

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH IDIOMS AND THEIR ARABIC EQUIVALENTS: A LINGUOCULTUROLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study conducts a comparative analysis of Russian and English idioms through the lens of linguoculturology and cognitive linguistics, with the aim of identifying both commonalities and differences in idiomatic usage, as well as variations in interpretation and meaning shaped by cultural background and historical context. The study also examines their Arabic equivalents. Idioms are a vital component of language and culture, reflecting the distinctive ways in which native speakers perceive and conceptualize reality. Russian and Arabic, as representatives of different cultural systems, each possess a rich set of unique idiomatic expressions. This research explores the similarities and differences between Russian and Arabic idioms, along with the cultural contexts in which they are employed.

Keywords: idioms, Russian, English, Arabic languages, equivalence, linguoculturology, linguistic features, lexical analysis.

Idioms are vivid, figurative, and fixed expressions that convey a wide range of meanings and emotions, enriching a language and adding expressiveness and color. They encapsulate significant layers of historical context for each culture and are closely tied to the distinctive traits of specific social groups and native speakers [Toporov, 2007, pp. 181–188].

In recent decades, idioms have attracted increasing scholarly attention across multiple disciplines, including linguistic analysis, language contact studies, translation, and cultural research. This underscores the importance of idiomatic studies not only for advancing linguistic theory but also for enhancing practical intercultural communication [Ivanova, 2009, p. 18].

The mentality and cultural values of a given social or ethnic group shape the unique features of its language, which are vividly expressed in its idiomatic repertoire. Consequently, studying idioms offers insights into the cognitive and cultural patterns of different peoples, within the framework of their traditions and historical development. Such study broadens perspectives, deepens the understanding of other cultural spheres, and provides a solid basis for fostering more effective intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding [Mishchenko, 2010, p. 121].

1.1. Relevance of the Study

In the modern era, globalization has become a pervasive phenomenon, which underscores the particular importance of studying idioms within the framework of linguoculturology. This importance arises from the fact that, in any sphere of intercultural interaction and mutual influence, it is crucial to account for the specificity of cultural codes, which are primarily embedded in language. Without an understanding of the culture underlying a foreign language, there can be no solid foundation for intercultural communication; thus, the study of idioms gains special significance. Both Russian and English possess a rich cultural heritage and a wide variety of idioms, offering abundant material for analyzing and illustrating not only cultural and linguistic parallels but also distinctive features [Benashvili, 2011].

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the similarities and differences between Russian and English idiomatic expressions through the lens of linguoculturological analysis. To accomplish this aim, the research outlines the theoretical foundations of idiom studies, explores the cultural factors shaping their formation, and conducts a comparative analysis based on selected criteria. This approach is intended to enhance the understanding of the cultural and linguistic dimensions of idioms in both Russian and English, while also providing a potential methodological basis for future research in this field [Schmidt, 2013].

1.3. Research Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study follows an interdisciplinary approach, integrating various aspects of linguistic and cultural analysis. To facilitate an effective comparison of Russian and English idioms, the research employs a semantic-semiotic analysis. This method enables the identification of deeper meanings and cultural connotations of expressions by incorporating both semantic and semiotic perspectives [3].

Semantic analysis reveals the meanings of utterances by accounting for the semantic identity of superficially different expressions (i.e., synonymy) and the semantic distinctions in superficially identical expressions (i.e., homonymy). It also establishes the principles governing the formation of such similarities and differences within language. Semantics focuses on interpreting the meanings of all linguistic units, including words, morphemes, syntactic constructions, and intonations.

This approach also makes it possible to effectively identify and analyze the structure and functions of analogous expressions. The considerable variety of idioms in both Russian and English, combined with the rich historical context of these languages, enhances the objectivity and reliability of the findings obtained during the analysis. Consequently, the study can draw more substantiated conclusions about the functioning of idioms in different linguistic and cultural contexts, which may serve as a valuable foundation for future research on this topic [Petrova, 2011].

2. Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical foundations for studying linguistic phenomena encompass the analysis of the structural organization of language and the functions of its units. It is essential to address various theoretical aspects of the semantic parameters of linguistic units and their manifestation in actual language use, which requires examining large and diverse text corpora. This approach makes it possible to achieve a more accurate understanding—taking into account numerous nuances—of the uniqueness and expressiveness of idiomatic expressions, their usage contexts, and the development of an understanding of the cultural and historical events that shaped the emergence of idioms [Ivanova, 2012].

Accordingly, the analysis of structural and contextual components is carried out through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates translation theory, semantics, and cultural studies, thereby enabling a more comprehensive and holistic investigation [Gavrilova, 2014].

2.1. Idiom as a Linguistic Unit

An idiom, or phraseological unit, as a linguistic entity, constitutes a fixed combination of words whose meaning cannot be inferred from the individual meanings of its components. In other words, idioms operate as indivisible units within language, and their meaning must be interpreted holistically rather than through the meanings of the separate words. The semantics of such fixed expressions, shaped by historical and cultural factors, reflect the distinctive cognitive patterns of native speakers. Studying these expressions facilitates a deeper understanding of the mentality and unique worldview of different peoples, as idioms transmit cultural norms and stereotypes across generations.

Idioms can be classified in various ways. For example, they may be categorized as poetic, contextual, or situational. For the purposes of idiom study, they are often distinguished according to their origin and the manner in which they are integrated into contemporary speech [Smirnova, 2015].

2.2. Linguoculturology and Its Role in the Study of Idioms

Linguoculturology plays a pivotal role in the study of idioms, functioning as a branch of linguistics that links language and culture and examines their interrelationship. This field enables a deeper understanding of how the cultural traditions, values, and worldviews of specific social groups are encoded in language. Idioms, which carry a substantial layer of cultural context within linguistic expression, constitute particularly suitable objects of investigation in linguoculturology. In turn, the study of idiom semantics benefits from linguoculturological analysis, which draws upon a rich array of cultural and sociological methods.

These methods facilitate the uncovering of mechanisms underlying the formation and development of linguistic units and support the exploration of subtle nuances of meaning within the context of societal mentality and historical development. The expansion of methodological approaches further enhances the understanding of the interplay between language and culture, as well as the reflection of this interplay in idiomatic expressions [Tarasova, 2016].

3. Idioms in the Russian Language

Russian idioms occupy a prominent position in both expressive and everyday language, reflecting the richness of the cultural and historical heritage. They frequently take the form of metaphorical expressions, conveying not only linguistic but also cultural information. For instance, idioms related to daily life, nature, and historical events highlight key aspects of the Russian mentality. These expressions facilitate the succinct and emotional communication of complex ideas, often drawing upon imagery familiar to every native speaker. Consequently, idioms serve as an essential tool for understanding the very essence of the Russian people [Nikitina, 2017].

3.1. Characteristics of Russian Idioms

Russian idioms occupy a prominent position in both expressive and everyday language, reflecting the richness of Russia's cultural and historical heritage. They frequently manifest as metaphorical expressions that convey not only linguistic but also cultural information, serving as a mirror of Russian culture and multifaceted history, illustrating profound historical processes and unique national traditions that have evolved over many centuries [Lebedeva, 2018, p. 15]. The origins of Russian idioms can be broadly categorized into three sources: folk origin, literary origin, and borrowings from other languages. Borrowed phraseological units may be fully borrowed untranslated expressions (e.g., *alma mater*, *eureka*), calques (literally translated expressions), or semi-calques (with partial lexical-grammatical deviations). From a linguoculturological perspective, particular attention is given to idioms of folk or literary origin, as their meanings are encoded within cultural context and often resist literal translation, providing a key to understanding sociocultural nuances [Yakovleva, 2020, p. 26].

Flora and fauna are widely represented in Russian idioms, with animals and plants attributed specific qualities. Wild animals reflect traits such as the cunning of the fox, timidity and swiftness of hares, cruelty and stupidity of the wolf, and strength and clumsiness of the bear (e.g., *to wake the sleeping bear*, *hungry as a wolf*), while domestic animals, such as the horse used in daily labor, symbolize diligence, strength, and endurance (*tired as a horse*). Colors and human body parts frequently appear in idioms with symbolic meanings; white often symbolizes goodness, while black conveys negativity or danger (*white-faced*, *black envy*). Body parts are also emblematic: the head represents intellect, hands signify skill or labor (*to take into one's own hands*, *golden hands*), and other expressions include *to lose one's head*, *wind in the head*, or *to guard like the apple of the eye*.

