BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg
BG PULSE JOURNAL

TEACHING THE TRANSLATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS THROUGH CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

A cognitive-comparative and pedagogical approach to English–Uzbek translation

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doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23598204

Abstract: Phraseological units are difficult to translate because their meanings are conventionalized, figurative, and culturally embedded. This article explores how Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) can support the teaching of English–Uzbek phraseological translation. It combines a focused review of cognitive-linguistic and translation-pedagogical literature with a comparative, illustrative analysis of recurring expressions and Uzbek functional equivalents. Special attention is given to Uzbek literary works by Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, G'afur G'ulom, O'tkir Hoshimov, and Shukur Xolmirzayev as authentic primary-text resources for classroom corpus building. The analysis distinguishes close conceptual and figurative correspondence, shared meaning with different imagery, and culture-specific cases requiring paraphrase or substitution. A five-stage teaching model is proposed: identification, conceptual mapping, cross-linguistic comparison, strategy selection, and contextual verification. The article argues that CMT is most useful as a complementary method: it encourages learners to explain translation choices rather than rely exclusively on memorized equivalents. The listed literary editions provide a verifiable starting point for developing a page-referenced English–Uzbek phraseological corpus; the examples in the analytical table are illustrative, not claimed as quotations from particular pages.
Keywords: conceptual metaphor; phraseological units; idioms; translation pedagogy; English–Uzbek translation; Uzbek literature; cultural equivalence.

Annotatsiya. Maqolada frazeologik birliklarni ingliz tilidan o'zbek tiliga tarjima qilishni o'qitishda konseptual metafora nazariyasidan foydalanish masalasi yoritiladi. Abdulla Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, G'afur G'ulom, O'tkir Hoshimov va Shukur Xolmirzayev asarlari autentik badiiy manba sifatida tavsiya etilib, frazeologik birliklarni kontekstda tahlil qilish, obrazlarni qiyoslash va tarjima strategiyasini asoslashga yo'naltirilgan besh bosqichli model taklif etiladi. Jadvaldagi misollar izohli o'quv namunalari bo'lib, muayyan asardan sahifama-sahifa olingan iqtiboslar emas.

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается применение теории концептуальной метафоры при обучении переводу английских фразеологических единиц на узбекский язык. Произведения Абдуллы Кадыри, Чулпана, Гафура Гуляма, Уткира Хашимова и Шукура Холмирзаева предлагаются как аутентичные источники для контекстуального анализа. Представлена пятиэтапная учебная модель, направленная на выявление фразеологизма, анализ образной мотивации, межъязыковое сопоставление, выбор стратегии и проверку перевода в контексте.

1. Introduction

Phraseological units (PUs), including idioms and fixed figurative expressions, form an expressive layer of language in which meaning cannot always be predicted from the component words. A translator must identify the intended meaning, the image that motivates it, its pragmatic force, and the extent to which a comparable expression is conventional in the target language. Word-for-word translation may preserve the source image but produce an unnatural or misleading Uzbek expression. In Uzbek linguistics, Sh. Rahmatullayev's explanatory phraseological dictionary provides an important descriptive basis for identifying conventional meanings, variants, and synonymous expressions [13; 14].

This difficulty is especially relevant to English–Uzbek translation. Although speakers of both languages draw on shared embodied experiences such as movement, temperature, vision, and bodily sensation, phraseological systems package those experiences through different images and cultural conventions. The translator therefore needs to distinguish lexical similarity from conceptual and functional equivalence.

1.1. Problem, aim and research questions

Conceptual Metaphor Theory regards metaphor not merely as a rhetorical ornament but as a systematic way of understanding one domain through another. For example, expressions such as spend time, save time, and waste time reflect the conceptualization TIME IS A VALUABLE RESOURCE. This cognitive perspective provides a route from an unfamiliar expression to its figurative motivation and can help learners compare alternative translations with greater precision [1; 2].

The research problem addressed here is that phraseological translation is often taught through lists of bilingual equivalents. Such lists are useful, but they do not necessarily teach students how to interpret an unfamiliar idiom or justify a choice when the Uzbek image differs from the English one. The aim of the article is to formulate a CMT-informed framework for teaching English–Uzbek phraseological translation while emphasizing the role of authentic Uzbek literary language as a source of context and cultural interpretation.

