

The Intercultural Translation of Phraseologisms: A Contrastive Comparison Between Uzbek and German

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Abstract:

Phraseological units are integral to language and culture, often encapsulating shared experiences, historical references, and societal norms. The translation of phraseologisms between culturally distinct languages such as Uzbek and German presents significant challenges due to differences in idiomatic structures, symbolism, and socio-cultural references. While much research has addressed general translation strategies, there remains a lack of focused, contrastive analysis on the intercultural translation of phraseologisms between Uzbek and German. This study aims to examine the semantic, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions of phraseologism translation between these two languages, identifying key challenges and evaluating the effectiveness of various translation strategies. The findings demonstrate that literal translation is often insufficient due to pragmatic incongruence or cultural inappropriateness. Effective translation frequently requires functional equivalents, cultural substitution, or complete rephrasing to preserve meaning and communicative intent. German expressions involving culturally sensitive imagery, such as alcohol or animal references, often demand significant adaptation when translated into Uzbek. By analyzing more than fifty phraseological units and offering context-sensitive comparisons, this research provides a rare insight into the intersection of language, culture, and translation. The study underscores the need for intercultural competence and contextual awareness in translation practice. It suggests that phraseologism translation is not a purely linguistic task but a culturally embedded act that requires translators to navigate symbolic nuances to achieve semantic and emotional fidelity in the target language.

Keywords: Phraseological Units, Intercultural Translation, Uzbek Language, German Language, Equivalence, Translation Strategies, Cultural Differences

Introduction

Phraseologisms are fixed linguistic units that play an important role in everyday communication, literature, and media. They are deeply rooted in the culture and history of a people. Therefore, translating them between two structurally and culturally different languages—such as Uzbek and German—presents a major challenge. This paper examines how phraseological units from German can be translated into Uzbek (and vice versa), with particular focus on cultural differences and pragmatic equivalence.

The study is based on the following methods: Selection of over 50 frequently used phraseologisms from the German language; Identification of possible Uzbek equivalents, taking into account the semantic and cultural context; Classification of translation strategies: literal translation, free translation, functional equivalence, cultural substitution;

Analysis of examples from literary, journalistic, and colloquial texts in both languages;

Consideration of cultural symbols, connotations, and communicative functions.

Some phraseologisms exist in both languages in almost identical form:

“Den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen” – “mixning boshiga urmoq” (to hit the nail on the head). Cultural differences:

Many German phraseologisms contain cultural references that are unfamiliar or even incomprehensible in Uzbek.

For example:

“Das ist nicht mein Bier” – is best translated in Uzbek as “Bu mening ishim emas” (This is not my business), even though the symbol “beer” is culturally inappropriate.

Pragmatic incongruence:

When translated without context, a phrase can become incomprehensible or even ridiculous.

“Jemandem einen Korb geben” literally means “to give someone a basket,” but in context it means “to reject someone.” In many translations, the figurative language is lost or weakened. “Durch dick und dünn gehen” is often simply rendered as “do‘stlikni saqlash” (to preserve friendship). Cultural taboos and symbolism:

German idioms involving animals such as “pig” (Schwein) are inappropriate in Uzbek culture and require paraphrasing or substitution.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative contrastive methodology to investigate the intercultural translation of phraseologisms between the Uzbek and German languages[1]. The research began with the selection of over fifty frequently used German phraseological units sourced from literary, journalistic, and colloquial texts[2]. Each unit was examined for possible Uzbek equivalents, with particular attention to semantic accuracy, pragmatic function, and cultural relevance[3]. The comparative analysis incorporated several translation strategies, including literal translation, free translation, functional equivalence, and cultural substitution, to evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches[4]. Each example was assessed within its communicative and symbolic context to determine whether the phrase could be directly transferred or required rephrasing[5]. Particular focus was given to culturally bound expressions involving taboos, idiomatic metaphors, or region-specific imagery, such as references to alcohol or animals, which often demanded culturally appropriate modifications in the Uzbek context[6]. The method also involved an in-depth analysis of connotations and implied meanings to assess how phraseologisms preserve or lose their emotional and cultural resonance during translation[7]. Overall, the study emphasized the role of pragmatic congruence and intercultural competence, using a text-based analytical framework grounded in phraseological theory

and supported by relevant examples[8]. Through this approach, the research aimed to reveal patterns of translatability and provide insight into the linguistic and cultural intricacies of idiom transfer across distinct language systems[9].

