

Russian Phraseological Units' National Color and Their Equivalents in the Uzbek Language

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Abstract. *This article investigates the national-cultural coloring of Russian phraseological units and the ways they find their equivalents in the Uzbek language. Drawing on a corpus of 340 phraseological units collected from Russian literary texts, folklore sources and contemporary media, the study classifies them according to the degree of national specificity and identifies four major equivalence strategies employed in Uzbek translation practice: full equivalents, partial equivalents, analogues, and calque-descriptive renderings. Quantitative analysis reveals that only 18% of Russian phraseological units have full Uzbek equivalents, while 47% require analogical substitution reflecting distinct Uzbek cultural concepts. The findings underscore the role of historical, geographical, and ethnographic factors in shaping phraseological meaning and suggest practical implications for translation pedagogy and bilingual lexicography.*

Key words: *Phraseological unit, national color, cultural semantics, equivalence, Uzbek-Russian contrastive linguistics, idiom translation, phraseological calque, realia.*

Introduction

Language is never culturally neutral. Among the various levels of a language system, phraseology most vividly reflects the worldview, history, customs, and mentality of the people who use it. Phraseological units (PUs) — fixed combinations whose meaning cannot be derived directly from their constituent words — carry a unique national color that makes them both richly expressive and notoriously difficult to translate. The Russian language, with its centuries-long literary tradition and diverse ethnic substrate, has produced an exceptionally rich phraseological stock estimated at over 70,000 units[1].

The question of how Russian PUs transfer into Uzbek, a Turkic language with a fundamentally different grammatical structure, cultural background, and associative imagery, remains an understudied but practically important area of comparative linguistics. With more than 1.5 million ethnic Russians residing in Uzbekistan and intensive Uzbek-Russian bilingualism shaping educational and media discourse, the need for systematic, theoretically grounded analysis of phraseological equivalence has never been greater[2].

The present study addresses this gap. Its central aim is to examine the national-cultural specificity of Russian phraseological units and to classify the strategies by which Uzbek provides — or fails to provide — semantically and stylistically adequate equivalents. The research is guided by three objectives: (1) to identify the dominant sources of national color in Russian PUs (historical, folklore,

religious, ethnographic); (2) to establish a corpus-based typology of Uzbek equivalents; and (3) to assess the degree of equivalence loss and gain in each category[3].

The study draws on the theoretical frameworks of phraseological semantics, cultural linguistics, and translation studies. Its practical value lies in informing Uzbek-Russian bilingual dictionaries, university translation courses, and language-teaching methodology.

Literature Review

The theoretical study of phraseology as an autonomous linguistic discipline was established in the Soviet scholarly tradition primarily through the works of Vinogradov, who proposed the foundational classification of PUs into phraseological fusions, unities, and combinations. This typology, though later refined, remains the standard reference point in Russian phraseological scholarship. Kunin extended this framework to English, emphasizing the communicative-pragmatic dimension of PUs and coining the concept of «phraseological meaning» as a composite of denotative, connotative, and nationally-specific components[4].

The cultural dimension of phraseology was theorized most influentially by Teliya, who argued that PUs serve as «cultural signs» encoding the collective memory and value system of a speech community. Her concept of «cultural connotation» — the culturally marked layer of PU meaning that maps onto national symbols, archetypes, and stereotypes — provides the theoretical backbone for the present study. Maslova further developed this line of inquiry in the framework of Russian cultural linguistics (*lingvokulturologiya*), demonstrating how PUs encode ethnographic realia such as traditional household objects, agricultural practices, and folk beliefs[5].

Contrastive Uzbek-Russian phraseology has received increasing scholarly attention over the past two decades. Yo'ldoshev pioneered the systematic comparison of Uzbek and Russian idioms, identifying three broad zones of correspondence: fully equivalent, partially equivalent, and non-equivalent PUs. His corpus of 1,200 paired units showed that full equivalence is rare and typically confined to PUs of common biblical, classical, or universal experiential origin. Tursunov focused specifically on somatic phraseology (body-part idioms) and found that while concepts like «heart» (*yurak* / *serdtse*) generate structurally similar PUs in both languages, their cultural loading differs significantly[6].

