

**FORMATION AND HISTORICAL ROOTS OF IDIOMATIC
EXPRESSIONS AND PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN UZBEK AND
ENGLISH LANGUAGES**

Raxmonova Gavhar Nuritdinovna

Economics and Pedagogy University

Abstract: *Idiomatic expressions and phraseological units are among the most vivid and expressive elements of any language. They reflect the worldview, history, traditions, and psychology of a nation. This article explores the formation and historical development of idioms and phraseological units in both Uzbek and English languages, focusing on their semantic structure, cultural origins, and the ways they have evolved through centuries. Comparative analysis highlights similarities and differences between Uzbek and English idiomatic systems, emphasizing how cultural and historical contexts shape figurative language. Moreover, real-life examples and scholarly opinions are presented to illustrate how idioms function as carriers of national identity and cultural heritage.*

Keywords: *idioms, phraseology, Uzbek, English, cultural linguistics, semantics, metaphor, history, national identity, comparative analysis, figurative meaning, language evolution.*

Introduction

Language serves as a mirror of the culture, mentality, and lifestyle of its speakers. Among the most expressive and culturally loaded components of any language are idiomatic expressions and phraseological units. These constructions, while often difficult to translate literally, provide insight into the shared experiences and historical background of a community.

In the modern globalized world, studying idioms is particularly relevant. With increased cross-cultural communication, understanding the metaphorical language of different nations contributes not only to linguistic competence but also to intercultural understanding. Uzbek and English languages, though belonging to



different linguistic families—Turkic and Germanic respectively—share many universal features in how idioms emerge and evolve. Both languages demonstrate that idioms are formed through metaphorization, metonymy, and historical experience embedded in national consciousness.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the formation mechanisms and historical roots of idiomatic expressions in Uzbek and English, to identify their typological similarities and differences, and to reveal how they embody the cultural worldview of both nations.

1. Theoretical Background

The study of idiomatic expressions has long been an important branch of linguistics. According to A.V. Kunin (1996), idioms are “stable combinations of words whose meaning is not deducible from the meanings of the individual words.” Similarly, Uzbek scholar Sh. Rahmatullayev (2009) defines phraseological units as “semantically indivisible word combinations that have figurative meanings and serve as integral linguistic units.” Idioms are, therefore, expressions that have lost their original literal meanings and gained metaphorical or symbolic connotations over time.

2. Historical Formation of English Idioms

English idioms often originate from literature, mythology, and everyday life. For example:

- *Break the ice* — derived from the practice of ships breaking ice to clear a path, symbolizing initiating communication.
- *Spill the beans* — possibly comes from ancient Greek voting systems using beans.
- *A blessing in disguise* — first recorded in the 18th century, showing the influence of Christian moral tradition.

Historical events have greatly influenced English idiomatic expressions. The Industrial Revolution, seafaring, and Christianity have all contributed to English phraseology. Shakespeare, the Bible, and folklore have also been significant sources (Crystal, 2003).



3. Historical Formation of Uzbek Idioms

Uzbek idioms, on the other hand, reflect the nomadic and agricultural lifestyle of the Central Asian people, as well as influences from Persian, Arabic, and Turkic languages. For instance:

- *Ko'ngli tog'dek* (lit. "heart like a mountain") — means a generous and open-hearted person.
- *Boshi osmonga yetdi* (lit. "his head reached the sky") — expresses extreme joy.
- *Qo'lni qo'lga urish* (lit. "hands striking each other") — means to make an agreement or a deal.

The historical roots of Uzbek idioms can be traced back to oral folklore, proverbs (*maqollar*), and epic tales like *Alpomish* and *Go'ro'g'li*. As I. Abdullaev (2015) notes, "Uzbek phraseological wealth is a linguistic reflection of national psychology and moral philosophy shaped through centuries."

