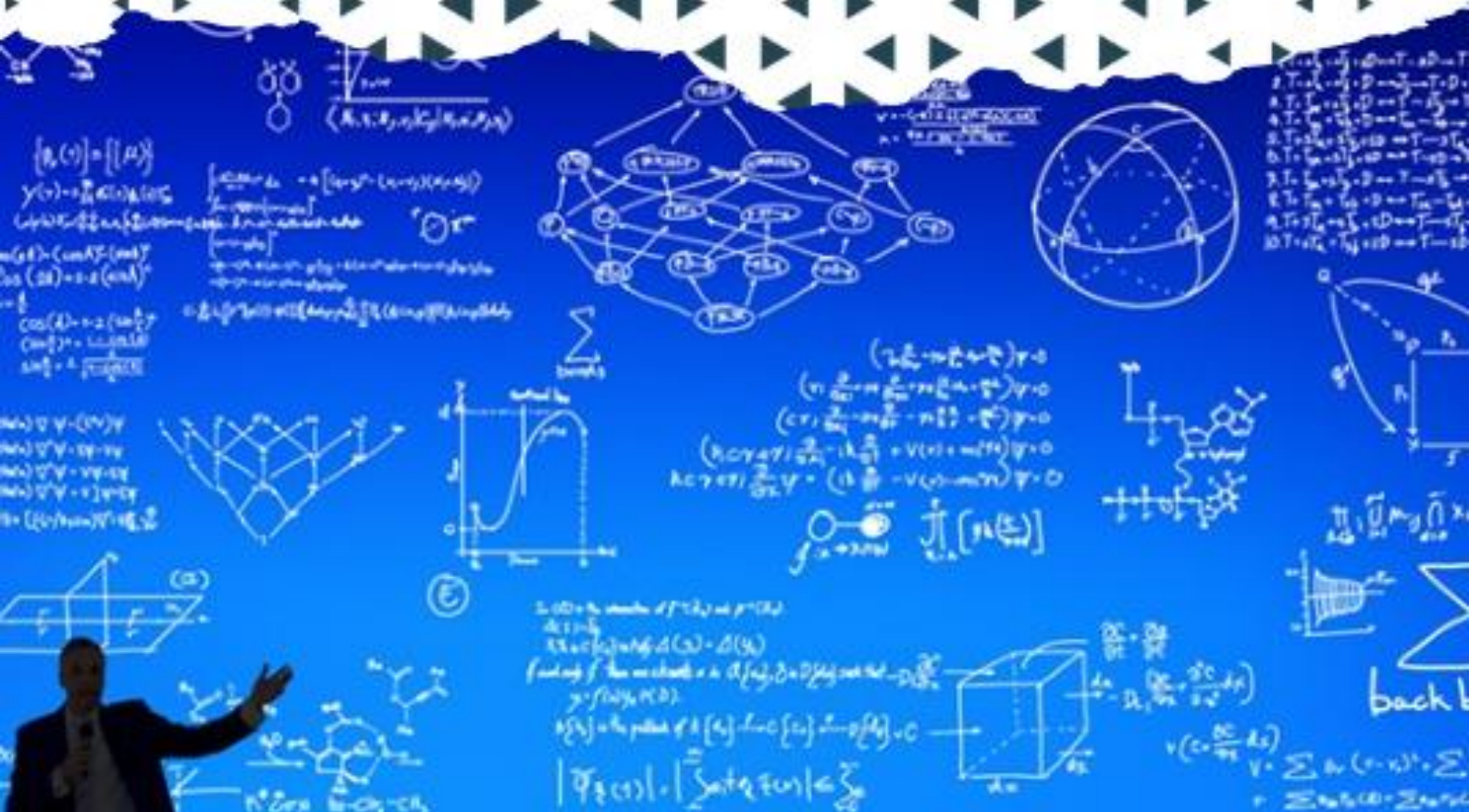




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CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF IDIOMS

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Idioms represent an essential part of any language and reflect the cultural values, traditions, and historical experiences of the people who speak it. The purpose of this study is to explore the similarities and differences between idioms across cultures and languages. The research focuses on comparing idiomatic expressions in English and other languages to identify cultural influences on figurative language. Using qualitative comparative analysis, several idioms related to emotions, behavior, and everyday situations were examined. The findings reveal that while many idioms share universal meanings across cultures, their imagery and metaphorical foundations often differ significantly due to cultural and historical contexts. The results highlight the importance of cultural awareness in language learning and translation. Understanding idioms from a cross-cultural perspective helps learners interpret figurative language more accurately and improves intercultural communication.

