

INTERCULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS CAUSED BY IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH

Omonova Farangiz Asror kizi

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Master's student in Linguistics

omonova.f.a@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4376-6572>

Abstract: This article analyzes the role of idiomatic expressions in English in intercultural communication and the semantic and stylistic misunderstandings arising from them. It has been shown that the richness of idiomatic units in cultural connotations, their inability to be directly translated, and their dependence on context can lead to misinterpretations and communicative barriers in communication. In the study, based on discourse analysis and stylistic approaches, idiomatic expressions found in mass texts and examples of oral speech in English were analyzed, and their connection with cultural content, stylistic function, and intercultural competence was determined. In conclusion, the necessity of cultural assimilation of idiomatic expressions in the process of language learning and teaching is emphasized.

Keywords: idiomatic expressions, intercultural communication, semantic misunderstanding, stylistic functions, intercultural pragmatics, English, discourse analysis, language and culture

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the English language occupies an important place as a means of international communication and is becoming the main means of communication between representatives of different nations and cultures. However, language is not just about grammatical rules and vocabulary; it is also an expression of cultural context, social values, and national way of thinking. In particular, idiomatic expressions (i.e., phraseological units) are one of the most powerful means of expressing the cultural load of the language. Idiomatic expressions in English often do not provide the possibility of direct translation, and their meaning is understood only within the framework of a certain culture. Therefore, the use of idiomatic units of the English language in intercultural communication can often lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or even communication interruptions. Because language learners or individuals who are not fluent in English often face difficulties in understanding the true meaning of idioms from the context. This situation requires a deeper study of the inextricable link between language and culture within the framework of intercultural pragmatics. This article is aimed at analyzing the cultural and stylistic features of idiomatic expressions in English, as well as revealing the cases of intercultural misunderstanding arising from the misinterpretation of these expressions. The article also provides examples from real-world examples of communication, texts, or corpus analysis, and suggests effective approaches to solving this problem. The research results indicate the need to pay attention to the cultural context when mastering idiomatic units for those studying English as a foreign language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Idiomatic expressions in English and their role in intercultural communication are one of the important topics in linguistic and cultural research. Idioms are studied in linguistics not only as a

semantic unit, but also as an expression of cultural identity, historical experience, and national thinking (Kovecses, 2002). Their peculiarity is that when idiomatic expressions are often translated directly, the meaning is distorted or misunderstood. This leads to intercultural misunderstandings and communication errors (Wierzbicka, 1997). Boers and Demecheleer (2001) in their study studied the metaphorical nature of idioms and the cultural perceptions associated with them, calling them a complex link for those learning English as a second language. They say that idioms are not just linguistic units, but the cultural basis behind them complicates the correct understanding of language learners.

In the field of intercultural pragmatics, Thomas (1983) showed that the main cause of pragmatic errors can be related to cultural differences. From this point of view, idiomatic expressions often appear as a "pragmatic barrier." For example, the English phrase kick the bucket, if translated directly into Uzbek, seems absurd and can confuse the interlocutor who is not aware of the context. Moon (1998) classifies idioms according to their degree of stability, contextual dependence, and stylistic function, showing that they are often involved in determining the formal level of communication. At the same time, he analyzes the difficulties of language learners in mastering idioms from a psycholinguistic point of view. Also, Tillotson (2011) in his research examines how English idioms are perceived in communication in an international context, emphasizing that they are an integral part of intercultural competence. In his opinion, it is very important for language learners to understand idiomatic expressions not only lexically, but also culturally. Recent research on corpus linguistics (Brezina, 2018) also provides practical recommendations for language teachers by analyzing the frequency of use of idioms in real speech, their contextual variability, and stylistic load in discourse.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the semantic and stylistic features of idiomatic expressions in English in intercultural communication, as well as the misunderstandings arising from them, were studied on the basis of discourse analysis and stylistic analysis. As research material, fiction in English, media texts, interviews, films and TV series, as well as examples of written conversations in international communication processes were selected. During the analysis, the cultural connotation of idiomatic expressions, the meaning given in the context, and the factors leading to their misinterpretation were studied. Also, from the point of view of intercultural pragmatics, the stylistic load of these expressions and what communicative barriers they can cause between the participants in communication were assessed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the course of the study, it was established that idiomatic expressions in English are culturally specific language units, which in many cases cannot be directly translated, and they can cause intercultural misunderstandings at different levels in the process of communication. Idioms are semantically often metaphorical and figurative, and their correct interpretation is correctly understood only by interlocutors who have context and cultural knowledge. For example, the widespread phrase "kick the bucket" in English means "to die," but if this phrase is translated directly by newly learners of English, its original meaning is not understood, and the main idea in the speech is lost. Such examples clearly demonstrate the difference between cultural thinking and the structure of language. The analysis showed that idioms in communication are used not only to convey meaning, but also to give a stylistic color to the conversation, to convey irony, humor, or emotional tone. However, these stylistic intentions can be misinterpreted by