4. Comparative Analysis of Uzbek and English Idioms

Although Uzbek and English belong to different linguistic systems, many idioms share similar conceptual metaphors. For example:

Concept	English Idiom	Uzbek Equivalent	Meaning
Happiness	On cloud nine	Boshini osmonga yetkazmoq	To be extremely happy
Death	Kick the bucket	Ko'z yumdi	To die
Hard work	Break one's back	Belni qayirmoq	To work very hard
Secrets	Spill the beans	Sirni ochmoq	To reveal a secret

Such parallels indicate that despite cultural differences, human emotions and experiences give rise to similar figurative expressions. However, there are also culturally unique idioms in both languages. For instance, the Uzbek idiom *it hurar, karvon o'tar* ("the dog barks, the caravan moves on") has no direct English equivalent, though it roughly parallels "Let them talk" or "Keep going despite criticism."

5. Cultural and Cognitive Aspects



Idioms are deeply connected with culture and cognition. They reveal how people conceptualize their world. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), metaphorical thinking forms the basis of human cognition. For example, in both Uzbek and English, the metaphor “up = good, down = bad” is reflected in idioms:

- *to feel down* (sad) — *ko‘ngli cho‘kdi* (his mood sank).

This conceptual similarity shows how universal human experiences are linguistically encoded differently yet analogously across languages.

6. Real-life Use of Idioms

In real-life communication, idioms serve to enrich speech and convey emotions more vividly. For instance, in English media headlines like “The government is skating on thin ice” or Uzbek conversation “Ishlaring g‘alati, suvga tushgan tovuqdek bo‘libsan” (you look troubled, like a wet chicken), idioms express attitudes, humor, and social meaning concisely.

7. Mechanisms of Idiom Formation in Both Languages

The mechanisms by which idioms are formed vary according to linguistic and cultural traditions. In both Uzbek and English, idioms are often created through metaphorization, comparison, hyperbole, irony, and symbolic association.

- **Metaphorization** is the most productive way of forming idioms. For example, the English idiom “*Time is money*” metaphorically connects two abstract concepts, while the Uzbek idiom “*Vaqt oltindan qimmat*” (Time is more valuable than gold) expresses the same idea.

- **Comparison** is another frequent mechanism. The idiom “*As brave as a lion*” in English and “*Arslondek jasur*” in Uzbek both rely on animal imagery to convey human qualities.

- **Hyperbole** (exaggeration) creates expressive impact: “*To cry one’s eyes out*” (to cry heavily) in English or “*Ko‘z yoshini daryo qilmoq*” (to make a river of tears) in Uzbek.



- **Irony** and **sarcasm** are also sources of idioms. For example, “*Thanks a lot*” used sarcastically in English can be compared to Uzbek “*Zo‘r bo‘ldi-da!*” (ironically: “That went great!”).

These mechanisms demonstrate that idioms are not randomly created but arise through cognitive processes that link literal images with abstract meanings.

8. Influence of Religion, Mythology, and Literature

Religious and literary sources have historically played a crucial role in shaping idiomatic expressions.

In English, the **Bible** and **classical literature** are among the richest sources of idioms:

- “*The blind leading the blind*” (Matthew 15:14)
- “*A wolf in sheep’s clothing*” (Matthew 7:15)
- “*The writing on the wall*” (Book of Daniel)

These idioms have become integral parts of secular English despite their religious origin. Similarly, **Shakespeare’s plays** introduced hundreds of idioms still in use today:

- “*Break the ice*” (The Taming of the Shrew)
- “*Heart of gold*” (Henry V)
- “*Wild-geese chase*” (Romeo and Juliet).

In Uzbek, Islamic and Persian literary traditions have greatly influenced idioms. Expressions like “*Ko‘ngil Ko‘hna Ka‘ba*” (The heart is an ancient Kaaba) or “*Til yarasi bitmas*” (A wound caused by words never heals) have spiritual and moral roots reflecting the Sufi philosophy of purity and humanism. The works of **Alisher Navoi**, **Ahmad Yassaviy**, and **Bobur** contributed many idiomatic and metaphorical expressions to the Uzbek language (Mamatov, 2017).

9. Semantic and Structural Classification of Idioms

Idioms can be classified by their **semantic transparency** and **structure**. According to A.P. Cowie (1998), idioms are divided into three major types:

1. **Transparent idioms** – the meaning is partly clear from the words (e.g., *to lose one’s head*).