Keywords: *idioms, cross-cultural communication, figurative language, language comparison, cultural linguistics.*

Introduction

Language and culture are closely interconnected, and idioms serve as one of the clearest examples of this relationship. Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be understood solely from the literal interpretation of the individual words. Instead, their meanings are shaped by cultural traditions, historical experiences, and shared knowledge within a speech community. Because idioms are deeply rooted in culture, they often present difficulties for language learners and translators who may not be familiar with the cultural background behind the expressions.

The study of idioms across different cultures has become increasingly important in the field of linguistics and language education. As globalization increases interaction between people from diverse cultural backgrounds, the ability to understand figurative language plays a crucial role in successful communication. Misinterpretation of idioms may lead to confusion or misunderstanding, especially in intercultural contexts where speakers rely on literal interpretations of phrases that actually carry metaphorical meanings [9, 49].

Cross-cultural comparison of idioms allows researchers to identify universal patterns in human thinking as well as culturally specific metaphors used in language [6, 184]. Many idioms across languages express similar ideas, such as describing happiness, anger, or success, yet they often use different imagery or symbolic references. For instance, an English idiom may refer to animals, weather, or food, while another language might use references to local traditions or historical events. Such differences demonstrate how language reflects the environment and worldview of its speakers [7, 538].

The aim of this research is to analyze idioms from a cross-cultural perspective and determine how cultural factors influence their formation and meaning. The study focuses on identifying similarities and differences between idioms in English and other languages, examining their metaphorical structures, and evaluating the implications of these findings for language learning and translation studies. By understanding the cultural foundations of idiomatic expressions, language learners can develop a deeper comprehension of both linguistic meaning and cultural context.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative comparative approach to analyze idioms across different languages. The primary objective of the method is to identify similarities and differences in the metaphorical structures and cultural references embedded in idiomatic expressions. Data for the study were collected from dictionaries of idioms, linguistic textbooks, and previously published research on phraseology and cultural linguistics. A selection of commonly used idioms in



English was compiled and then compared with equivalent expressions from other languages such as Uzbek and Russian. The selection criteria for idioms were based on their frequency of use in everyday communication and their relevance to common human experiences such as emotions, success, failure, and social relationships. Approximately thirty idioms were selected for analysis. Each idiom was examined according to three key aspects: literal meaning, figurative meaning, and cultural imagery. The literal meaning refers to the direct interpretation of the words, while the figurative meaning reflects the idiomatic interpretation used by native speakers. Cultural imagery involves the metaphorical elements that represent cultural concepts, symbols, or traditions [1, 85].

The analysis process consisted of several stages. First, idioms with similar meanings across languages were grouped together. Second, the metaphorical images used in each idiom were analyzed to determine whether they were universal or culture-specific. Third, the cultural background of each idiom was examined to identify possible historical, environmental, or social influences on its formation. The comparative analysis allowed for identifying patterns that demonstrate how cultural context shapes figurative language.

Qualitative interpretation was used rather than statistical analysis because the focus of the research was on meaning and cultural symbolism rather than numerical data. This method is commonly used in linguistic studies that explore conceptual metaphors and cultural semantics [8, 197]. By examining idioms within their cultural context, the research provides insights into the relationship between language and culture and highlights the challenges that idioms pose for second language learners and translators.

Results

The analysis revealed both similarities and differences in idiomatic expressions across cultures. One of the most notable findings is that many idioms share similar figurative meanings despite having different literal imagery. For example, the English idiom "to spill the beans," which means to reveal a secret, has equivalents in other languages that express the same idea but use different



metaphorical images. In some languages the concept of revealing a secret may be associated with opening a container or speaking too freely rather than spilling food. This indicates that while the underlying concept is universal, the imagery used to convey it is shaped by cultural context.

Another important result is the frequent use of animals in idiomatic expressions across different languages. Animals often serve as symbolic representations of human characteristics such as laziness, bravery, or cunning. However, the specific animals used may differ depending on cultural familiarity. For example, one culture might associate cleverness with a fox, while another culture might use a different animal that is more prominent in its natural environment. This demonstrates how local geography and folklore influence the creation of idiomatic expressions.

The study also revealed that some idioms have nearly identical structures across languages due to shared historical or cultural influences. This is especially evident in languages that have interacted through trade, literature, or historical contact. Borrowed idioms or translated expressions may appear in multiple languages with only minor differences in wording. Such similarities reflect the process of cultural exchange and linguistic borrowing.