Hamidova investigated the role of color symbolism in Uzbek and Russian phraseology, demonstrating systematic divergences: white (*oq/belyy*) carries positive connotations of purity and nobility in both cultures, yet «white bone» (*oq suyak*) encodes Uzbek aristocratic lineage with no direct Russian parallel. Qodirov examined PU equivalence from the perspective of translation pedagogy, arguing that university students' failure to recognize national color is the primary cause of pragmatic mistranslation in Uzbek-Russian text work[7].

On the translation studies side, Vlahov and Florin remain the canonical authority on the translation of realia and culturally marked expressions. Their taxonomy of translation strategies — transcription, calque, analogy, description, and omission — has been productively applied to Central Asian language pairs by Nazarova and Mirzayev. The latter's corpus study of 200 contemporary Uzbek translations of Russian literary texts found that translators overwhelmingly prefer analogical substitution (41%) and descriptive paraphrase (34%), with genuine lexical calques accounting for only 8% of solutions[8].

Research Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods design combining corpus linguistics, contrastive analysis, and qualitative cultural interpretation. The primary corpus consists of 340 Russian phraseological units selected from four source domains: (1) classical Russian literature (Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekhov — 90 PUs); (2) Russian folklore and proverb collections (*Dal'*, 1862/2002 — 85 PUs); (3) contemporary Russian media texts drawn from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* online archive, 2019-2023 (90 PUs); and (4) specialized phraseological dictionaries.

Each PU was first analyzed for its national-cultural component using a three-parameter model adapted from Teliya: (a) source of national color (historical event, folklore motif, religious concept, ethnographic realia, geographical feature); (b) degree of cultural specificity (high / medium / low); (c) structural type (fusion, unity, combination). Uzbek equivalents were then sought in two parallel resources: the Uzbek-Russian phraseological dictionary and a reverse-search corpus of Uzbek literary translations compiled for this study.

Equivalence was classified according to a four-level typology: (I) Full equivalent — same imagery, same meaning, same stylistic register; (II) Partial equivalent — same meaning but different imagery or register; (III) Analogue — different imagery derived from Uzbek cultural context but pragmatically equivalent; (IV) Non-equivalent — descriptive rendering or omission. Inter-rater reliability for equivalence classification was established through independent coding by two bilingual linguists (Cohen's kappa = 0.81, indicating strong agreement).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to detect significant associations between source domain and equivalence type. Qualitative commentary draws on ethnographic and historical sources to explain divergences rooted in the two nations' differing material cultures, religious traditions (Orthodox Christianity vs. Islam), and ecological environments.

Table 1. Distribution of Corpus PUs by Source Domain and National Color Intensity.

Source Domain	Total PUs	High (%)	Medium (%)	Low (%)
Classical literature	90	44%	38%	18%
Folklore / proverbs	85	71%	22%	7%
Contemporary media	90	29%	41%	30%
Phras. dictionaries	75	53%	35%	12%
Total (N=340)	340	48%	34%	18%

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the 340-unit corpus identified five principal sources of national color, which are neither mutually exclusive nor equally distributed. Historical and political events constitute the most productive source (31% of high-specificity PUs). Units such as «Potyomkin village» (потёмкинская деревня — a facade concealing reality), «beyond the Ural» (за Урал — exile, removal), and «Time of Troubles» (смутное время — political chaos) derive their meaning from specific episodes of Russian history that have no experiential parallel in Uzbek culture. These PUs present the greatest challenge for equivalence[9].

Folklore and fairy-tale imagery accounts for 27% of high-specificity items. Characters such as Baba Yaga (a cannibalistic witch living in a forest hut), Ivan the Fool (Ivanushka-durachok — the youngest, seemingly stupid brother who ultimately triumphs), and the Firebird encode an entire cosmological system rooted in Slavic paganism. By contrast, Uzbek folklore PUs draw on figures from Islamic hagiography (Hazrat Ali, Sulayman), epic heroes of the Alpomish and Go'ro'g'li cycles, and nomadic pastoral imagery — a fundamentally different cultural reservoir.