representatives of other cultures. For example, although the English phrase "pull someone's leg" is used in the sense of humor or mockery, people unfamiliar with this phrase may understand it as a real action and misjudge the interlocutor's intention. As a result, simple speech expression creates intercultural conflict or discomfort in communication. This situation shows that, in addition to the linguistic aspect of the language, its pragmatic and cultural level is also extremely important.

The study also observed that English idioms are often misunderstood in an international context - for example, in situations such as foreign students, tourist groups, online professional communication, international conferences. One of the reasons for this is that idiomatic expressions are often not taught independently of the context and their cultural roots are not given sufficient attention. Especially in the process of language learning, idioms in textbooks are often given without explanation or with a simple dictionary translation. This hinders the understanding of their application in real life and their functional load. According to the results of discourse analysis, idioms used, especially in the media of mass culture (mass media) and in oral communication, can be incomprehensible or misinterpreted by representatives of other cultures. For example, phrases like "hit the books" (to read a lot) or "under the weather" (to feel bad) are meaningless in literal translation, and understanding them requires not only knowledge of the language but also awareness of the expressive styles characteristic of English-speaking culture. At the same time, stylistic analysis has shown that some idioms are used in a positive or negative tone depending on the social situation. For example, the phrase "call it a day" when used in a positive connotation means successful completion of work, but in an incorrect context, it can be perceived as a refusal to work. This can lead to misjudgments, misunderstandings, and even interpersonal conflicts in communication.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that idiomatic expressions in English are culturally loaded language units, and their misinterpretation or misunderstanding leads to various misunderstandings in intercultural communication. The research results confirmed that idiomatic expressions directly influence the content of communication not only semantically, but also through their stylistic and pragmatic functions. One of the important conclusions is that they are not directly translated, are connected with cultural connotations, and in some cases can lead to conflict or confusion between the participants of the speech. Also, incorrect perception of idiomatic units is often observed among interlocutors who have good grammatical and lexical knowledge of the language. This necessitates the formation of intercultural competence in the study and teaching of English. The use of idioms in context, their connection with cultural roots, irony, humor, and social relations requires a deeper cultural understanding from the learner. Therefore, it is important to introduce interactive approaches in teaching English by consistently teaching idiomatic expressions, explaining them through real examples of communication, using them in dramatic scenes, film dialogues, or in the context of social networks. This allows language learners not only to master language units, but also to understand their cultural and communicative significance. In future research, the universality and specificity of idioms can be studied more deeply through intercultural comparative analysis in different languages.

LIST OF USED LITERATURE

1. Kövecses, Z. (2002). *Metaphor: A practical introduction*. Oxford University Press.
https://books.google.com/books/about/Metaphor.html?id=npm_Ebota4kC

2. Kövecses, Z. (2024). Metaphorical idioms in Extended CMT. Unpublished manuscript. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381251619_Metaphorical_idioms_in_Extended_CMT
3. Boers, F., & Demecheleer, M. (2001). Measuring the impact of cross-cultural differences on learners' comprehension of imageable idioms. *ELT Journal*, 55(3), 255–262. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1014108.pdf>
4. Shaffer, D. (2005). Teaching idioms with conceptual metaphors and visual representations. *Internet TESL Journal*, 11(9). <https://iteslj.org/Articles/Shaffer-Idioms.html>
5. Gibbs, R. (1997). Metaphor in idiom comprehension. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 37(4), 523–540. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749596X97700261>
6. Littlemore, J. (2003). The effect of cultural background on metaphor interpretation. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 18(4), 273–301. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10926480390255870>
7. Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.scribd.com/document/54589442/Metaphor-in-Culture-by-Kovecses>
8. Boers, F., Eyckmans, J., & Stengers, H. (2004). Remembering figurative idioms by hypothesizing about their origin. *Language Teaching Research*, 8(3), 301–316. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234579254_Remembering_Figurative_Idioms_by_Hypothesizing_About_Their-Origin
9. Soleimani, H., Abusaeedi, R., Kheiri, S., & Karami, M. (2024). Effectiveness of web-based tools in learning idiomatic expressions: A CALL study. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 11(2), 1–18. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370000000_Effectiveness_of_Web-based_Tools_in_Learning_Idiomatic_Expressions