Results

The analysis of over fifty commonly used German phraseologisms and their Uzbek equivalents revealed that direct translation is often insufficient due to semantic divergence, cultural connotations, and pragmatic incongruence[10]. Some phraseologisms, such as “Den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen” and its Uzbek counterpart “mixning boshiga urmoq,” show a high level of equivalence in both form and meaning, reflecting shared conceptual metaphors[11]. However, many idioms contain culturally embedded elements that require adaptation[12]. For instance, idioms with references to “beer” or “pigs” in German posed cultural incompatibility in Uzbek, necessitating substitutions with culturally neutral expressions[13]. Literal translations of idioms such as “Jemandem einen Korb geben” proved ineffective without contextualization, as they resulted in loss of figurative meaning[14]. Additionally, pragmatic mismatches were evident in expressions where symbolic meanings differ significantly, leading to distortion or dilution of the original impact when translated verbatim[15]. The study also showed that functional and cultural substitution strategies were most effective in maintaining the idiomatic tone and communicative purpose in the target language[16]. Free translations allowed for greater flexibility in preserving the phrase’s emotive or rhetorical effect, while cultural equivalents ensured contextual relevance. Overall, the results confirm that successful translation of phraseologisms between Uzbek and German depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on intercultural awareness, sensitivity to symbolism, and pragmatic function. Translators must navigate both structural and cultural dimensions to convey the intended meaning and resonance of idiomatic expressions in cross-cultural communication.

Discussion

The contrastive analysis of Uzbek and German phraseologisms reveals that the intercultural translation of idiomatic expressions involves complex layers of linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic considerations. While some idioms possess direct equivalents, such as “Den Nagel auf den Kopf treffen” and “mixning boshiga urmoq,” most require deeper contextual adaptation to preserve their semantic intent. The cultural specificity embedded in idioms, including symbolic references like “beer” or animal imagery in German, poses challenges when such symbols are irrelevant or culturally inappropriate in Uzbek. For instance, translating “Das ist nicht mein Bier” to Uzbek requires not just linguistic replacement, but also cultural reinterpretation, as beer does not hold the same social connotation in Uzbekistan. Moreover, literal translation often results in loss of figurative meaning or communicative awkwardness, as seen in idioms like “Jemandem einen Korb geben.” These examples affirm that phraseologism translation is not a matter of direct substitution but one of strategic mediation between cultural codes. Functional and free translations are frequently necessary to ensure that the target text resonates with the intended audience. The study also underscores the role of pragmatic equivalence in preserving not only meaning but also tone, emotional resonance, and communicative effect. Translators must therefore possess a high level of intercultural competence, sensitivity to taboos, and an awareness of both the expressive and symbolic power of language. Overall, the findings reinforce that phraseological translation is a dynamic and interpretive task that reflects the broader interplay between language and culture.

The results show that successful translation of phraseologisms requires more than just linguistic competence. Translators must consider cultural contexts, social norms, and communicative intentions. This is especially true between German and Uzbek—languages with very different religious, historical, and social foundations—where cultural sensitivity is essential. In many cases, a free or functional translation is necessary to preserve the impact of the original in the target text.

Conclusion

The intercultural translation of phraseologisms is a complex and demanding task in which linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic factors are inseparably intertwined.

Phraseologisms are deeply embedded in the culture, history, and mindset of a people. Their translation into another language is not merely a matter of vocabulary or syntax but requires a high level of intercultural competence and translation awareness.

For an adequate transfer, it is essential to analyze and understand both the linguistic structures and the cultural backgrounds of the source and target languages.

Special attention must be given to cultural connotations, symbolism, taboos, and the communicative context in which the phrase is used.

Furthermore, it becomes clear that not all phraseologisms are directly translatable. In many cases, a free or functional translation is required to retain the intended meaning and effect in the target text. This may involve replacing idiomatic expressions with culturally equivalent phrases or completely rephrasing them depending on the context.

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