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IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN UZBEK-ENGLISH TRANSLATION: CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND THE NEED FOR SPECIALIZED LEXICOGRAPHICAL RESOURCES

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Abstract: Idioms are culturally bound expressions that pose significant challenges in translation due to their figurative meanings and deep cultural associations. This article explores the difficulties in translating idioms between Uzbek and English, with a focus on the absence of specialized bilingual idioms dictionaries. By analyzing linguistic, cultural, and practical translation issues, the study highlights the importance of cultural awareness and appropriate lexical resources for accurate and meaningful idiomatic translation.

1. Introduction

Language is more than a means of communication—it is a representation of culture, identity, and worldview. Among the figurative elements that enrich a language, idioms hold a unique position. Idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be understood from the literal definitions of the individual words but rather from their usage within cultural and linguistic contexts. Translating idioms between languages with distinct cultural backgrounds, such as Uzbek and English, is a complex task that requires more than lexical equivalence.

The absence of a specialized Uzbek-English idioms dictionary further exacerbates the challenge. Translators, learners, and scholars often lack the necessary resources to accurately interpret and render idiomatic expressions across these two languages. This article examines the linguistic and cultural barriers in idiomatic translation and argues for the development of a comprehensive bilingual idiom resource.

2. The Nature of Idioms and Their Cultural Significance

Idioms encapsulate the history, traditions, values, and daily life of a culture. They contribute emotional depth and cultural richness to language. For instance, the English idiom “The early bird catches the worm” has a comparable Uzbek expression: “Ertalabki qush rizqini topadi.” While both emphasize the value of being proactive, the imagery and cultural nuances differ.

Idioms often enhance communication by adding creativity and emotional expression. Saying "He's over the moon" is more evocative than the literal "He is very happy." In literature, idioms can express sarcasm, humor, warmth, or despair, and in conversation, they often reflect social class, region, or age group.

3. Challenges in Translating Idioms

3.1 Non-Equivalence

One of the primary difficulties in translating idioms is **non-equivalence**. Many Uzbek idioms are deeply embedded in local culture and may not have direct English equivalents. For example, the idiom "Oyoq-qo'lini sovuq suvga urmaydi" [10, 69] literally translates to "He doesn't dip his hands or feet in cold water," meaning someone who lives in complete comfort. There is no direct English counterpart that captures both the meaning and tone.

3.2 Contextual Dependency

Idioms rely heavily on context. The same phrase can have different meanings depending on the situation. Misinterpreting or mistranslating an idiom can result in awkwardness, confusion, or unintended humor. Accurate translation requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural and contextual sensitivity.

3.3 Absence of Lexicographical Resources

A significant barrier to effective idiomatic translation between Uzbek and English is the **lack of a specialized bilingual idioms dictionary**. General dictionaries often omit idioms or provide literal translations without usage examples or cultural explanations. As a result, translators are left without reliable references, which can lead to inaccurate or flat translations.

4. Literary Translation and Idioms: The Case of O'tgan Kunlar

The importance of idioms becomes especially clear in literary works such as O'tgan Kunlar by Abdulla Qodiriy [9, 35]. The novel is rich with culturally embedded idioms that reflect Uzbek traditions, social norms, and humor. Translating such texts requires more than linguistic fluency—it demands cultural literacy. Literal translations risk stripping the text of its emotional depth and cultural context, thereby altering the author's voice and intention.

5. Strategies for Idiom Translation

Translators often employ several strategies when dealing with idioms:

- **Finding an equivalent idiom** in the target language (when available)
- **Paraphrasing the meaning** while preserving tone
- **Adapting** the idiom to the cultural context of the target language
- **Omitting** the idiom (only when no adequate translation exists)

Each strategy must be applied judiciously to maintain the integrity of the original expression.

6. The Need for a Bilingual Uzbek-English Idioms Dictionary

The current lack of a standardized idioms dictionary between Uzbek and English presents a serious gap in both educational and professional fields. A well-researched, annotated dictionary would not only serve translators but also support language learners, literary scholars, and cultural researchers. It would provide accurate definitions, cultural notes, and usage examples to ensure idioms are translated with their intended meaning and emotional weight.

7. Conclusion

Idioms are a vital part of linguistic and cultural identity. Their translation requires not only linguistic expertise but also a deep understanding of the cultural contexts in which they exist. The absence of a dedicated Uzbek-English idioms dictionary poses a serious challenge to translators, learners, and scholars alike. Addressing this gap through the development of comprehensive idiomatic resources would greatly improve the quality of translations and foster deeper cross-cultural understanding.

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