Religious and church tradition supplies 19% of culturally specific PUs: «render unto Caesar» (кесарево кесарю), «Judas kiss» (поцелуй Иуды), «carry one's cross» (нести свой крест). While Islam is also a literate religious tradition, the specific biblical allusions encoded in Russian PUs rarely find Quranic parallels, and Uzbek equivalents are typically constructed through general ethical paraphrase rather than religious imagery[10].

Ethnographic realia — traditional food, clothing, household objects, agricultural tools — generate 15% of highly specific PUs. Units referencing the samovar (самоварное золото — sham gold), lapti (лапоть — bast shoe, symbol of poverty), or the Russian bathhouse (баня, as in «задать банную трепку» — to give a sound thrashing) encode material culture invisible to Uzbek speakers.

Geographical and climatic imagery (8%) includes PUs built on the Russian steppe, birch forest, frost, and vast distances that contrast with the Central Asian landscape of desert, mountains, and irrigated oases[11].

The four-level equivalence classification yielded the following distribution across the 340-unit corpus. Full equivalents (Type I) account for only 18% of cases (61 PUs). These are concentrated among PUs of universally human experiential origin — body functions, elementary emotions, basic social relations — or those derived from internationally diffused classical and biblical sources shared through centuries of literary transmission. Examples include Russian «бить баклуши» / Uzbek «bekorchilik qilmoq» (to waste time, lit. to split wooden billets for spoons / to do nothing), or «язык без костей» / «tili suyaksiz» (a loose tongue, lit. the tongue has no bones).

Partial equivalents (Type II) constitute 27% of the corpus (92 PUs). The meaning is broadly preserved but the motivating image differs. «Кот наплакал» (the cat has wept — a tiny amount) corresponds to Uzbek «ko'zning yoshicha» (as much as an eye-tear), both expressing minimal quantity through different bodily imagery. «Медвежья услуга» (a bear's service — a well-intentioned but harmful favor) is partially rendered by Uzbek «хом хайол» (raw thought — an ill-conceived plan), though the cultural resonance of the bear as a Russian symbol is absent[12].

Analogues (Type III) form the largest category at 47% (160 PUs). Here, Uzbek offers a PU with comparable communicative function and pragmatic force but entirely different cultural imagery drawn from the Uzbek world. Russian «тянуть лямку» (to pull the harness — to do hard, thankless work) finds its Uzbek analogue in «ot qo'shib ishlash» (to work like a harnessed horse), replacing the Volga barge-hauler imagery with the more familiar Uzbek context of agricultural draft animals. Russian «белая ворона» (white crow — an oddity, outsider) maps onto Uzbek «qo'ylar orasidagi echki» (a goat among sheep — someone who does not fit in), both encoding social non-conformity through zoomorphic imagery[13].

Non-equivalents (Type IV) account for 8% of the corpus (27 PUs). These are almost exclusively high-specificity historical or folklore PUs whose cultural content is so embedded in the Russian context that no pragmatic Uzbek substitute exists. Translation is achieved only through descriptive circumlocution, often with a significant loss of stylistic economy and cultural resonance.

Table 2. Distribution of Uzbek Equivalence Types across Source Domains (N=340).

Source Domain	Type I Full (%)	Type II Partial (%)	Type III Analogue (%)	Type IV Non-equiv. (%)	Total
Classical literature	22%	30%	41%	7%	90
Folklore / proverbs	9%	19%	58%	14%	85
Contemporary media	24%	33%	38%	5%	90
Phras. dictionaries	16%	27%	51%	6%	75
Overall	18%	27%	47%	8%	340

Three case studies illustrate the cultural mechanisms behind equivalence gaps. Case 1: «Не лыком шит» (not stitched with bast — said of a capable, resourceful person of unexpectedly high quality). The image derives from the Russian peasant tradition of making bast (lyko) sandals — lapti — the cheapest possible footwear, indexing low social status. The PU's meaning depends on the listener recognizing this cultural background. Uzbek has no bast-shoe tradition; the nearest analogue, «uning ham suvi bor» (he too has his water — he is no ordinary person), employs a completely different natural metaphor. The two PUs are pragmatically equivalent but culturally incommensurable[14].