In contrast, some idioms are highly culture-specific and cannot be translated directly without losing their meaning. These idioms often contain references to traditional customs, historical events, or cultural symbols that are unique to a particular society. When such idioms are translated literally, they may confuse learners or fail to convey the intended meaning. Therefore, translators often replace them with equivalent expressions that carry similar meanings in the target language rather than translating them word for word. Overall, the results demonstrate that idioms serve as linguistic reflections of cultural identity while simultaneously revealing common patterns of human thought and experience.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the strong relationship between language, culture, and cognition. Idioms illustrate how speakers conceptualize



abstract ideas through metaphorical imagery derived from everyday experiences and cultural traditions. While many idioms across cultures express similar concepts such as happiness, anger, or secrecy, the images used to represent these concepts vary widely [5, 647]. This variation supports the theory that language is shaped by the cultural environment in which it develops. From a linguistic perspective, cross-cultural comparison of idioms supports the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, which suggests that humans understand abstract ideas through concrete experiences. For example, emotions are often described using physical sensations or natural phenomena. Although the specific metaphors may differ across cultures, the cognitive process underlying them appears to be universal. This explains why similar idioms can exist in different languages even when their literal imagery differs [3, 134].

The results also have important implications for language teaching and learning. Idioms are often difficult for second language learners because their meanings cannot be deduced from the individual words. Without knowledge of the cultural context behind the expression, learners may misunderstand the intended meaning or use the idiom incorrectly. Therefore, language instruction should incorporate cultural explanations alongside vocabulary learning. Teaching idioms through stories, cultural examples, and real-life contexts can help learners understand their figurative meanings more effectively.

In addition, the study highlights the challenges faced by translators working with idiomatic expressions. Direct translation often fails to convey the intended meaning of an idiom because the metaphorical imagery may not exist in the target culture. Translators must therefore identify equivalent expressions that produce a similar effect in the target language. This process requires not only linguistic competence but also deep cultural knowledge [2, 942].

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The number of idioms analyzed was relatively small, and the research focused mainly on a limited set of languages [4, 197]. Future research could expand the analysis to include a wider range of languages and cultural contexts. Quantitative studies could also



examine the frequency and distribution of idioms in different forms of communication such as literature, media, and everyday conversation.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural comparison of idioms demonstrates that idiomatic expressions are not only linguistic units but also important cultural markers that reflect the traditions, values, and worldview of a particular society. Idioms represent the collective experiences of people and often originate from historical events, social practices, and everyday activities that are familiar to members of a specific culture. Through the analysis of idioms across different languages, it becomes evident that figurative language provides insight into how different cultures conceptualize common human experiences such as emotions, relationships, success, and failure. Although idioms may appear unique to each language, many of them share similar underlying meanings, which suggests that human thought processes often follow comparable patterns regardless of cultural background.

The findings of this study reveal that while the meanings of many idioms are universal, the metaphorical images used to express them are often culturally specific. For instance, certain idioms may include references to animals, food, nature, or traditional practices that are significant within a particular culture. These elements make idioms rich sources of cultural information and demonstrate how language is shaped by environmental and social factors. At the same time, the existence of similar idioms across different languages highlights the shared cognitive mechanisms through which people interpret and describe their experiences. This balance between universality and cultural specificity is one of the most interesting aspects of idiomatic language and shows how language functions as both a cultural and communicative tool.

Another important conclusion of this research is the role that idioms play in effective communication and language learning. For second language learners, idioms often represent one of the most challenging aspects of vocabulary acquisition because their meanings cannot be understood through literal



translation. Without proper knowledge of the cultural background and figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions, learners may misinterpret or misuse them in communication. Therefore, it is essential for language teaching to include cultural explanations and contextual examples when introducing idioms. By doing so, educators can help learners develop not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness, which is increasingly important in a globalized world where communication between people from different cultures is common.

The study also emphasizes the significance of idioms in translation and intercultural communication. Translating idioms requires more than simply finding equivalent words in another language; it requires understanding the cultural context in which the idiom is used. In many cases, direct translation may result in expressions that sound unnatural or confusing to speakers of the target language. As a result, translators often rely on functional equivalents or culturally adapted expressions that convey the same meaning even if the literal wording differs. This process demonstrates the complex relationship between language and culture and highlights the importance of cultural competence in translation practices.

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