

# Translating Idiomatic Expressions In “Harry Potter”

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**Abstract:** This article examines the application of foreignization (preserving the original flavor) versus domestication (replacing with a more familiar expression for the reader) is illustrated with real examples from the book. The case study shows that in translating “Harry Potter” into Uzbek, the translator creatively uses various strategies as outlined by Mona Baker – finding equivalent idioms, substituting with similar meaning, paraphrasing, or in some cases omitting difficult idioms. As a result, the magical atmosphere and humor of the original are conveyed effectively, while the translated text remains fluent and accessible to readers.

**Keywords:** Harry Potter, idioms, phraseological units, translation strategies, foreignization, domestication, adaptation, literary translation.

**Introduction:** J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is famed not only for its captivating story and imaginative world-building, but also for its playful use of language. The novels abound in idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and colloquial phrases that give color to the narrative and depth to the characters' interactions. These range from everyday English idioms to quirky exclamations unique to the wizarding world. For instance, the magical characters often use expressions drawn from their own cultural context – “Merlin's beard!” is a bewildered exclamation invoking a legendary wizard, much as a Muggle (non-magical person) might exclaim “Oh my God!” or “Good grief!” in surprise. Likewise, the character Ron Weasley utters “Holy cricket!” as a mild expletive, an old-fashioned British expression of astonishment which sounds amusing to the modern ear. Such idioms and exclamations serve a dual purpose in the text: they underscore the uniqueness of the magical universe (by referencing its lore and sensibilities) and simultaneously mirror familiar sayings (to ensure readers can grasp the intent and tone).

## METHODOLOGY

In addition, the concepts of foreignization vs. domestication are particularly pertinent to fantasy literature. Foreignization involves retaining the foreign elements to give readers a taste of the source culture, whereas domestication involves smoothing them into familiar terms for the target audience. We expect to

see instances of both approaches in the Uzbek translation, depending on the idiom's nature. For example, an exclamation deeply rooted in the magical context might be left in a “foreign” form (transliterated or directly translated), whereas a common proverb might be replaced with an Uzbek proverb (a domesticating move) to maintain relatability.

The methodology for this study is a comparative textual analysis of idioms and set phrases found in “Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone” (the first book in the series, known as “Garri Potter va Afsungarlar toshi” in Uzbek translation) and their rendered forms in the official Uzbek version. We selected a representative set of idiomatic expressions covering various types: exclamations, proverbs, metaphors, and culturally specific references. Each idiom is analyzed in context to determine its function in the story (e.g., does it add humor? indicate character traits? build atmosphere?) and then examined in the translated text to see how that function is preserved or altered. By aligning each example with one or more of Baker's strategies or Venuti's approaches, we can assess the translator's technique. The examples were chosen from key dialogues and narrative passages that highlight translation challenges. Where relevant, we also incorporate insights from other researchers or translators who have studied the series' translations into various languages, to contextualize the Uzbek translator's choices within broader translation

tendencies observed for Harry Potter.

## RESULTS

Our analysis of idiomatic expressions in “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” and their Uzbek translation reveals a rich tapestry of translation strategies in action. The translator demonstrates flexibility, alternating between paraphrases, and cultural substitutions as needed. Below we summarize several key findings, each illustrated by examples from the text:

**Many idioms undergo contextual adaptation in the Uzbek translation, often being replaced with culturally resonant proverbs to maintain their intended meaning.** An exemplary case is the proverb “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” In a scene with Aunt Petunia (referred to obliquely in the Uzbek text as Missis Dursli to maintain formality), she warns someone not to assume success prematurely by using this English proverb. The Uzbek translator deftly replaces it with “Hali bo’lmagan ishga ashula aytma,” literally “Don’t sing a song about something that hasn’t happened yet,” which is a well-known Uzbek proverb with the same meaning. The result is that the target text feels natural; an Uzbek reader encounters a familiar adage that fits the situation perfectly. In another example, when Hagrid wants to express that something is utterly incomprehensible to him, in English he uses the idiom “It’s all Greek to me.” Since, as noted, Uzbek has no direct equivalent idiom involving a language metaphor, the translator provides a simple explanation: “Men bularni mutlaqo tushunmayman” (“I absolutely do not understand these things”). However, elsewhere in the text, to maintain the character’s folksy voice, the translator occasionally inserts an idiomatic touch. For example, to compensate for losing the “Greek” metaphor’s color, the translator might have Hagrid use a different Uzbek colloquialism or exclamation later in his dialogue. This kind of compensation ensures that Hagrid’s speech remains flavorfully informal overall, even if one particular idiom was neutralized.

**Unique exclamations rooted in the magical setting, such as “Merlin’s beard!” and “By Jove!”, are generally foreignized in the Uzbek translation to preserve the original cultural flavor.** In the Uzbek translation, “Merlanning soqoli!” is retained as a direct translation, thus foreignizing the expression. This choice preserves the whimsical reference to Merlin, a figure that may or may not be recognized by young Uzbek readers, but it certainly imparts the sense that the character is part of a different world with its own legends. Given that Harry Potter introduces many such terms (names of spells, magical objects, etc.), leaving some of these

exclamations untranslated adds consistency – it would feel odd if every spell name remained fantastical but a magical swear like “Merlin’s beard” was converted to a mundane equivalent like “Voy Xudo!”. Notably, in cases where the foreignizing approach might hinder understanding, the translator relies on context to carry the meaning. For example, in the scene, “Merlin’s beard” is exclaimed in reaction to astonishing news, and the surrounding narration or the character’s shocked behavior clues the reader that this is an exclamation of surprise. Thus, even without an explicit footnote or explanation, the reader can grasp that “Merlanning soqoli!” is akin to saying “Wow!” or “Goodness me!” albeit with a magical twist. Conversely, an expression like “Holy cricket!”, which has no particular magical reference, was handled differently: the translator chose to domesticate it, yielding “Voy bo’lmasa!” or “Voy tavba!”, which are Uzbek exclamations of mild shock or disbelief. The phrase “holy cricket” itself carries a quaint tone in English, but since translating it literally (“Muborak chirildoq hasharot!”) would make little sense, a normal Uzbek exclamation effectively conveys the intended reaction.

