

Pragmatic Equivalence in Translating Animal-Based Phraseological Units from English Into Uzbek

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Abstract: This article examines pragmatic equivalence in the translation of animal-based phraseological units from English into Uzbek. Animal-based phraseological units, or zoonymic idioms, are culturally marked expressions that often describe human behaviour, emotions, intelligence, social relations, and moral evaluation through animal imagery. Since such units usually have figurative rather than literal meanings, their translation requires not only semantic accuracy but also pragmatic adequacy. The article argues that the translator should preserve the communicative effect, stylistic tone, cultural implication, and contextual function of the original expression. The study applies a qualitative comparative method and analyses examples such as when pigs fly, let the cat out of the bag, work like a horse, crocodile tears, a fish out of water, and kill two birds with one stone. The findings show that full equivalence, partial equivalence, cultural substitution, paraphrase, and compensation are the main strategies used in translating English animal idioms into Uzbek. The article concludes that pragmatic equivalence is often more important than formal equivalence in translating animal-based phraseological units.

Keywords: Pragmatic equivalence, phraseological units, animal idioms, zoonymic idioms, English-Uzbek translation, cultural substitution, idiomaticity.

Introduction: Phraseological units are one of the most expressive layers of any language. They reflect the history, culture, mentality, humour, social norms, and worldview of a speech community. Idioms and other fixed expressions are not merely linguistic combinations; they also perform important communicative, emotional, and evaluative functions in discourse. Fernando (1996) emphasizes that idioms are closely connected with discourse functions and speaker attitude, which makes them especially important in translation studies.

Among phraseological units, animal-based expressions occupy a special place. Animals are frequently used as metaphorical symbols for human qualities. For example, in English, a fox may symbolize cleverness, a lion courage, a sheep passivity, and a snake betrayal. Similar symbolic associations exist in Uzbek, but they do not always coincide with English. This difference

creates serious difficulties for translators because the same animal may have different cultural meanings in different languages. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is not only a literary device but also a basic mechanism of human thought; therefore, animal-based idioms can be viewed as culturally shaped metaphorical expressions.

The concept of equivalence has been widely discussed in translation studies. Nida (1964) distinguishes between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on closeness to the form and content of the source text, while dynamic equivalence aims to produce a similar effect on the target audience. This idea was later developed by Nida and Taber (1969), who argued that the naturalness of the translated message is essential for successful communication. This approach is particularly relevant to the translation of animal idioms, because a literal translation often fails to produce the same pragmatic

effect in the target language.

Baker (2011) also discusses idiom translation as a problem of equivalence above word level. She notes that idioms may be translated by using an idiom of similar meaning and form, an idiom of similar meaning but different form, paraphrase, omission, or compensation. These strategies are especially useful in English-Uzbek translation, where direct correspondence between animal-based phraseological units is not always possible.

The problem becomes more complex when the phraseological unit contains an animal component. The animal image may carry humour, irony, emotional colouring, or negative evaluation. However, preserving the same animal image is not always necessary or appropriate. For instance, the English idiom when pigs fly is not normally translated into Uzbek literally as cho'chqalar uchganda. A more pragmatically equivalent Uzbek expression is tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda, which also means that something will never happen. This example shows that the translator's main task is not to transfer the animal image mechanically, but to reproduce the communicative intention and pragmatic effect of the source expression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical basis of this study is connected with phraseology, idiomaticity, metaphor theory, and pragmatic equivalence. Fernando (1996) considers idioms as fixed expressions that have specific semantic, stylistic, and discourse functions. From this perspective, idioms do not simply name situations; they also express the speaker's attitude toward those situations. This is important for the present study because animal-based phraseological units often contain evaluation, irony, humour, criticism, or emotional judgement.

Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence is also central to this research. Nida (1964) argues that translation should not be limited to formal correspondence between source and target language units. Instead, the translator should aim to create an equivalent response in the target audience. Nida and Taber (1969) further explain that a good translation should sound natural in the receptor language and should be understandable for the target reader. This idea is directly applicable to animal idioms, because literal translation may preserve

the lexical form but destroy the naturalness and pragmatic value of the original expression.

Baker's classification of idiom translation strategies provides a practical framework for this article. Baker (2011) states that idioms can be translated through similar idioms, different-form idioms, paraphrase, omission, or compensation. Her approach is useful because it recognizes that idiomatic meaning is often culture-bound and cannot always be transferred word for word.

The metaphorical nature of animal idioms can also be explained through the theory of conceptual metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor shapes the way people understand abstract concepts through concrete experience. In animal-based idioms, animals serve as metaphorical models for describing human character, social behaviour, emotions, and moral qualities. For example, the image of a fox is associated with cleverness or cunning, while the image of a donkey may be associated with hard work or stubbornness in some cultural contexts.

