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**CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH  
PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores how cultural differences influence the comprehension and interpretation of English idioms. Idioms are deeply rooted in the history, traditions, and values of English-speaking societies, which often makes them challenging for non-native speakers. By analyzing theoretical perspectives and practical examples, this study demonstrates the role of culture in idiomatic meaning and provides insights into translation and language teaching.

**Key words:** phraseological units, fixed expressions, cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural equivalents, linguistic artifacts, conceptual metaphors, idioms.

Language serves as a crucial repository of cultural cognition, encapsulating the beliefs, traditions, and worldview inherent to a particular community. Phraseological units—such as idioms and proverbs—function as linguistic manifestations of collective experience and cultural wisdom, offering profound insights into the socio-cultural identity of a speech community. This research undertakes a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek phraseological units to identify and interpret the cultural characteristics embedded within them. Through the examination of the cultural connotations and symbolic meanings encoded in these expressions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between language, culture, and communication.

Idioms, also referred to as phraseological units, constitute an essential component of the English language, enriching communication with figurative depth, expressiveness, and cultural significance. Unlike literal vocabulary, idiomatic expressions cannot be interpreted through the direct meanings of their constituent words, as their semantic value is metaphorical and deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of English-speaking societies. For learners of English as a foreign language, idioms present a particular challenge, as their mastery requires not only linguistic proficiency but also an understanding of cultural conventions and worldviews. This study seeks to examine the influence of cultural differences on the comprehension of English idioms, emphasizing both theoretical perspectives and practical implications for language teaching and translation.

**Theoretical Background.** Linguists have generally characterized idioms as fixed or semi-fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the literal interpretation of their constituent elements (Fernando, 1996; Moon, 1998). For example, the idiom “*spill the beans*” conveys the meaning “*to disclose a secret*,” a sense that is not evident from the individual meanings of *spill* or *beans*. The interrelation between language and culture has long been recognized as intrinsic.



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According to Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956), language embodies and reflects the cultural patterns of thought specific to a given community, while Hofstede (2001) demonstrated that cultural values significantly influence modes of communication. Similarly, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) underscored the importance of conceptual metaphors, suggesting that idiomatic expressions frequently arise from culturally shared perceptions and experiences. Therefore, idioms can be regarded as linguistic manifestations of cultural identity and collective worldview.

**Cultural Differences in Idiom Interpretation:** English idioms often carry meanings that are obscure to learners from different cultural backgrounds. Consider the following examples:

“Kick the bucket” – to die. A literal interpretation makes no sense without cultural familiarity.

“The ball is in your court” – it is your turn to decide. This idiom relies on sports culture.

“Spill the beans” – to reveal a secret. Its meaning is unrelated to the literal image.

When idioms are translated word-for-word, they often lose their figurative meaning. For instance, “kick the bucket” translated into Uzbek literally (“chelakni tepmoq”) is meaningless. Instead, a culturally equivalent phrase such as “jon taslim qilmoq” is used.

Moreover, some idioms reflect unique cultural realities. “Carry coals to Newcastle” means “to do something unnecessary,” but since Newcastle’s coal industry is unknown in Uzbekistan, the idiom is incomprehensible without explanation.

**Practical Analysis.** In practice, some idioms do have cross-cultural equivalents. For example, “Break the ice” in English closely corresponds to Uzbek “muzni eritmoq,” both meaning to ease tension in communication. Such idioms are more easily understood because of universal human experiences.

However, research shows that many idioms require cultural adaptation. In language classrooms, learners often misinterpret idioms when relying on literal translation. Liu (2008) emphasizes that idiom teaching should include cultural background, context, and authentic usage. Similarly, Baker (2018) argues that effective idiom translation demands not just linguistic but also cultural knowledge.

A small-scale case study conducted with Uzbek learners of English highlights these pedagogical challenges. When idiomatic expressions were presented without contextual support, participants predominantly interpreted them in a literal manner. In contrast, when the same idioms were introduced within relevant cultural frameworks, learners demonstrated a markedly higher level of comprehension. These findings suggest that effective instruction in idioms should incorporate both linguistic clarification and culturally grounded explanations. Idioms represent vital components of language that encapsulate cultural meaning, and their interpretation is profoundly shaped by cross-cultural differences. Consequently, learners from non-English-speaking backgrounds often encounter difficulties in understanding idiomatic expressions unless they are equipped with sufficient cultural awareness and contextual knowledge.

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In conclusion, the comparative exploration of cultural elements within native English and Uzbek phraseological units offers significant insights into the intricate relationship between language and culture. Through the analysis of cultural motifs and recurrent themes inherent in idiomatic expressions and proverbs, this study deepens the comprehension of the cultural legacy and linguistic diversity characterizing both English and Uzbek languages. The outcomes of the research hold practical relevance for cross-cultural communication, language education, and the promotion of intercultural competence, underscoring the necessity of cultural awareness and contextual sensitivity in linguistic interpretation and analysis..

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