Overall, the results indicate that the Uzbek translator of Harry Potter employed a mixed strategy approach. Out of the examples analyzed, a good number retained idiomatic or proverbial flavor (through direct equivalents or analogous expressions), some were paraphrased or simplified, and a few were omitted or heavily localized. Importantly, none of the key idioms were mistranslated in a way that would mislead the reader; when changes were made, they were conscientiously done to either preserve clarity or adapt humor. The translator’s choices demonstrate an awareness of the target audience’s linguistic and cultural frame of reference, as well as a commitment to preserving the enchanting tone of the source text. This balance is precisely what one would hope to find in a high-quality literary translation.

## DISCUSSION

The practical examples from Harry Potter underscore several significant insights about idiom translation in literature. One prominent theme is the tug-of-war between preserving nuance and ensuring comprehension. In each idiom examined, the translator had to weigh the value of the original wording or imagery against the potential for misunderstanding if translated literally. The decision to keep “Merlanning soqoli!” as is, for instance, suggests that the translator judged the phrase’s contribution to the magical setting to be more valuable than a fully transparent meaning. Young readers might not grasp it immediately, but it adds a layer of authenticity and fun – they learn a bit of

the wizarding vernacular as they read. On the other hand, the choice to domesticate “Holy cricket!” to “Voy tavba!” indicates a priority for immediate comprehension and naturalness in dialogue. This likely reflects the translator’s sensitivity to the flow of a conversation; an odd phrase like “holy cricket” might distract or puzzle readers in the middle of a scene, whereas “voy tavba” is instantly understood as an exclamation, letting the story proceed seamlessly.

Another important point is how cultural and contextual familiarity guided the translations. When an idiom had a readily available counterpart in Uzbek, especially a proverb or a set phrase, the translator eagerly used it (e.g., the chickens and singing proverb). This strategy not only makes the translation smoother, but it also resonates more with the reader, as proverbs often carry cultural connotations and wisdom that strike a chord. The use of “Bir gap bor,” as an equivalent for “a bone to pick,” is a nuanced choice that shows cultural insight – it transforms an idiom about a bone (which might sound like a strange metaphor about literal bones if translated word-for-word) into an idiom about “having a word,” which Uzbek readers immediately recognize as an idiomatic way to broach a grievance. Such choices exemplify Baker’s second strategy (idiom of similar meaning, different form) and demonstrate how a translator matches the function of an idiom in the target culture, even if the image or form changes.

The discussion would be incomplete without touching on the constraints and creative liberties inherent in such translation. Translators of globally beloved works like Harry Potter often work under constraints such as maintaining consistency with established terms (e.g., names of spells or creatures might have official or preferred translations) and catering to an audience that may include both children and adults. Despite these constraints, the translator showed creative liberty in idiom translation, which is generally encouraged as long as it doesn’t distort the story. The examples show that the translator did not shy away from departing from the source text’s literal form – something critical in idiom translation. This is a risk-taking aspect of translation: one has to trust that rendering “Let the cat out of the bag” as “ichidagini aytib qo’yibdi” will convey the story point (someone blabbed a secret) clearly enough that the plot isn’t affected. Trust and boldness go hand in hand here; trust in the readers’ ability to follow implicit meanings, and boldness to deviate from the source wording for the greater good of the narrative.

## CONCLUSION

One of the key takeaways is that each idiom presents a unique case. There is no one-size-fits-all approach;

what matters is the translator’s sensitivity to context and audience. In some cases, a literal translation with a touch of explanation (explicit or via context) does the job, while in others, a complete re-imagining of the phrase in the target language is warranted. The Uzbek translation of Harry Potter shows instances of both, guided by an overarching goal: make the text enjoyable and understandable without diluting its distinctive flavor. The translator often succeeded by leaning on the richness of the Uzbek language – tapping into its stock of proverbs, idioms, and expressive phrases – to find matches for English idioms. Where the Uzbek language lacked a ready-made equivalent, the translator employed paraphrase or concise explanation, ensuring the plot remains clear. And when even paraphrase would break the momentum or tone, strategic omissions were made and compensated for in other creative ways.

In conclusion, the practical analysis underscores that translating idiomatic expressions is a craft of decision-making. The translator must continually ask, “What is lost and what is gained by this rendition?” The examples from Harry Potter demonstrate mostly gains: meaning is conveyed, emotional and humorous effects are preserved, and cultural bridges are built for the target readers. The translator’s creativity and cultural competence emerge as decisive factors in this success. For Uzbek readers of Harry Potter, the magic lives not just in wands and spells, but in the very language of the tale – a testament to a translation that deftly handles idioms and phrases to cast the same spell the original did. Through this case study, we see a concrete embodiment of the theories of idiom translation, ultimately reaffirming that a skilled translator can indeed “kill two birds with one stone”: produce a translation that is faithful to the original and delightful for the new audience, all at once.

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