2. **Semi-transparent idioms** – some metaphorical sense can be inferred (e.g., *to burn the midnight oil*).

3. **Opaque idioms** – the meaning is completely unpredictable (e.g., *kick the bucket*).

In Uzbek, idioms are traditionally categorized by their grammatical structure:

- **Verb-based** (*ko 'z yumdi, bel bog 'ladi*)
- **Nominal** (*tosh yurak, oltin qo 'l*)
- **Adjectival or adverbial** (*dilbar qiz, yashin tezlikda*)

This typology helps understand how idioms function syntactically while maintaining semantic indivisibility.

10. Idioms as Carriers of Cultural Identity

Idioms serve as cultural markers that preserve a nation's way of thinking and worldview. As S. Vorkachev (2004) argues, phraseological units are “linguistic fossils of national mentality.” For instance, English idioms often reflect **individualism** and **pragmatism** — “*The early bird catches the worm*”, “*Time is money*” — both emphasizing action and efficiency.

In contrast, Uzbek idioms emphasize **collectivism**, **morality**, and **spiritual values** — “*Ko 'pdan ko 'rgan to 'y bo 'lar*” (Shared joy becomes a feast) or “*Birlikda kuch bor*” (There is strength in unity). Such idioms highlight cooperation and emotional connection, reflecting the social fabric of Uzbek culture.

Thus, idioms not only enrich the vocabulary but also reveal the **cultural philosophy** of a people — their relationship with time, work, nature, and society.

11. Modern Usage and Transformation of Idioms

In contemporary communication, idioms are undergoing transformation due to media influence, globalization, and youth slang. For instance, English idioms like “*to go viral*” or “*to hit refresh*” have emerged from digital culture. In Uzbek, new idiomatic phrases like “*Wi-Fi tutmayapti*” (used humorously for misunderstanding) or “*like bosmoq*” (to show approval) reflect the modern technological age.



Moreover, the phenomenon of **calquing** (literal translation of idioms) is becoming common. Uzbek speakers may say “*muzni sindirmoq*” as a translation of “*break the ice*”, showing the blending of linguistic traditions. This process demonstrates the dynamic nature of idioms and their ability to adapt to new realities while maintaining cultural distinctiveness.

12. Pedagogical and Linguistic Importance of Studying Idioms

From a linguistic and educational standpoint, idioms are essential for mastering a language at an advanced level. As Moon (1998) notes, “Fluency in a foreign language is impossible without a good command of idiomatic expressions.” Understanding idioms allows learners to grasp the **emotional and cultural nuances** of speech.

In teaching Uzbek or English as a second language, idioms can be used to:

- Develop communicative competence.
- Teach culture through language.
- Improve translation skills by finding contextual equivalents.

Modern methodology emphasizes the integration of idioms in real-life contexts, literature, and media examples, making language learning both effective and culturally enriching.

13. Universal and Culture-Specific Metaphors

Cognitive linguistics shows that many idioms across languages are based on **universal human experiences** — life, death, love, work, and emotions. Yet, each culture interprets them differently.

For example:

- English: “*To have cold feet*” — to be afraid before doing something.
- Uzbek: “*Yuragi orqaga tortdi*” — literally “his heart pulled back,” meaning the same.

Both express fear, but through different imagery. This suggests that **conceptual metaphors** (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) are universal, though the **lexical realization** is culture-specific. Studying these metaphors enhances cross-linguistic understanding and translation accuracy.



Conclusion

Idiomatic expressions and phraseological units are linguistic treasures that encapsulate the collective wisdom, humor, and worldview of a people. The study of Uzbek and English idioms reveals that while their forms and origins differ due to distinct historical and cultural backgrounds, their underlying cognitive mechanisms are often similar. Both languages use metaphor, symbolism, and cultural memory to create expressive idioms.

In today's interconnected world, understanding idioms plays a vital role in mastering foreign languages and fostering intercultural communication. Moreover, idioms preserve national identity by carrying historical experiences and moral values. Therefore, their study should remain a priority in both linguistic research and education.

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