The objectives are to: (1) explain the relevance of conceptual metaphor to phraseological translation; (2) distinguish recurring types of English–Uzbek correspondence; (3) match these types with suitable translation strategies; (4) identify Uzbek literary works that can support contextualized corpus work; and (5) propose a classroom procedure that can be tested in future research.

Research questions

RQ1. How can conceptual-metaphor awareness help students interpret and translate English phraseological units into Uzbek?

RQ2. What kinds of conceptual and phraseological correspondence should learners distinguish when comparing English expressions with Uzbek equivalents?

RQ3. Which strategies are appropriate when source and target expressions share a communicative concept but differ in imagery or cultural conventionality?

Research novelty and contribution

The article connects three layers often taught separately: cognitive motivation, English–Uzbek comparison, and classroom translation strategy. Its practical contribution is a five-stage model that requires students to explain the meaning and function of an idiom before selecting an Uzbek rendering. CMT is not treated as a universal explanation for every fixed expression; it is used alongside semantic, pragmatic, literary-context, and dictionary-based analysis.

2. Theoretical background

Lakoff and Johnson's foundational account describes conceptual metaphors as systematic mappings between domains [1]. Kövecses further explains how bodily experience interacts with cultural variation, so similar experiences may be expressed through different conventional images [2]. In translation, this distinction matters: the same target concept may be represented by a matching metaphor, a different metaphor, or a non-metaphorical phrase. The Uzbek phraseological tradition adds a necessary lexicographic and language-specific perspective: Rahmatullayev's dictionary records the semantic and usage-related features of Uzbek idioms, while Mamatov's work addresses the theoretical basis of phraseologism formation [13–15]. These sources do not themselves establish that every Uzbek idiom is metaphorically motivated; rather, they provide evidence for checking meaning and conventionality before a conceptual mapping is proposed.

2.1. Uzbek phraseological scholarship and its relevance

The present study draws on Uzbek phraseological description as well as international work on conceptual metaphor. Rahmatullayev's O'zbek tilining izohli frazeologik lug'ati documents the meanings and variants of Uzbek phraseological units and is useful for checking whether a proposed equivalent is conventional rather than a word-for-word construction [13]. His later O'zbek tilining frazeologik lug'ati offers a further reference point for phraseological identification [14]. Mamatov's discussion of the theoretical foundations of phraseologism formation is relevant to the distinction between a stable phraseological unit and a freely created figurative expression [15].

For this article, these Uzbek sources are used as descriptive and lexicographic evidence, while Lakoff and Johnson [1] and Kövecses [2] inform the conceptual analysis. The two perspectives serve different functions: phraseological dictionaries help establish meaning and conventionality; Conceptual Metaphor Theory offers a possible explanation of the relationship between a concrete image and an abstract concept. A proposed mapping is accepted only when it is plausible in context, not merely because the expression contains a body-part or concrete noun.

A further methodological point concerns literary data. Literary works by Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, G'afur G'ulom, Hoshimov, and Xolmirzayev are recommended as primary texts for future corpus collection, but the present paper does not claim that the illustrative pairs in Table 1 were extracted from those works. Any empirical extension should record the exact edition, page, surrounding sentence, speaker, and function of each attested phraseological unit. This distinction is essential for reproducibility and for avoiding unsupported quotations.

2.1. Metaphor awareness and translation pedagogy

Research into metaphor-aware language teaching suggests that grouping expressions by shared conceptual patterns can aid learning and retention. Boers found that drawing learners' attention to metaphorical themes may support vocabulary retention [3]. Hastürkoğlu's study of conceptual-metaphor instruction in translation pedagogy reported that explicit attention to mappings can be useful when idioms do not share the same conceptual structure across languages [4]. Schäffner's discussion of metaphor translation likewise emphasizes that translators may preserve a metaphor, replace it with another, paraphrase it, or omit it when the communicative context warrants such a decision [5]. These findings support a process-oriented approach rather than mechanical substitution.

