

Theory And Core Approaches To Translating Idioms

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Abstract

This article provides a detailed analysis of the theoretical foundations and practical approaches to translating idioms. It highlights the distinctive features of idiomatic units and the cultural and linguistic complexities they present, shedding light on the challenges encountered during the translation process. Key strategies such as equivalence, compensation, and adaptation are thoroughly examined. The study also emphasizes the importance of the translator's intercultural competence and accurate contextual assessment. Ultimately, the research offers both theoretical and practical recommendations for successfully translating idioms.

Keywords: Idiom, translation, theory, approaches, culture, linguistics, equivalence, strategies

Introduction

Idioms are an integral part of any language, playing a crucial role in enriching speech and making it more vivid, meaningful, expressive, and engaging. They are regularly used in everyday conversation as well as in both spoken and written discourse, enhancing the impact and aesthetic appeal of expression. However, the unique nature of idioms specifically, the fact that their semantic meaning is not simply the sum of their individual components creates significant obstacles during translation. This challenge becomes especially evident when working between languages with different cultural and linguistic structures, as idioms encapsulate not only linguistic elements but also deep cultural layers.

A key issue in translating idioms is whether to render them literally or to find an equivalent expression that fully conveys their intended meaning. This dilemma is recognized as one of the fundamental theoretical problems in translation studies. Although translation theory is closely connected to linguistics, it is not merely a branch of it; rather, it is an independent

academic discipline with its own object of study and methodology. The semantic content of idioms, their adequacy, ironic features, and positive or negative connotations all demand special scholarly attention in the translation process. Therefore, developing robust theoretical foundations and effective methodological approaches to ensure adequacy when translating idioms is of pressing importance. This article is dedicated to analyzing the main aspects of the theory of idiom translation, the problems that arise in the process, and the key strategies and approaches designed to address these issues. It also considers the influence of cultural and contextual factors on translation, helping to identify solutions that allow the original meaning and stylistic features of idioms to be fully reflected in the target language.

Literature Review

The problem of translating idioms has long been one of the most complex and pressing issues in translation studies, consistently drawing the attention of scholars for many years. An analysis of the literature in this field reveals that the unique linguistic nature

of idioms specifically, the fact that their meaning differs from the sum of their constituent parts continues to pose significant challenges during the translation process. Although early research often focused on finding word-for-word equivalents for idioms, the limitations of this approach became increasingly evident over time. Modern translation studies have developed more profound and comprehensive approaches to idiom translation, which require taking into account not only linguistic factors but also cultural, contextual, and pragmatic considerations (Al-Khawaldeh, Nabeel, 2021).

In the literature, achieving adequacy in idiom translation occupies a central place. The concept of adequacy refers to the target text's ability to fully reflect the semantic and stylistic features, as well as the expressive impact, of the source text. This is particularly important for culturally loaded units such as idioms. A translator must accurately convey not just the literal dictionary meaning of an idiom but also its underlying connotations, irony, emotional coloring, and cultural associations. In this regard, it is emphasized that concepts such as meaning, appropriateness, irony, and positive or negative connotations demand special attention during the translation process. Neglecting these factors can lead to a decline in translation quality and the emergence of misinterpretations in the target language. The key strategies and methods used in translating idioms are widely discussed in the literature and can be grouped into several categories:

- **Full equivalence:** Finding an idiom in the target language that matches the source language idiom in both meaning and form. This is the most ideal scenario and typically occurs when there is cultural proximity between the languages.
- **Partial equivalence:** Selecting an idiom that matches in meaning but differs

somewhat in form. Here, the primary focus is on preserving the idiom's sense.

- **Calque (loan translation):** Translating the components of an idiom literally. However, this approach often results in awkward or incomprehensible expressions in the target language and is therefore rarely recommended.
- **Paraphrase (explanatory translation):** When no equivalent idiom exists in the target language, the meaning of the idiom is explained in plain words. While this approach may diminish the idiom's expressiveness, it allows for accurate conveyance of its meaning.
- **Substitution with a similar meaning but different imagery:** Choosing an idiom that expresses the same meaning as the source idiom but is based on different imagery. This requires a proactive approach from the translator.
- **Compensation:** If the stylistic or figurative features of an idiom cannot be fully preserved in the target language, the loss is compensated elsewhere in the text—for example, through other stylistic devices in a different passage.
- **Omission:** In cases where an idiom does not negatively affect the overall meaning of the text and finding a suitable equivalent is impossible, omitting it from the translation may occasionally be necessary. However, this approach must be applied with great caution to avoid distorting the text's true meaning.

When choosing among these strategies, the context of the translation, the target audience, the genre of the text, and its stylistic characteristics play a decisive role. For instance, paraphrasing idioms may be more common in scientific or technical texts, whereas literary translation prioritizes finding figurative equivalents.

