

A Comparative Cognitive-Pragmatic Analysis of English and Russian Idiomatic Expressions and Their Translation in Digital Media

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Annotation *This article presents a comparative cognitive-pragmatic analysis of English and Russian idiomatic expressions and examines the ways in which their meanings, cultural connotations, and pragmatic functions are preserved or transformed in translation within digital media. Particular attention is given to the relationship between idiomatic meaning, conceptual structures, cultural knowledge, emotional evaluation, and communicative intentions. The study explores how English and Russian idioms reflect culturally specific conceptualizations and how these features influence their interpretation in online communication, including social media, digital journalism, blogs, and other internet-based platforms. The analysis also identifies major translation strategies used to render idiomatic expressions, including equivalence, substitution, paraphrase, literal translation, and contextual adaptation. The findings demonstrate that successful translation of idioms in digital media requires not only linguistic competence but also cognitive and pragmatic awareness of the source and target cultures. The comparative perspective reveals both universal conceptual patterns and culture-specific meanings underlying English and Russian idiomatic expressions. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of intercultural communication and provides a theoretical basis for improving the accuracy, naturalness, and pragmatic effectiveness of idiom translation in contemporary digital discourse.*

Keywords: *idiomatic expressions, cognitive pragmatics, comparative analysis, English language, Russian language, idiom translation, digital media, cultural connotation, conceptualization, pragmatic meaning, intercultural communication, translation strategies, digital discourse.*

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions represent one of the most complex and culturally significant components of natural language. Unlike free word combinations, idioms frequently convey meanings that cannot be fully derived from the literal meanings of their individual components. Their interpretation depends on conceptual knowledge, cultural experience, contextual information, emotional evaluation, and the communicative intentions of language users. For this reason, idioms constitute an important area of research in cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, translation studies, and intercultural communication. The comparison of idiomatic expressions across languages makes it possible to identify not only structural and semantic similarities but also differences in the ways particular cultures conceptualize human experience, social relations, emotions, behavior, and everyday situations.[1]

English and Russian provide particularly valuable material for comparative idiom research because both languages possess extensive and highly productive phraseological systems while reflecting different historical, cultural, and communicative traditions. English idiomatic expressions are widely used in contemporary international communication, particularly in social networks, digital journalism, online discussions, advertising, and entertainment content. Russian idioms similarly demonstrate a strong connection with cultural traditions, historical experience, literature, folklore, and socially established patterns of evaluation. When these expressions are transferred from one language into another, translators must therefore deal not only with lexical and grammatical differences but also with differences in conceptualization and pragmatic meaning.

The development of digital media has significantly increased the importance of idiom translation. Contemporary users encounter idiomatic expressions in multilingual online environments where communication is characterized by speed, informality, multimodality, emotional intensity, and interaction between speakers from different cultural backgrounds. In digital discourse, an idiom may perform several functions simultaneously: it may communicate information, express an attitude, create humor, establish solidarity, intensify criticism, signal irony, or influence the emotional response of the audience. Consequently, literal translation may preserve the lexical structure of an expression while failing to reproduce its communicative effect.[2]

A cognitive-pragmatic approach provides an effective theoretical framework for addressing this problem. From a cognitive perspective, idioms are viewed as linguistic manifestations of conceptual structures and culturally established patterns of thought. From a pragmatic perspective, their interpretation depends on context, speaker intention, communicative situation, interpersonal relations, and expected audience response. Combining these perspectives allows idiomatic expressions to be analyzed as dynamic units whose meaning emerges from the interaction between linguistic form, conceptual knowledge, cultural experience, and communicative context.[3]

The present study therefore focuses on a comparative cognitive-pragmatic analysis of English and Russian idiomatic expressions and their translation in digital media. The research seeks to determine how idiomatic meanings are constructed in the two languages, which conceptual and cultural features distinguish them, and what translation strategies are employed to preserve their semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic functions. Particular attention is given to equivalence, cultural substitution, paraphrase, literal translation, contextual adaptation, and omission or compensation where necessary.