Research on English-Uzbek animal phraseological units also confirms that many idioms require cultural adaptation. Akramova and Bazarbaeva (2022) discuss the difficulties of translating American idioms with animal names into Uzbek and show that direct translation is often impossible. For example, they suggest Uzbek equivalents such as sir boy bermaslik for not to let the cat out of the bag and tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda for when pigs fly. Similarly, Abdumominova (2025) studies phraseological units with animal components and emphasizes that such units reflect cultural knowledge and are often used to describe human behaviour and emotional states.

Thus, previous studies show that animal-based phraseological units are not only linguistic expressions but also culturally and pragmatically significant units. This article builds on these theoretical and practical observations and focuses on how pragmatic equivalence can be achieved in translating English animal idioms into Uzbek.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive and comparative method. The research material consists of selected English animal-based phraseological units and their possible Uzbek translations. The examples were

chosen because they represent different degrees and types of equivalence: full equivalence, partial equivalence, cultural substitution, paraphrase, and pragmatic non-equivalence.

The analysis is based on three main criteria. First, the semantic meaning of each English idiom is identified. Second, the pragmatic function of the idiom is examined, including tone, emotional effect, speaker attitude, irony, humour, and evaluation. Third, possible Uzbek translations are compared in order to determine which version produces the closest pragmatic effect for Uzbek readers or listeners.

The methodological approach of this study is influenced by Baker's (2011) model of idiom translation strategies and Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence. The study does not aim to provide a complete dictionary of English-Uzbek animal idioms. Instead, it offers an analytical model for translating animal-based phraseological units according to their contextual and pragmatic functions.

DISCUSSION

Full or Near-Full Equivalence

English phraseological unit	Meaning	Possible Uzbek equivalent	Type of equivalence
<i>as sly as a fox</i>	very cunning	<i>tulkidek ayyor</i>	near-full equivalence
<i>as busy as a bee</i>	very active or hardworking	<i>aridek mehnatkash / aridek ishchan</i>	near-full equivalence
<i>crocodile tears</i>	false tears	<i>timsoh ko'z yoshlari / yolg'on yig'i</i>	semantic-pragmatic equivalence

These examples demonstrate that full equivalence is possible when the same animal has similar symbolic meaning in both languages. However, even in such cases, the translator must consider context. For instance, as busy as a bee may express praise, admiration, or simple description depending on the situation. Therefore, Uzbek equivalents such as *mehnatkash*, *tinib-tinchimas*, or *juda band* should be selected according to the communicative intention of the source text.

Full or near-full equivalence occurs when an English animal-based phraseological unit has an Uzbek equivalent with a similar meaning, similar pragmatic function, and sometimes similar animal imagery. In such cases, the translator can preserve both the idiomatic meaning and the cultural image without creating misunderstanding. For example, the English expression as sly as a fox can be translated into Uzbek as *tulkidek ayyor*. Both expressions use the image of the fox to describe a cunning or clever person. This shows a high degree of semantic and pragmatic equivalence. The same can be observed in as busy as a bee, which may be translated as *aridek mehnatkash* or *aridek ishchan*. In both English and Uzbek, the bee is associated with activity and hard work.

Another example is crocodile tears, which means false or insincere tears. It may be translated into Uzbek as *timsoh ko'z yoshlari* or more naturally as *yolg'on yig'i*. The first variant preserves the animal image, while the second focuses on meaning and pragmatic effect. Baker (2011) notes that the translator should choose the strategy according to the naturalness and acceptability of the target language expression.

Partial Equivalence with a Different Animal Image

Partial equivalence occurs when the target language has an idiom with the same pragmatic meaning but a different animal image. This type of equivalence is very common in translating animal-based phraseological units from English into Uzbek. For example, the English idiom to work like a horse means to work very hard. In Uzbek, the expression *eshshakdek ishlamoq* may be used to express the same idea. The animal image changes from horse to donkey, but the pragmatic

meaning is preserved. Akramova and Bazarbaeva (2022) point out that animal symbolism often depends on cultural experience and everyday life. In Uzbek culture, the donkey is traditionally associated with heavy physical work, patience, and burden, which makes *eshshakdek ishlamoq* a natural equivalent in many contexts.

Another example is to kill two birds with one stone. The Uzbek equivalent is usually *bir o'q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq*. Here, the English image of birds is replaced by the Uzbek image of rabbits. The literal form changes,

but the meaning remains the same: to achieve two aims with one action.

