COGNITIVE STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS FROM ENGLISH INTO UZBEK

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Abstract: The translation of phraseological units from English into Uzbek represents one of the most cognitively demanding tasks in cross-linguistic communication. Rooted in the intersection of cognitive linguistics, translation studies, and phraseology, the present article examines the principal cognitive strategies that professional translators and language learners employ when rendering English idioms, proverbs, collocations, and fixed expressions into Uzbek. Drawing on frameworks from conceptual metaphor theory, frame semantics, and schema theory, the study argues that successful translation of PUs requires not merely lexical substitution but a sophisticated form of conceptual mapping, cultural schema activation, and pragmatic recalibration. The article further identifies key challenges arising from the structural and cultural asymmetry between English and Uzbek and proposes a taxonomy of cognitive-translational strategies appropriate to the Uzbek linguistic context.

Keywords: *phraseological units, cognitive strategies, translation, English, Uzbek, conceptual mapping, frame semantics, cultural schema.*

Phraseological units constitute a fundamental yet problematic layer of any natural language. Unlike single lexical items, phraseological units encode culturally embedded meanings that cannot be decoded through compositional analysis alone - that is, the meaning of the whole is not predictable from the meanings of its constituent parts. When a speaker of English says "to beat around the bush" or "to spill the beans," the communicative content is thoroughly idiomatic, reflecting a specific socio-cultural and historical context that a non-native interlocutor may not share. This non-compositionality is precisely what makes the translation of phraseological units a cognitively rich enterprise that demands attention from both theoretical and applied perspectives.

Uzbek, as a Turkic language with a distinct grammatical structure, rich oral literary tradition, and unique cultural heritage, presents a particularly interesting case for phraseological translation research. The language has been shaped by Persian, Arabic, and Russian influences while simultaneously preserving its own native stock of idioms and proverbial expressions. As a result, the Uzbek translator working from English faces a tripartite challenge: identifying the correct semantic and pragmatic meaning of the English phraseological units, locating a functionally equivalent expression in Uzbek (if one exists), and - when no equivalent is available - employing a cognitive strategy that preserves the communicative and affective force of the original without distorting the target-language text.

The theoretical framework underpinning this article draws on several converging research traditions. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory provides the foundational insight that idioms are not merely arbitrary linguistic conventions but are grounded in embodied conceptual structures that organize experience.[1] Charles Fillmore's frame semantics offers a complementary perspective, showing that PUs activate specific cognitive frames - structured bodies of knowledge - which must be recognized and appropriately mapped during translation.[2] Schema theory, as developed within cognitive psychology and applied to language

comprehension by researchers such as Rumelhart and Bartlett, further illuminates how background knowledge, cultural memory, and world experience shape the translator's mental processing of idiomatic input.[3]

Before a translator can render a PU into Uzbek, they must first comprehend it correctly in its English context. This comprehension process is far from passive and involves several cognitive operations that have been documented in psycholinguistic research. The initial phase is literal decoding, where the individual words are processed for their primary meanings. However, the experienced translator - like any proficient speaker - rapidly shifts to a figurative reading as contextual cues signal that a non-literal interpretation is required. This shift is governed by pragmatic inference: the translator draws on knowledge of the communicative context, the genre of the text, and their stored mental lexicon of PUs to suppress the compositional reading and activate the idiomatic one.

A central mechanism in this process is frame activation. When an English reader encounters the idiom "to burn bridges," for instance, the expression triggers a conceptual frame involving irreversible action and severed relationships. The translator into Uzbek must recognize which frame is being invoked and then search their cognitive repertoire for an Uzbek expression that activates a structurally and functionally congruent frame. The Uzbek equivalent "ko'prikni yoqib yubormoq" - though a direct borrowing that has entered contemporary usage - demonstrates how borrowings sometimes occur precisely because the conceptual frame has no indigenous equivalent that matches the metaphorical imagery with sufficient precision. In other cases, such as the expression "to kill two birds with one stone," Uzbek offers "bir o'qda ikki quyonni urmoq" (to shoot two rabbits with one arrow), a near-equivalent whose frame differs only at the level of the specific objects involved, while the underlying conceptual structure - maximal efficiency through minimal expenditure - remains identical.

This leads to a fundamental classification of PUs according to the degree of translational equivalence they permit. Full equivalents exhibit both semantic and structural congruence across the two languages, allowing direct substitution with minimal cognitive effort. Partial equivalents share the same meaning but differ in imagery, structure, or register, requiring the translator to exercise judgment about which feature to prioritize. Zero equivalents, by contrast, have no counterpart in Uzbek and demand a more extensive cognitive strategy, often involving paraphrase, descriptive translation, or the creation of a calque.[4] Understanding this classification is not merely taxonomic; it directly informs the cognitive strategy the translator must adopt at each point of decision.

Building on the conceptual framework outlined above, it is possible to identify a taxonomy of cognitive strategies that translators of English PUs into Uzbek employ.[5] The first and most cognitively economical strategy is equivalence retrieval, wherein the translator directly accesses a stored Uzbek equivalent from long-term memory. This strategy relies on strong bilingual lexical organization and is most available to experienced translators with extensive exposure to both languages. The cognitive demand is relatively low because the mapping between source and target units is pre-stored; the translator's role is retrieval rather than construction. For example, the English "time flies" maps directly to Uzbek "vaqt tez o'tadi" with little interpretive work required.

