

TRANSLATING ENGLISH IDIOMS INTO UKRAINIAN: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Idioms are an essential part of any language, enriching communication with imagery, expressiveness, and cultural nuance. They serve not only to embellish speech but also to encapsulate collective experiences, wisdom, and humor.

Idioms are stable expressions that can be phrases or even whole sentences. They also describe a person's character, emotion, action, attitude to any topic, etc. Their use enriches speech, shows the depth of the language itself. It is important to remember that phraseological units should be perceived as a whole, because the meaning may not coincide with the meaning of the words included in them [1, p. 5].

However, for Ukrainian learners of English, idioms often present a significant linguistic and cultural barrier. Translating idioms is not merely a matter of substituting words; it is a complex interpretive task that demands creativity, cultural insight, and linguistic precision. For instance, idioms featuring animal components often reflect cultural perceptions of those animals, which may differ between English and Ukrainian. For instance: 'let the cat out of the bag' (to reveal a secret) does not have a direct Ukrainian equivalent. A possible translation is 'випустити кота з мішка', but it may require additional context to convey the intended meaning effectively; 'hold your horses' (wait a moment) can be translated as 'притримай коней', which is quite close to the original, but the usage may differ culturally.

Even professional translators recognize that idioms are not exactly a piece of cake to render into another language. While some idioms may be relatively easy to handle, they are only a drop in the bucket compared to the vast number of expressions that pose serious difficulties due to their figurative meanings. Machine translation engines, which often rely on literal word-for-word processing, typically fail to convey the intended sense, leading to confusion or absurdity in the translated text.

Literal translation of idioms can result in several issues:

- Loss of meaning: when translated word-for-word, an idiom may become meaningless or misleading, thus failing to convey the original idea.
- Loss of imagery: idioms often rely on vivid metaphors or cultural references. A literal translation may strip away this imagery, weakening the phrase's emotional or rhetorical impact.
- Loss of usefulness: an inaccurately translated idiom may distort the meaning of the entire text, which confuses the reader and undermines communication.

Given these challenges, translators must adopt strategies that ensure idioms are interpreted and rendered effectively in the target language.

There are several methods used to translate English idioms into Ukrainian, each suited to different contexts and idiomatic structures.

1. Finding the equivalent

This method involves using an established Ukrainian idiom that shares both meaning and form with the English source. Such idioms often stem from shared cultural or literary

traditions, such as classical mythology, historical texts, or the Bible (Augean stables – авгієві стайні, a labour of Sisyphus – сізіфова праця, to cross the Rubicon – перейти Рубікон, the golden calf – золотий телець).

This approach retains the idiom's original components and expressive power, assuming an equivalent exists in both languages.

2. Using a calque (loan translation)

In this strategy, the idiom is translated by preserving the original structure and meaning as closely as possible, even if some elements differ. While these translations might diverge slightly in imagery or syntax, they maintain the core metaphorical meaning (to make a long story short – сказати коротко, as pale as paper – блідий мов стіна, one's own flesh and bone – рідна кровинка, a voice in the wilderness – глас волаючого в пустелі).

This technique is particularly useful for idioms with partial overlap in meaning or cultural familiarity.

3. Using an Analog

Many English idioms have close analogs in Ukrainian, particularly when both languages express similar concepts through different cultural lenses. These equivalents often come in the form of proverbs or sayings and convey similar connotative meanings (he that mischief hatches, mischief catches – хто іншому яму копає, сам у неї потрапляє, there is no use crying over spilt milk – що з воза впало, те пропало, don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs – яйця курку не вчать, don't cross the bridge before you come to it – не кажи гоп, доки не перескочиш). Here, the translator selects the best match based on style, register, and tone.

4. Contextual Substitution

Sometimes, idioms are too culturally specific or abstract to be translated directly or even analogously. In such cases, translators may resort to contextual substitution—replacing the idiom with an expression or phrase that matches the context and emotional tone of the original (kind words butter no parsnips – годувати байками солов'я, to make a cat's paw of someone – чужими руками жар вигрібати, more power to your elbow – ні пуху, ні луски).

This method preserves communicative intent while sacrificing literal equivalence.

5. Descriptive Translation

When none of the above strategies suffice, descriptive translation is used. This involves paraphrasing the idiom to convey its full meaning, often with more words or detailed explanation (out of the clear blue sky – раптом, зненацька, white elephant – подарунок, якого важко позбутися, yes-man – людина, що з усіма згоджується, тільки підтакує).

Descriptive translation is particularly useful for idioms that encapsulate culturally loaded or novel ideas unfamiliar to the target audience.

Translating idioms is an intricate and creative endeavor that goes beyond linguistic knowledge. It requires sensitivity to both source and target cultures, a deep understanding of idiomatic meaning, and an ability to judge when to use equivalence, analogy, substitution, or explication. A well-translated idiom preserves not only the literal sense but also the emotional and rhetorical power of the original expression.

Ultimately, the task of a translator is not merely to convert words but to convey meaning – colorful, expressive, and culturally embedded meaning that gives language its vitality and charm. In this regard, translating idioms is not a hindrance but an art form, one that transforms linguistic barriers into bridges of understanding.

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