The idiom when pigs fly also requires a different animal image in Uzbek. The expression means that something will never happen. Translating it literally as *cho'chqalar uchganda* would sound unnatural in Uzbek. A pragmatically equivalent Uzbek expression is *tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda*. This confirms Nida's (1964) idea that the effect on the target audience is often more important than formal similarity.

English idiom	Literal animal image	Uzbek equivalent	Pragmatic meaning
<i>to work like a horse</i>	horse	<i>eshshakdek ishlamoq</i>	to work very hard
<i>to kill two birds with one stone</i>	birds	<i>bir o'q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq</i>	to achieve two goals with one action
<i>when pigs fly</i>	pigs	<i>tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda</i>	never / impossible

These examples show that pragmatic equivalence does not always require the preservation of the same animal image. What matters most is whether the target reader or listener receives the same communicative message.

Cultural Substitution

Cultural substitution is used when the source idiom contains an image, custom, or cultural association that does not sound natural in the target language. In this strategy, the translator replaces the source expression with a culturally familiar target-language expression. Baker (2011) considers this strategy effective when the original idiom has no close equivalent in the target language. For example, the English idiom not to look a gift horse in the mouth means that one should not criticize or question the value of something received as a gift. A literal Uzbek translation such as *sovg'a qilingan otning og'ziga qaramaslik* may be understandable, but it does not sound as natural as *berganning yuziga qarama*. The Uzbek version removes the animal image but preserves the moral and pragmatic meaning of the English idiom.

Another example is putting the cart before the horse, which means doing things in the wrong order. A literal translation such as *aravani otning oldiga qo'yimoq* may be understood in some contexts, but it may not always function as a natural Uzbek idiom. Depending on the context, it may be translated as *ishni teskari boshlamoq*, *hammasini chalkashtirib yubormoq*, or *ishni noto'g'ri tartibda qilmoq*. In this case, cultural substitution or paraphrase helps the translator produce a natural target text.

Cultural substitution is especially useful in literary translation, journalism, dialogue, advertising, and informal speech. In these genres, naturalness and immediate comprehension are often more important than preserving the exact lexical structure of the original idiom. This supports Nida and Taber's (1969) view that translation should be natural and meaningful for the receptor audience.

Translation by Paraphrase

Paraphrase is one of the most common strategies in translating idioms. It is used when the target language

has no suitable idiomatic equivalent or when an idiomatic translation would sound unnatural. Baker (2011) notes that paraphrase is frequently used in idiom translation because many idioms are culture-specific and cannot be directly transferred into another language.

For instance, the English idiom to let the cat out of the bag means to reveal a secret. In Uzbek, it can be translated as *sirni oshkor qilmoq* or *sir boy bermoq*. The animal image of the cat disappears, but the pragmatic meaning is preserved. Akramova and Bazarbaeva (2022) also give *sir boy bermaslik* as an Uzbek equivalent for the negative form not to let the cat out of the bag.

Another example is hold your horses. Literally translating it as *otlaringni ushla* would sound strange in

Uzbek. The appropriate Uzbek translation is *shoshilma*, *sabr qil*, or *biroz kut*. Although the animal image is lost, the communicative function of the expression is preserved. The phrase is usually used to tell someone not to hurry, and this pragmatic function is more important than the literal image.

The idiom dog-eat-dog world can be translated as *shafqatsiz raqobat muhiti*. In this case, paraphrase is necessary because the literal translation would not sound natural in Uzbek. Similarly, to smell a rat may be translated as *bir gap borligini sezmoq* or *shubhalanmoq*. These examples confirm that paraphrase is often the most effective way to preserve pragmatic meaning when there is no direct equivalent in the target language.

English idiom	Possible Uzbek translation	Translation strategy
<i>to let the cat out of the bag</i>	<i>sirni oshkor qilmoq / sir boy bermoq</i>	paraphrase
<i>hold your horses</i>	<i>shoshilma / sabr qil</i>	paraphrase
<i>dog-eat-dog world</i>	<i>shafqatsiz raqobat muhiti</i>	paraphrase
<i>to smell a rat</i>	<i>shubhalanmoq / bir gap borligini sezmoq</i>	paraphrase
<i>a dark horse</i>	<i>kutilmagan kuchli raqib / hali yaxshi tanilmagan nomzod</i>	paraphrase

The disadvantage of paraphrase is that it may reduce the imagery and stylistic colour of the original idiom. Fernando (1996) argues that idioms often perform expressive and evaluative functions in discourse. Therefore, when paraphrase weakens the expressiveness of the original, the translator may use compensation in another part of the text to restore stylistic effect.