The second strategy is conceptual substitution, which is engaged when the source PU has no stored equivalent and the translator must search for an Uzbek expression that shares the same underlying conceptual metaphor or frame.[6] Here the cognitive process is more analytical: the

translator must decompose the English idiom into its conceptual components, identify the source domain of the metaphor, and then scan the Uzbek phraseological inventory for an expression that deploys a different vehicle to convey the same semantic and pragmatic tenor. The English expression "a storm in a teacup" -signifying disproportionate fuss over a trivial matter - may be rendered by the Uzbek "pashsha terisidan mo'yna tikmoq" (to make a fur coat from a fly's skin), which uses a completely different image while encoding the identical conceptual content of gross exaggeration. The translator's cognitive task here is one of analogical reasoning: finding the structural parallel between two conceptually congruent but superficially dissimilar expressions.

A third strategy is descriptive or explicatory translation, employed when neither stored equivalents nor conceptual substitutes are available.[7] The translator abandons the attempt to preserve figurative form and instead renders the meaning of the PU in plain Uzbek prose, often adding a culturally explanatory gloss. While this strategy is the least elegant from a stylistic standpoint, it is cognitively the most transparent and communicatively the most reliable, particularly in texts where precision of meaning outweighs literary effect - legal documents, technical manuals, or informational texts. Related to this is the strategy of calque formation, where the translator creates a new Uzbek expression by translating the constituent elements of the English PU literally, producing a coinage that may or may not be immediately intelligible to Uzbek readers but that preserves the imagery of the original. Calquing carries cognitive risks because the resulting expression may activate unexpected associations in Uzbek or simply fail to communicate, but when successful, it can enrich the Uzbek phraseological stock with new expressive resources.

A fourth and increasingly discussed strategy is cultural schema adaptation, which recognizes that some English PUs are embedded in cultural schemas - structured systems of culturally specific knowledge - that have no Uzbek counterpart at all.[8] The expression "to open a can of worms," for instance, presupposes familiarity with the cultural practice of using worms as fishing bait and the chaos that results from unsealing their container. An Uzbek reader unfamiliar with this practice may fail to grasp even the transferred meaning. In such cases, the translator must not only convert the linguistic form but also perform a cultural substitution, replacing the English cultural schema with one that is cognitively accessible to the Uzbek reader while preserving the pragmatic function of the expression. This strategy requires the deepest level of bicultural competence and the most complex form of cognitive mediation between the two linguistic worlds.

The specific linguistic and cultural relationship between English and Uzbek creates several characteristic translation difficulties that are not merely incidental but structurally conditioned. Grammatically, Uzbek is an agglutinative SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) language with a rich system of suffixal morphology, while English is an analytic SVO language with relatively limited inflectional morphology. This structural difference affects the formal shape of PUs in each language: English idioms often exploit syntactic flexibility and preposition-heavy constructions, while Uzbek idioms tend to rely on postpositions, verb-final constructions, and elaborate nominal compounds.[9] The translator therefore faces the additional cognitive task of not only meaning-mapping but also structural remodeling, ensuring that the translated PU sounds natural and idiomatic in Uzbek rather than awkward and foreign.

Cultural asymmetry adds a further layer of complexity. English phraseology draws heavily on maritime experience ("to sail close to the wind"), animal husbandry ("to put the cart before the horse"), sporting culture ("to move the goalposts"), and Biblical or classical literary tradition ("to wash one's hands of something"). Uzbek phraseology, by contrast, reflects the experience of a

predominantly agrarian, steppe, and mountainous culture with strong Islamic influences and a rich tradition of oral poetry ("doston" and "maqol"). These divergent cultural substrates mean that not only the images but the entire associative worlds of the two languages differ in significant ways, and the translator must navigate these differences with sensitivity to both the source text's meaning and the target audience's cultural expectations.[10]

Furthermore, register and stylistic considerations require ongoing cognitive attention. Uzbek, like all languages, stratifies its phraseological repertoire by register: some PUs are appropriate only in colloquial speech, others belong to literary or formal discourse, and still others occupy a neutral stylistic space. An English translator who renders a formal English idiom with a colloquial Uzbek equivalent, or vice versa, has produced a pragmatic mistranslation even if the semantic content is accurate. The cognitive ability to monitor register simultaneously with meaning is therefore an indispensable component of effective phraseological translation between the two languages, and one that is acquired only through sustained bilingual experience and systematic study of both languages' stylistic norms.[11]

The translation of phraseological units from English into Uzbek is a cognitively multidimensional process that extends far beyond the retrieval of stored equivalents from bilingual dictionaries. As this article has argued, it requires the activation of conceptual metaphor structures, the recognition and re-mapping of cultural frames and schemas, the application of analogical reasoning in the search for functional equivalents, and the continuous monitoring of pragmatic, stylistic, and register appropriateness.[12] The taxonomy of cognitive-translational strategies proposed here - equivalence retrieval, conceptual substitution, descriptive translation, calque formation, and cultural schema adaptation - reflects the range of cognitive approaches that translators deploy in response to the varying degrees of structural and cultural asymmetry between the two languages.

These strategies are not mutually exclusive, and skilled translators move fluidly among them as dictated by the specific challenges of each PU and its context.[13] The broader implication of this analysis is that the translation of PUs is not a peripheral or ornamental aspect of translation competence but a central site at which linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, and cognitive flexibility converge. Investment in its systematic study - both in research and in translator education - is accordingly an investment in the quality of cross-cultural communication between the English-speaking world and the Uzbek-speaking one, a channel whose importance will only grow as Uzbekistan's engagement with global intellectual, scientific, and literary culture deepens in the coming decades.

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