

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK IDIOMS IN EFL TEACHING**

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**Abstract:** Idioms constitute a vital part of natural language use and play an important role in achieving communicative competence in a foreign language. However, idiomatic expressions are often culturally bound, which makes them difficult for learners to comprehend and use appropriately. This study presents a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek idioms with a focus on their pedagogical implications in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the research examines semantic, structural, and cultural similarities and differences between idioms in the two languages. The findings indicate that while some idioms share conceptual metaphors across both languages, many are culture-specific and require explicit cultural explanation. The study emphasizes the importance of contrastive analysis and culturally informed instruction in teaching idioms to Uzbek EFL learners.

**Keywords:** idioms, English and Uzbek, comparative study, EFL teaching, cultural competence

**Introduction**

Idioms are an integral part of everyday communication and play a crucial role in expressing ideas in a concise, vivid, and culturally meaningful way. Native speakers frequently use idiomatic expressions in spoken and written discourse, making idiom comprehension an essential skill for learners aiming to achieve fluency in a foreign language. Despite their importance, idioms remain one of the most challenging aspects of language learning, particularly for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL).

One of the primary difficulties in learning idioms lies in their figurative nature. The meaning of an idiom often cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of its individual components. For instance, the English idiom “*kick the bucket*” has no semantic connection to its literal interpretation, which can confuse learners unfamiliar with its figurative meaning[1,58]. This challenge is further intensified when idioms are deeply embedded in the cultural and historical context of the target language.

In the Uzbek context, EFL learners frequently encounter difficulties when interpreting English idioms due to cultural differences between English-speaking communities and Uzbek society. Although Uzbek also possesses a rich system of idiomatic expressions, the metaphors, symbols, and cultural references underlying Uzbek idioms often differ significantly from those found in English. As a result, learners may incorrectly transfer meanings from their native language or rely on literal interpretation[2,79].

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek idioms and to explore how such a comparison can inform more effective EFL teaching practices. The research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the main semantic and cultural similarities and differences between English and Uzbek idioms?
2. How do these similarities and differences affect Uzbek learners’ comprehension of English idioms?
3. How can comparative analysis be used as a pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms?

By examining these issues, the study seeks to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and pedagogically effective approaches to teaching idioms.

**Literature Review.** Idioms have long attracted the attention of linguists and language educators due to their complex semantic and pragmatic properties. They are commonly described as fixed or semi-fixed expressions whose meanings are conventionalized and often non-compositional. In second and foreign language learning, idioms are viewed as a key component of advanced proficiency and natural language use[3.46].

Research suggests that learners who lack idiomatic competence may produce grammatically accurate but pragmatically unnatural speech. Consequently, idiom instruction is considered essential for developing communicative competence, particularly at intermediate and advanced levels of language learning[4,125].

**Culture and Idiomatic Meaning.** The close relationship between language and culture is especially evident in idiomatic expressions. Idioms often reflect cultural values, beliefs, historical events, and everyday practices of a speech community. For this reason, understanding idioms requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness. Studies in applied linguistics emphasize that learners interpret idioms more successfully when they are familiar with the cultural context in which those idioms are used[5.53]. Conversely, idioms that lack equivalents in the learner's native language or culture tend to cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

**Comparative and Contrastive Approaches.** Comparative analysis has long been used as a pedagogical tool in foreign language teaching. By comparing structures and meanings across languages, learners can become more aware of similarities and differences, which can facilitate comprehension and reduce negative transfer. In the context of idiom teaching, contrastive analysis helps identify idioms that share similar metaphors across languages as well as those that are culture-specific[6,201]. Such an approach is particularly relevant for Uzbek EFL learners, whose native language contains many metaphorical expressions but differs significantly from English in terms of cultural symbolism.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design.** This study employs a qualitative comparative research design. The analysis focuses on selected English and Uzbek idioms and examines their semantic structure, metaphorical basis, and cultural connotations. The goal is not statistical generalization but in-depth linguistic and pedagogical interpretation.

**Data Selection.** The data consist of 40 commonly used idioms: 20 English idioms and 20 Uzbek idioms. The idioms were selected from reputable idiom dictionaries and language teaching materials. Priority was given to idioms frequently encountered in spoken discourse and EFL textbooks.

**Analytical Framework.** The idioms were analyzed according to three main criteria:

1. Semantic transparency (degree to which meaning can be inferred)
2. Conceptual metaphor (underlying image or idea)
3. Cultural specificity (degree of cultural dependence)

The analysis also considers whether functional or conceptual equivalents exist between English and Uzbek idioms.

### **Results and Discussion**

**Semantic and Conceptual Similarities.** The analysis revealed that some English and Uzbek idioms share similar conceptual metaphors, despite differences in wording. For example, English idioms related to emotions, such as *"lose one's head,"* have Uzbek counterparts that convey a similar idea of emotional loss of control. These shared metaphors suggest that certain human experiences are universal and are conceptualized in similar ways across cultures. Such

similarities can facilitate idiom learning, as learners may rely on positive transfer from their native language. When teachers explicitly highlight these parallels, learners are more likely to understand and retain idiomatic meanings.

**Cultural and Semantic Differences.** Despite some similarities, many idioms were found to be highly culture-specific. English idioms often draw on sports, animals, or historical practices common in English-speaking cultures, whereas Uzbek idioms frequently reflect agricultural life, family relations, and moral values rooted in local traditions. For example, idioms related to weather or farming in Uzbek may have no direct equivalents in English. In such cases, literal translation leads to misunderstanding. Uzbek learners of English may attempt to interpret English idioms through the lens of their own cultural experience, which can result in semantic errors.

The findings highlight the importance of a comparative approach in EFL teaching. Presenting English idioms alongside their Uzbek equivalents, when available, helps learners recognize conceptual similarities and differences. For culture-specific idioms, teachers should provide cultural explanations, examples, and contextualized usage. Using authentic materials such as films, dialogues, and short texts can further enhance learners' exposure to idiomatic language. Encouraging learners to compare idioms across languages also promotes intercultural awareness and critical thinking.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined English and Uzbek idioms from a comparative perspective and explored their implications for EFL teaching. The analysis demonstrates that while some idioms share universal conceptual metaphors, many are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. These cultural differences significantly affect idiom comprehension among Uzbek EFL learners. The findings suggest that idioms should not be taught as isolated lexical items. Instead, effective idiom instruction should integrate linguistic analysis, cultural explanation, and contrastive comparison. By adopting such an approach, teachers can help learners develop both idiomatic competence and intercultural communicative competence.

In conclusion, comparative analysis of English and Uzbek idioms provides valuable insights for EFL pedagogy. It enables learners to better understand figurative language, avoid negative transfer, and use idioms more confidently and appropriately in real-life communication.

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