The influence of cultural and contextual factors on idiom translation deserves particular attention. Idioms often reflect the historical, social, religious, and everyday

experiences of a specific culture. Consequently, an idiom from one language may be unfamiliar not only linguistically but also culturally in another language. For example, a literal translation of the English idiom "to kick the bucket" into Uzbek would be meaningless in the target language and could even come across as ridiculous. In such cases, the translator must have a deep understanding of both languages and both cultures, grasp the original cultural burden of the idiom, and be able to adapt it to the target culture. This process demands intercultural competence and interpretive skill on the part of the translator.

In recent years, scholarly research on idiom translation has increasingly focused not only on theoretical aspects but also on practical solutions. In particular, approaches from corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics have made it possible to study more deeply the semantic structure of idioms, their frequency of use, and their contextual features. This provides translators with valuable information for finding the most adequate equivalents for idioms. Furthermore, advances in translation technology especially efforts to improve the detection and accurate translation of idioms in machine translation systems have spurred ongoing research. Nevertheless, due to the complexity and cultural specificity of idioms, the translator's effective judgment and cultural sensitivity remain indispensable.

Research Methodology

This study focuses on an in-depth analysis of the theory and practice of idiom translation, grounded in a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodology. The research design involves a systematic review and examination of existing scholarly literature, including monographs, academic articles, and dissertations. The primary objective is to systematically explore both theoretical and practical approaches to translating idioms, assess

their effectiveness, and determine how cultural and contextual factors influence the translation process. In doing so, the study aims to offer theoretical and practical solutions to the challenges inherent in this complex area of translation studies.

The theoretical framework draws on functionalist approaches in translation studies specifically Skopos theory as well as principles from cognitive linguistics. Skopos theory emphasizes the need to prioritize the target audience and the function of the text when translating idioms. Cognitive linguistics, meanwhile, helps deepen our understanding of how idioms generate meaning, their role in human thought, and their reliance on cultural symbols, thereby making it easier for translators to find adequate equivalents. Together, these approaches allow translation to be viewed not merely as a linguistic substitution but as a communicative act driven by a specific purpose and grounded in cultural and contextual considerations.

A comprehensive literature review was chosen as the data collection method. Priority was given to recent scholarly sources on idiom translation, particularly studies published after 2020. Special attention was paid to research examining the linguistic features of idioms, translation theories, translation strategies, and the impact of cultural and contextual factors. Works addressing the issue of achieving adequacy in idiom translation (Harding, Sue-Ann, and Ovidi Carbonell Cortés), along with studies analyzing problems in translating idioms between English and Uzbek, were of particular interest. Additionally, articles from both international and local academic journals, as well as conference proceedings on the topic, were reviewed to build a broad information base. Concepts such as meaning, appropriateness, irony, and positive or negative connotations of idioms were

analyzed within the framework of each strategy. The success of different approaches was evaluated against criteria for adequacy (Harding, Sue-Ann, and Ovidi Carbonell Cortés), with the main indicator being the target language's ability to fully capture the original meaning, stylistic features, and expressive impact of the translated idiom.

Comparative, analytical, and synthetic methods were employed for data analysis. Each translation strategy—full equivalence, partial equivalence, calque, paraphrase, substitution with a similar-meaning unit, compensation, and omission was examined individually. Their strengths and weaknesses, appropriate usage contexts, and level of effectiveness were assessed. The analysis aimed to identify the optimal conditions for applying each strategy. The influence of cultural and contextual factors on the translation process was analyzed within the framework of intercultural communication theories. Although this research is primarily theoretical in nature, the importance of corpus linguistics approaches for identifying the contextual usage and frequency of idioms is also acknowledged. It is noted that future empirical studies could analyze idiom corpora in source and target languages to identify translation equivalents and evaluate their usage, helping to find more precise and evidence-based solutions to translation challenges. Furthermore, the capabilities and limitations of translation technologies particularly machine translation systems in detecting and rendering idioms are examined from a theoretical perspective, underscoring the value of the human translator's effective judgment and cultural sensitivity (Al-Shawi, Hadeel Abdul-Kareem).

Throughout the study, all sources have been properly cited, and plagiarism has been strictly avoided. The principles of academic ethics have been rigorously

upheld. This methodology ensures a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to idiom translation, providing a solid foundation for deepening existing theoretical knowledge and developing practical recommendations. By analyzing various translation methods in conjunction with cultural and contextual factors, the study serves as a practical guide for translators seeking solutions that fully reflect the original meaning and stylistic features of idioms in the target language. This research fills gaps in translation studies, strengthens the theoretical underpinnings of idiom translation, and contributes to overcoming practical difficulties in the field.

Conclusion

Translating idioms proves to be a complex and multifaceted process that demands broader theoretical and practical approaches than simple linguistic substitution. This study has particularly emphasized that idioms carry deep cultural and contextual weight, and that their meaning, stylistic nuances, and expressive impact must be adequately rendered in the target language. Effective translation encompasses not only linguistic competence but also cross-cultural awareness, cognitive understanding, and the skillful application of various strategies. This, in turn, underscores the need for continuous research and the development of new approaches within this branch of translation studies. Ultimately, the creative judgment and sensitivity of the human translator play a decisive role in idiom translation, serving as a key factor in facilitating successful cross-cultural communication.

Foydalanilgan adabiyotlar

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