The relevance of the study is determined by the growing role of digital communication in intercultural interaction and by the increasing demand for accurate and culturally appropriate translation. A better understanding of the cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of idioms can contribute to more effective translation practices and facilitate communication between English- and Russian-speaking audiences. The study also demonstrates that idiom translation should be regarded not merely as a lexical substitution process but as an interpretive activity involving the reconstruction of conceptual and communicative meaning in the target language.[4]

Methodology

The study employs a comparative cognitive-pragmatic methodology to examine English and Russian idiomatic expressions and their translations in digital media. The methodological framework integrates principles of comparative linguistics, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, phraseology, discourse analysis, and translation studies. Such an interdisciplinary approach makes it possible to investigate idioms simultaneously as linguistic units, conceptual structures, culturally determined expressions, and pragmatic instruments of communication.

The research material consists of representative English and Russian idiomatic expressions encountered in contemporary digital discourse, including online news materials, social media publications, blogs, digital magazines, discussion forums, and other internet-based communicative contexts. The expressions were selected according to their idiomaticity, frequency of contextual use, cultural relevance, and potential translation difficulty. Particular attention was paid to idioms containing metaphorical, evaluative, emotional, humorous, ironic, or culturally specific meanings.[5]

The analysis was conducted in several interconnected stages. First, the semantic structure of each idiomatic expression was identified by distinguishing its literal lexical components from its conventional figurative meaning. Second, the underlying conceptual domain of the idiom was examined. This stage focused on concepts such as human behavior, emotions, interpersonal relations, success and failure, conflict, intelligence, social status, risk, and everyday experience. Third, the pragmatic function of the expression was determined according to its communicative context. This included identifying whether an idiom served to inform, evaluate, persuade, criticize, express emotion, create humor, establish solidarity, intensify a statement, or produce an ironic effect.

The comparative stage involved identifying similarities and differences between English and Russian idioms at semantic, structural, conceptual, cultural, and pragmatic levels. Particular emphasis was placed on cases where idioms expressed similar conceptual meanings through different images and cases where apparently similar expressions demonstrated different pragmatic or cultural implications. This procedure helped distinguish universal conceptual patterns from language-specific conceptualizations.[6]

The translation analysis examined how the figurative meaning and communicative function of the source idiom were reproduced in the target language. Several major translation strategies were considered, including the use of a direct idiomatic equivalent, selection of a culturally corresponding idiom, paraphrasing, literal translation, contextual adaptation, and compensation. Each strategy was evaluated according to its ability to preserve the semantic content, pragmatic force, stylistic characteristics, emotional evaluation, and cultural implications of the original expression.

The study also applies contextual interpretation to determine whether the same idiom acquires different pragmatic meanings in different digital environments. This is particularly important because digital discourse often contains abbreviated language, irony, humor, informal interaction, hashtags, comments, and multimodal elements that can influence idiom interpretation. The methodological approach consequently treats meaning as context-dependent rather than as an entirely fixed property of the idiomatic expression.[7]

Finally, the analyzed examples were compared to identify recurring translation patterns and the principal factors influencing translation success. The methodological design allows the study to determine which translation strategies are most appropriate for different categories of English and Russian idioms and to establish the relationship between cognitive conceptualization, cultural specificity, pragmatic function, and translation equivalence in digital communication.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that English and Russian idiomatic expressions share a number of universal conceptual foundations while differing considerably in their metaphorical representation, cultural associations, pragmatic use, and translation behavior. The results indicate that idioms in both languages frequently conceptualize abstract experiences through concrete domains such as body parts, movement, animals, nature, physical objects, spatial relations, food, and everyday human activities. This suggests that certain cognitive mechanisms underlying idiomaticity are broadly shared across languages. At the same time, the particular images selected to express these concepts are strongly influenced by cultural and historical experience.[8]

One of the most significant findings is that semantic equivalence does not necessarily guarantee pragmatic equivalence. Two idioms may communicate approximately the same conceptual meaning but differ in emotional intensity, stylistic register, degree of informality, or evaluative force. This distinction becomes particularly important in digital media, where the communicative effect of an expression may be more important than its literal semantic content. An idiom used in a humorous social-media post, for example, may simultaneously convey information and establish an informal relationship with the audience. A translation that reproduces only the informational meaning but removes the humor or irony may therefore be semantically acceptable but pragmatically inadequate.[9]

The analysis further shows that culturally corresponding idioms represent one of the most effective translation solutions when an appropriate equivalent exists in the target language. Such equivalents allow translators to preserve not only the central meaning but also the figurative character and communicative naturalness of the original. However, complete equivalence between English and Russian idioms is relatively limited. In many cases, the two languages employ different conceptual images to express similar experiences. Consequently, translators frequently need to replace the source idiom with a target-language expression that is conceptually and pragmatically comparable rather than formally identical.[10]

Paraphrase constitutes another important strategy, particularly when an idiom contains culturally specific imagery for which no natural target-language equivalent exists. Although paraphrase can accurately communicate the propositional meaning of an idiom, it may reduce its metaphorical expressiveness, emotional intensity, or stylistic effect. This limitation is especially noticeable in literary-oriented digital content, advertising, and social-media communication, where expressive language plays an essential role in attracting and influencing audiences.