2.2. Uzbek literary works as primary-text sources

Uzbek literary works can enrich phraseological translation teaching because they place conventional expressions within dialogue, characterization, social relationships, historical settings, and emotional situations. Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar, Cho'lpon's Kecha va kunduz, and G'afur G'ulom's Shum bola offer distinct narrative voices and sociolinguistic environments [6–8]. O'tkir Hoshimov's Dunyoning ishlari and Shukur Xolmirzayev's O'n sakkizga kirmagan kim bor provide additional material for studying everyday speech, affect, family relationships, and the language of interpersonal experience [9; 10]. The editions listed in the references are identifiable editions recorded in academic-library catalogues.

For classroom research, the literary texts should be treated as primary data rather than simply as background reading. Students can locate a phraseological unit in a passage, record the speaker and situation, interpret its literal and figurative meanings, and compare it with a possible English equivalent. The context may show, for example, whether a phrase expresses anger, shame, affection, social distance, or irony. The same expression may require different translations in dialogue and narration.

A methodological distinction is important. The present table gives illustrative English units and functional Uzbek renderings; it does not attribute each rendering to a cited page of any literary work. When the proposed model is implemented as a corpus study, learners should record the exact edition, page number, context, and the status of each expression as idiomatic, proverbial, collocational, or author-created. That procedure prevents invented textual evidence and makes the analysis reproducible.

3. Materials and method The article uses a qualitative, comparative, and pedagogical design. Its illustrative set consists of recurrent English phraseological units paired with natural Uzbek phraseological or functional equivalents. Three dimensions guide analysis: (a) contextual meaning; (b) conceptual mapping, where a mapping is reasonably motivated; and (c) target-language conventionality, pragmatic suitability, and translation strategy. The analysis is illustrative rather than statistical and does not claim to represent the complete English or Uzbek phraseological systems. The Uzbek-language reference base is therefore used for target-language validation, not as a substitute for a directly collected parallel corpus. The analysis distinguishes (i) established dictionary meaning, (ii) a proposed conceptual interpretation, and (iii) a pedagogical translation choice. This separation reduces the risk of presenting an intuitive equivalence as a documented linguistic fact [13–16].

3.1. Analytical categories and procedure

The material is classified into three pedagogical categories. Category A covers units whose conceptual mapping and imagery are close in both languages. Category B includes units with a similar communicative concept but different imagery or lexical form. Category C covers culture-specific cases or expressions for which a direct phraseological equivalent may be unstable; these often call for paraphrase, explanation, or an idiomatic substitute. The categories are operational teaching tools, not absolute linguistic classes, and context can change the preferred solution.

For a literary-text corpus, each record should include the source-language expression, the sentence or dialogue in which it occurs, its literal gloss, contextual meaning, source and target domains, a candidate English equivalent, and a brief rationale for the chosen strategy. At least two independent translations or peer assessments would strengthen reliability. Where a mapping is uncertain, students should mark it as a hypothesis rather than force an expression into a metaphor category.

Table 1. Illustrative English–Uzbek phraseological correspondences

English unit	Conceptual focus	Possible Uzbek rendering	Teaching decision
spend time	TIME AS A RESOURCE	vaqt sarflamoq	Preserve close mapping
save time	TIME AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE	vaqtni tejamoq	Preserve; compare collocation
lose one's head	LOSS OF CONTROL AS LOSS OF HEAD	boshini yo‘qotmoq	Close conceptual/image match
turn a blind eye	IGNORING AS NOT SEEING	ko‘z yummoq	Preserve conventional image
come to a dead end	DIFFICULTY AS A BLOCKED PATH	boshi berk ko‘chaga kirib qolmoq	Preserve; check context
pave the way	PROGRESS AS A PATH	yo‘l ochmoq	Preserve close path image
break the ice	SOCIAL DISTANCE AS ICE	muhitni yumshatmoq; gap boshlab yubormoq	Functional substitution
see eye to eye	AGREEMENT AS SHARED VISION	fikri bir bo‘lmoq	Use Uzbek conventional phrasing
hit the ceiling	ANGER AS UPWARD MOVEMENT/HEAT	qoni qaynamoq; jahli chiqmoq	Substitute by register
in hot water	TROUBLE AS HEAT/DIFFICULT STATE	qiyin ahvolda qolmoq	Paraphrase or function
spill the beans	REVEALING INFORMATION AS SPILLING CONTENT	sirni oshkor qilmoq	Functional equivalent
a storm in a teacup	MINOR CONFLICT AS A STORM	pashshadan fil yasamoq	Cultural-image substitution
break someone's heart	EMOTIONAL PAIN AS PHYSICAL DAMAGE	yuragini sindirmoq	Close image; check context

Note. These pairs are illustrative teaching examples, not quotations attributed to the literary works listed in the references. The preferred translation depends on genre, register, and immediate context.