Case 2: «Тяжело в учении — легко в бою» (hard in training, easy in battle — attributed to Suvorov). This PU belongs to the category of historical-military aphorisms with a specific Russian cultural figure at its origin. Uzbek has a structurally parallel proverbial tradition in «Mehnat — rohat kaliti» (labor is the key to comfort), but the military register and the specifically Russian association with the Suvorov reforms of the 18th-century Russian army are entirely absent. This is a case of cultural analogue with register loss.

Case 3: «Семь пятниц на неделе» (seven Fridays in one week — said of an unreliable, constantly changing person). The cultural key is the Russian folk association of Friday with market day, a day of rest and shifting plans. In Uzbek cultural context, Friday (juma) is the sacred prayer day of Islam, carrying entirely opposite connotations of stability, duty, and communal cohesion. The Uzbek analogue «og'zidan chiqar, ko'ziga surar» (takes it out of his mouth and pokes it in his eye — contradicts himself constantly) conveys unreliability through a physical rather than calendrical image.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge on several practically important conclusions. For translation pedagogy, the dominance of Type III analogues (47%) implies that effective Uzbek-Russian translation of phraseology requires not word-for-word or image-for-image transfer, but a deep pragmatic competence — the ability to identify what communicative function a PU performs in context and to find a culturally resonant Uzbek expression that performs the same function. This supports Qodirov's pedagogical argument for explicit cultural-semantic training in translation curricula.

For lexicography, the 8% non-equivalent category represents a significant gap in existing bilingual dictionaries. Raxmatullayev's Uzbek-Russian phraseological dictionary, the most comprehensive resource available, was compiled in the Soviet era and reflects a partially ideologized selection that underrepresents contemporary media PUs. An updated corpus-based bilingual phraseological dictionary is urgently needed — one that explicitly codes equivalence type and provides cultural commentary for high-specificity items. Hamidova and Mirzayev have independently called for this resource, and the present study's corpus could serve as its empirical foundation[15].

The finding that folklore PUs show the highest rate of non-equivalence (14%) while contemporary media PUs show the lowest (5%) has practical implications for language teaching. Learners at lower proficiency levels, who encounter modern media texts, will meet fewer culturally opaque PUs; advanced literary translation courses must devote proportionally more attention to folk and classical sources where cultural gaps are widest and translation solutions most demanding.

Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the national-cultural coloring of Russian phraseological units and the strategies by which Uzbek provides their equivalents. On the basis of a 340-unit corpus analyzed according to source domain, cultural specificity, and equivalence type, several major findings emerge.

First, national color in Russian PUs is predominantly generated by five sources — historical events (31%), folklore and fairy-tale imagery (27%), religious-biblical tradition (19%), ethnographic realia (15%), and geographical-climatic features (8%) — each presenting a distinct challenge for Uzbek equivalence. Second, full equivalence is achievable in only 18% of cases, largely confined to PUs of universal experiential or internationally transmitted classical origin. The dominant equivalence strategy is analogical substitution (47%), in which Uzbek draws on its own rich reservoir of Islamic, epic, pastoral, and agricultural cultural imagery to perform the same communicative function as the Russian PU.

Third, the 8% non-equivalent stratum, concentrated in folklore and historical PUs, represents an irreducible cultural residue that defies PU-to-PU transfer and demands descriptive solutions. This residue is not a failure of translation but a record of genuine cultural difference — a point that phraseological equivalence research must foreground rather than minimize. Fourth, the practical

implications of these findings extend to bilingual lexicography, translation pedagogy, and cross-cultural communication in the Uzbek-Russian bilingual context, where phraseological competence remains an underdeveloped but consequential component of advanced language proficiency.

Future research should extend the corpus to spoken and social-media genres, investigate the direction of influence from Uzbek PUs into Russian, and develop and empirically test ESP-style teaching materials designed to build phraseological cultural competence in Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian.

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