Pragmatic Failure in Literal Translation

Literal translation can cause pragmatic failure when the target reader understands the words but does not understand the intended meaning. This is especially common in translating animal idioms, because their

meanings are often metaphorical and culture-bound. For example, the English idiom It is raining cats and dogs means that it is raining heavily. A literal translation such as *mushuklar va itlar yog'moqda* would be completely unnatural in Uzbek. The correct Uzbek translation would be *jala quyypati*, *sharros yomg'ir yog'moqda*, or *yomg'ir chelaklab quyypati*. In this case, the animal images have no pragmatic value in Uzbek, so they should not be preserved.

Another example is a bull in a china shop, which describes a clumsy or careless person who may cause damage. A literal translation such as *chinni do'kondagi buqa* may be understood only with explanation, but it

does not function naturally as an Uzbek idiom. More suitable translations include *beso'naqay odam*, *qo'pol harakat qiladigan odam*, or *hamma narsani buzib yuradigan odam*. Akramova and Bazarbaeva (2022) also suggest *beso'naqay* as a possible Uzbek equivalent for this idiom.

The idiom *a fish out of water* describes a person who feels uncomfortable in an unfamiliar situation. In Uzbek, it may be translated as *o'zini begona his qilmoq*, *noqulay ahvolda qolmoq*, or *o'z muhitidan tashqarida bo'lmoq*. A literal translation such as *suvdan chiqqan baliq* may be understandable in some contexts, but the translator must decide whether it sounds natural and appropriate in the target text.

These examples show that literal accuracy can lead to pragmatic inaccuracy. As Nida and Taber (1969) argue, translation should communicate the message naturally to the target audience. Therefore, in idiom translation, the translator must ask not only "What do the words mean?" but also "What does the speaker intend to achieve?"

Main Translation Strategies

The analysis shows that several major strategies are useful in translating animal-based phraseological units from English into Uzbek.

First, the translator may use an Uzbek idiom with a similar meaning and similar animal imagery. For example, as sly as a fox can be translated as *tulkidek ayyor*. This strategy is effective when the same animal has similar symbolic meaning in both languages.

Second, the translator may use an Uzbek idiom with a similar meaning but a different animal image. For example, when pigs fly can be translated as *tuyaning dumi yerga tekkanda*, and to kill two birds with one stone can be translated as *bir o'q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq*. This strategy preserves pragmatic meaning rather than formal structure.

Third, cultural substitution may be used when the source idiom is not natural in Uzbek. For example, not to look a gift horse in the mouth can be translated as *berganning yuziga qarama*. This translation removes the animal image but preserves the moral message of the idiom.

Fourth, paraphrase may be used when there is no appropriate idiomatic equivalent. For example, hold

your horses may be translated as *shoshilma* or *sabr qil*. Baker (2011) considers paraphrase one of the most practical strategies for idiom translation.

Fifth, compensation may be used when the imagery, humour, or stylistic colour of the source idiom is lost in translation. In literary translation, for instance, the translator may use another expressive Uzbek idiom in a nearby sentence to compensate for the loss of idiomaticity. This is important because idioms often have expressive and stylistic functions, as noted by Fernando (1996).

The choice of strategy depends on genre, audience, register, and communicative purpose. A literary translator may try to preserve imagery and emotional effect, while a translator of academic or official texts may prefer clarity. In children's literature, animal imagery may be preserved if it supports imagination. In journalism and everyday communication, naturalness and quick comprehension may be more important.

CONCLUSION

Translating animal-based phraseological units from English into Uzbek is a complex process because such units combine figurative meaning, cultural symbolism, emotional colouring, and pragmatic intention. The analysis shows that formal equivalence is often insufficient. A literal translation may preserve the animal name but fail to preserve the communicative effect of the original expression.

The most successful translation is one that sounds natural in Uzbek, expresses the same speaker attitude, and produces a similar effect on the target audience. Sometimes this requires preserving the animal image, as in as sly as a fox — *tulkidek ayyor*. Sometimes it requires changing the animal image, as in to kill two birds with one stone — *bir o'q bilan ikki quyonni urmoq*. In other cases, the animal image may be removed completely through paraphrase or cultural substitution, as in hold your horses — *shoshilma*.

The findings of this study support Nida's concept of dynamic equivalence, Baker's strategies of idiom translation, and Fernando's view of idioms as discourse-based expressive units. Animal-based phraseological units are valuable material for studying the relationship between language, culture, and translation. Their translation from English into Uzbek demonstrates that equivalence is not a mechanical

correspondence between words, but a functional relationship between meaning, context, culture, and communicative effect.

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