4. Results and analysis

The illustrative comparison points to three recurring relationships. First, some units have close conceptual and figurative counterparts. Lose one's head / boshini yo'qotmoq, turn a blind eye / ko'z yummoq, and pave the way / yo'l ochmoq preserve similar image patterns. Such examples allow teachers to connect the English form with the Uzbek expression and then verify whether the match remains natural in the sentence. Even apparently close equivalents should not be translated automatically: intensity, syntax, collocation, and register still matter.

Second, many units share a communicative concept but employ different images. See eye to eye can be rendered as fikri bir bo'lmoq, while break the ice may be translated as muhitni yumshatmoq or gap boshlab yubormoq, depending on context. Here, preserving the English image is less important than preserving the interpersonal function. These cases make it possible to discuss the difference between conceptual equivalence and formal or phraseological equivalence.

Third, some expressions are best translated through a functional equivalent or paraphrase. A storm in a teacup and pashshadan fil yasamoq both describe disproportionate reaction, but their images are not identical. Spill the beans commonly becomes sirni oshkor qilmoq, a clear functional rendering that does not reproduce the English container image. Literal translation in these cases may confuse the reader or create an unintended comic effect.

4.1. What Uzbek literary context adds

Literary passages enable students to evaluate more than dictionary meaning. A phrase uttered by a parent, a child, a narrator, or a socially powerful character can signal intimacy, hierarchy, irony, resentment, or affection. Qodiriy's historical-social dialogue, Cho'lpon's depiction of social constraints, G'afur G'ulom's colloquial and dialectal colouring, Hoshimov's emotionally charged family narratives, and Xolmirzayev's interpersonal dialogue can be used to compare how phraseology constructs voice and worldview [6–10]. These are corpus-design opportunities, not claims that a particular example in Table 1 occurs verbatim in those books.

A classroom corpus exercise may ask students to compare the wording of a literary passage with a bilingual dictionary entry. They should identify what information the dictionary does not capture: who speaks, to whom, in what emotional state, and with what social implications. If an English idiom cannot preserve those features, a different idiom, a plain-language equivalent, or a short explanatory translation may be preferable.

4.2. Implications of the comparison

The central result is procedural: the appropriate strategy follows from analysis of the concept, image, context, and target-language convention. Close correspondences can often preserve the image; partial correspondences call for comparison and substitution; culturally opaque units may need paraphrase or explanation. This conclusion is consistent with translation scholarship that treats metaphor transfer as a context-sensitive decision rather than a fixed one-to-one operation [5]. This procedure is compatible with Uzbek phraseographic practice, in which the head phrase, variants, semantic explanation, and usage examples are important for interpreting a unit [13; 14]. Recent comparative lexicographic discussion also demonstrates the value of examining how phraseological units are represented across editions of Uzbek phraseological dictionaries [16].

5. A five-stage CMT-based teaching model

Stage 1 — Identification. Students locate a fixed or semi-fixed expression and determine whether its meaning is literal, figurative, or ambiguous in the given passage. The teacher asks learners to explain the intended meaning before looking for an equivalent.

Stage 2 — Conceptual mapping. Students identify the image or source domain and the idea being understood through it. For instance, come to a dead end can be associated with DIFFICULTY AS A BLOCKED PATH. Learners should explain the mapping in their own words and acknowledge uncertainty when the expression has become opaque.

Stage 3 — Cross-linguistic comparison. Students search for an Uzbek phraseological or functional equivalent in a dictionary, literary text, or parallel text. They compare the image, meaning, register, connotation, and degree of conventionality rather than comparing word forms alone.

Stage 4 — Strategy selection. Students choose among metaphor preservation, substitution with another metaphor, functional equivalence, paraphrase, or explanatory translation. They justify the choice by referring to the intended reader, genre, and communicative purpose.

Stage 5 — Contextual verification. Students place the proposed translation back into the full sentence or dialogue. They check naturalness, collocation, register, pragmatic force, and whether the result preserves the speaker's intention. Peer review and dictionary or corpus consultation can be used to revise the final version.