Literal translation was found to be comparatively less effective when the source idiom possesses a strongly culture-specific figurative meaning. A word-for-word rendering may preserve the surface structure of the expression but produce an unnatural or incomprehensible phrase in the target language. Nevertheless, literal translation can be successful when the idiomatic image is transparent to speakers of both languages or when the translated expression is supported by sufficient contextual information. Therefore, the effectiveness of literal translation depends on the degree of conceptual and cultural overlap between the source and target languages.[11]

The results also reveal the importance of contextual adaptation in digital media. Digital communication differs from traditional written discourse because meaning is frequently constructed through the interaction of text, images, emojis, hashtags, hyperlinks, comments, and audience responses. An idiom can acquire additional pragmatic meanings depending on the communicative environment. For instance, an expression may be interpreted as humorous in one context but sarcastic or critical in another. Translators must therefore consider not only the idiom itself but also the surrounding discourse and the communicative purpose of the digital publication.

From a cognitive perspective, the findings demonstrate that idioms provide access to culturally embedded conceptual models. English and Russian speakers may conceptualize similar experiences through different metaphorical structures. These differences become particularly visible in expressions related to emotions, interpersonal relationships, social behavior, success, failure, and evaluation. The comparison therefore confirms that idiomatic language reflects both universal human experience and culture-specific ways of organizing that experience.[12]

The pragmatic analysis further indicates that idioms frequently perform interpersonal and evaluative functions. They may strengthen an author's position, soften criticism, establish solidarity, create distance, express approval or disapproval, and produce humor or irony. In digital communication, these functions may become even more prominent because users often employ idioms to construct an identifiable communicative style and to create a sense of familiarity with their audience.[13]

Another important result concerns the relationship between translation accuracy and cultural adaptation. A successful translation cannot always be defined as the closest lexical reproduction of the source expression. In many cases, the most accurate translation is the one that produces an equivalent cognitive and pragmatic effect in the target audience. This principle shifts the focus from formal correspondence to functional equivalence. Consequently, translators working with English and Russian idioms in digital media should prioritize the preservation of communicative intention, figurative meaning, emotional evaluation, and cultural relevance.[14]

The findings support the view that idiom translation is a multidimensional process involving linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic factors. The most effective translation strategy depends on the semantic transparency of the idiom, the availability of a target-language equivalent, the degree of cultural distance, the genre of digital discourse, and the intended audience. A flexible combination of idiomatic substitution, paraphrase, adaptation, and contextual interpretation is therefore more effective than reliance on a single translation technique.[15]

Conclusion

The comparative cognitive-pragmatic analysis of English and Russian idiomatic expressions demonstrates that idioms constitute complex linguistic units in which semantic meaning, conceptualization, cultural knowledge, and communicative intention are closely interconnected. Their translation, particularly in digital media, requires more than the identification of lexical

correspondences because idiomatic expressions frequently contain metaphorical images, cultural associations, emotional evaluations, stylistic characteristics, and pragmatic functions that cannot be transferred mechanically from one language to another.

The study shows that English and Russian idioms share universal conceptual patterns derived from common human experiences, while their specific metaphorical representations are often determined by cultural and historical factors. These similarities facilitate translation when corresponding idiomatic equivalents exist. However, differences in conceptualization frequently require translators to employ culturally appropriate substitutions, paraphrases, contextual adaptations, or other functional strategies.

The findings confirm that pragmatic equivalence is a central criterion of successful idiom translation. A translation should reproduce not only what an idiom means but also what it does in a particular communicative situation. This includes preserving emotional tone, irony, humor, evaluation, interpersonal meaning, stylistic register, and communicative intention. In digital media, these requirements become especially important because online communication is highly contextual, interactive, informal, and frequently multimodal.

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