cultural community. The intended effect is not distance but solidarity, and the humor has a warm, inclusive character, even though it may be sharp.

5.5. Modification and language play

The creative transformation of idioms is a significant pragmatic technique. It includes the substitution of components, the extension of the image, the actualization of the literal meaning and the use of the idiom in a context that revives the image. Such transformation draws the reader's attention to the expression and produces ironic, comic or emotional effects. The possibility of modification depends on the cultural familiarity of the unit: the reader must recognize the original in order to appreciate the play. For the translator, this is among the greatest difficulties, since the recognition of the base form cannot be taken for granted in the target audience.

The principal pragmatic differences discussed above are summarized in Table 2. The table presents tendencies, not rigid rules, and it should be read together with the caveats formulated in the discussion section.



Table 2. Dominant pragmatic tendencies in the use of idioms (comparative summary)

Pragmatic aspect	English literary text (Galsworthy type)	Uzbek literary text (G'ulom type)
Evaluation	Implicit, ironic, based on understatement	Explicit, emotional, often hyperbolic
Politeness and face	Indirectness, negative politeness, protection of privacy	Respect for age and status, honor of the family, formulas of blessing
Narrator's stance	Ironic distance from the voice of the society described	Closeness to the voice of the community, solidarity with the reader
Characterization	Social class marked by measured or colloquial idiom	Social role and age marked by folk idiom, proverbs and formulas
Language play	Modification and literalization of the idiom for irony	Exaggeration and comic imagery drawn from everyday life

6. Implications for Translation and Language Teaching

The differences revealed in the analysis have direct consequences for translation. The translation of idioms involves a choice among several strategies: the use of an idiom with a similar meaning and form, the use of an idiom with a similar meaning but a different form, paraphrase, and omission, as described in the standard works of translation studies [25, 26]. In the translation of literary texts, equivalence in meaning is not sufficient: the translator needs to preserve the imagery, the stylistic register, the evaluative and emotional coloring and, wherever possible, the cultural information. The choice depends on the function of the idiom in the particular context. If an idiom serves mainly for characterization, the translator will aim at an equivalent of the same register and social coloring. If it carries a culturally specific image that is important for the understanding of the text, a literal translation with a brief explanation may be preferred. If the idiom is used for ironic play, the preservation of the play in the target language may require a creative solution.

Translation from Uzbek into English runs the risk of losing the warmth, the emotional expressivity and the folk coloring of idiomatic speech when the idioms are replaced with neutral paraphrases. In the opposite direction, the translation of the English ironic understatement into Uzbek can lead to the loss of irony if the units chosen are too explicit and emotional. Awareness of the dominant pragmatic tendencies of the two cultures helps translators to avoid such shifts.



The results are also useful for the teaching of foreign languages. Learners tend to translate idioms word for word or to look for exact equivalents, ignoring the differences in connotation and in pragmatic force. Teaching should therefore include comparison of the imagery bases of idioms, work with authentic literary contexts, and tasks on the identification of the speaker's attitude and of the social situation. Such work develops not only lexical competence but also intercultural and pragmatic competence.

7. Discussion

The analysis confirms the thesis of linguoculturology that phraseological units are among the most culturally saturated elements of language, and it extends it to the literary text, where the cultural meanings are put into the service of artistic and communicative aims. At the same time, the study demonstrates that a purely cultural approach is insufficient. The same idiom may perform different functions depending on the context and on the communicative intention, and it is the pragmatic analysis that makes it possible to explain such variation.

The comparison also shows that the explanation of differences in terms of national character must be approached with caution. The tendency toward understatement in the English text and toward expressiveness in the Uzbek text reflects the dominant stylistic norms of the specific authors, the genre, the historical period and the social milieu, and is not a direct image of the character of a nation. Galsworthy depicts a particular social class and criticizes it, and G'ulom depicts a particular place and time and a particular child's perspective. Generalization beyond these conditions requires a broader empirical base. This is the main limitation of the study, and the extension of the research to a larger set of authors, genres and periods, together with the use of corpus methods, is a logical direction of further work.

8. Conclusion

The study has shown that idioms in the works of J. Galsworthy and G'. G'ulom are linguocultural and pragmatic phenomena of great importance. In the English text, the idioms are connected with the cultural codes of property, reserve and social convention, and they are used mainly for ironic evaluation, understatement and the distancing of the narrator from the described world. In the Uzbek text, the idioms are connected with the codes of kinship, honor, hospitality, religion and community, and they perform the functions of expressive characterization, folk humor and the expression of collective moral judgment. In both literary traditions, idioms are tools of characterization, evaluation, politeness management and the creation of the narrator's stance, but the dominant strategies differ.

The theoretical significance of the work lies in the integration of linguocultural, cognitive and pragmatic perspectives for the analysis of idioms in comparative literary discourse. The practical significance is connected with the improvement of translation of literary texts and the teaching of English and Uzbek as foreign languages. The prospects of further research include the compilation of an annotated corpus of idioms from the works of the two authors, the



quantitative analysis of their cultural and functional types, and the investigation of the strategies used in the existing translations of the works into the other language.

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