5.1. Sample classroom sequence (60–80 minutes)

Pre-task (10 minutes): introduce the concept of social relations and give students three expressions, including break the ice and see eye to eye. Learners predict possible meanings and identify literal images. Main task (25 minutes): in pairs, students translate a short English dialogue into Uzbek, list two possible renderings for each expression, and classify each option as preservation, substitution, functional equivalence, or paraphrase. Literary comparison (15 minutes): groups inspect a selected passage from one of the Uzbek works listed in the references, record the page number and speaker, and identify a phraseological expression that performs a comparable function. Reporting (10 minutes): each group explains why its preferred rendering fits the context. Reflection (5–10 minutes): learners write a short note on what conceptual analysis revealed that a word-for-word translation did not.

5.2. Assessment criteria

A practical rubric can allocate marks to semantic accuracy, conceptual correspondence, pragmatic appropriateness, cultural adequacy, stylistic naturalness, and the quality of the student's justification. No single criterion should automatically outweigh the others: retaining the source image is not successful if it distorts meaning or sounds unnatural in Uzbek. Teachers should also reward evidence-based decisions, including the careful use of literary context and reference works.

6. Discussion

The proposed model frames phraseological translation as a multi-level process. Lexical recognition identifies the unit; semantic analysis recovers contextual meaning; cognitive analysis explains a motivated image; cultural analysis tests whether the image is conventional in Uzbek; and pragmatic analysis checks whether the final expression works for the intended audience. This process offers a principled explanation for why literal translation may fail even when each individual word is understood correctly.

The role of Uzbek literary sources is particularly important for cultural and pragmatic interpretation. A narrative may deploy a familiar expression in a non-standard or ironic way, or it may contain dialectal and historically marked language. Students should not assume that every figurative phrase is a fixed idiom or that one English equivalent will fit all contexts. Annotation of source, speaker, situation, and page reference can help distinguish conventional phraseology from creative metaphor and individual authorial style. This emphasis is consistent with Uzbek phraseological scholarship, which treats literary and colloquial examples as useful evidence for describing phraseological meaning and stylistic function [14; 15].

CMT should therefore be integrated with, rather than replace, established translation resources. Dictionaries establish conventional meanings; corpora and parallel texts provide usage evidence; literary passages supply discourse and cultural context; and teacher or peer feedback helps evaluate naturalness. Conceptual mapping is most useful when it improves the learner's explanation of a translation decision. Some expressions are historically opaque or primarily metonymic, and forcing them into a metaphorical scheme can lead to overinterpretation.

7. Limitations and directions for further research

The present article is conceptual and illustrative. It does not report a controlled classroom experiment, and the table is not a statistically representative corpus. The literary titles listed above are recommended primary sources for a page-referenced corpus; an empirical paper should extract and document actual tokens from the editions used, provide contextual quotations within copyright limits, and report how categories were assigned. Some expressions may admit more than one interpretation, so independent annotation and inter-rater discussion would improve transparency.

A future study could compare a group taught through the five-stage CMT model with a group taught through conventional equivalent lists. Pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test tasks could assess translation accuracy, naturalness, retention, and students' ability to justify strategies. A balanced corpus drawn from multiple Uzbek authors and genres would also help test whether particular source domains recur across narrative, dialogue, and descriptive prose. Any quantitative claims should be based on observed data rather than on illustrative examples.

8. Conclusion

Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides a useful complementary framework for teaching English–Uzbek phraseological translation because it helps learners connect figurative wording with conceptual motivation. The comparison shows that equivalence may involve shared imagery, shared communicative meaning with different imagery, or culture-specific cases requiring functional substitution or paraphrase. The proposed five-stage model—identification, conceptual mapping, cross-linguistic comparison, strategy selection, and contextual verification—turns these distinctions into teachable steps.

The inclusion of Uzbek literary works by Qodiriy, Choʻlpon, Gʻafur Gʻulom, Hoshimov, and Xolmirzayev strengthens the proposed pedagogy by giving students a route from decontextualized idiom lists to authentic discourse. For rigorous future use, each literary example should be linked to a specified edition and page number. The model is best understood as a research-informed teaching proposal whose effectiveness should next be tested with translation students.

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