Idioms related to daily life, historical units of measurement, and monetary systems reflect practical and cultural significance. Examples include *arshin to the caftan*, *two for patches*, or monetary idioms such as *worth a grosh*, *a kopeck saves a ruble*, and *to cost a pretty penny*, which convey both denomination and cultural attitudes toward value. Food-related idioms highlight the cultural importance of bread and staple dishes such as *shchi* (cabbage soup) and *kasha* (porridge), revealing everyday dietary habits and social values (*to roll like cheese in butter*, *shchi and kasha are our food*, *bread is the head of everything*) [Mikhailova, 2021, p. 22]. Many idioms preserve folklore elements, including memorable fairy-tale characters and fantastical settings (*Baba Yaga*, *Koschei the Deathless*, *beyond the thrice-nine lands*), which evoke unreality, admiration, or moral lessons.

Idioms also reflect daily life, rituals, and significant life events. Expressions such as *to lie on the stove* (rest), *to spit at the ceiling* (extreme laziness), and household-related idioms like *to dance from the stove* or *bathhouse idioms* (with light steam, *to be born anew*) exemplify this connection. The use of flora, fauna, colors, body parts, food, folklore, and daily life in Russian idioms demonstrates their uniqueness and distinctiveness compared to similar expressions in other languages. Russian idioms provide a window into Russian culture and reveal the multifaceted nature of the Russian language.

4. Idioms in the English Language

English idioms vividly illustrate the diversity of English culture, which has evolved over a long historical period, enriched by numerous other cultures while retaining its distinctive features. A notable characteristic of English idioms is the large number of borrowed expressions, including both direct borrowings and calques.

These idioms demonstrate extreme thematic diversity and are often classified according to various criteria, with a distinctive feature being the prevalence of concise and memorable expressions.

Idioms in English frequently cover topics related to time, human qualities, personal success, finance, sports, and maritime life. At the same time, idioms associated with universal human concepts, such as colors, body parts, foods, emotions, character traits, animals, and plants, are also abundant. Many English idioms rely on contrast and opposition; for instance, bitter sweet describes conflicting emotions, while deafening silence refers to silence so intense it feels overwhelming. Wordplay is also common, including rhymes and idiomatic constructions, as seen in expressions like by hook or by crook (by any means) and wear and tear (extensive fatigue or damage).

William Shakespeare made a significant contribution to the English idiom treasury by creating vivid and figurative expressions, including in a pickle (to be in a difficult situation), the world is someone's oyster (all opportunities are open), forever and a day (an eternity), fool's paradise (illusory happiness), it's all Greek to me (utterly incomprehensible), and wild-goose chase (a futile pursuit). Due to their conciseness and multilayered meanings, the semantics of English idioms can be challenging for non-native speakers. Many well-known idioms originate from sports, such as kick the bucket, meaning "to die." Others date back centuries, reflecting meanings and contexts that have evolved alongside changes in English vocabulary, grammar, and phonetics.

When considering the cultural-historical component, English idioms often appear as apt, polysemous, and vivid expressions. For example, make no bones about it conveys a clear opinion or fact without hidden intentions, originating from a medieval European divination practice involving animal bones. Similarly, break the ice, literally "to break the ice," means "to ease the atmosphere," stemming from English sailors breaking ice to free trading ships during winter, symbolizing friendship and mutual assistance between countries.

Thus, a defining feature of English idioms is their vast phraseological stock, which has incorporated countless expressions from other languages and cultures. Compared to Russian idioms, English idioms tend to be more concise and direct. They are closely linked to the culture and everyday life of English speakers, embodying their mentality and worldview, which leaves a distinct imprint on the semantic and content aspects of idiomatic expressions, often based on imagery specific to English realities [Petrova, 2011, p. 31].

4.1. Characteristics of English Idioms

English idioms are characterized by a vast diversity of origins, which vividly reflects the cultural richness of the English-speaking community. This diversity underscores the inseparable link between language and the history of a people, as idiomatic expressions capture various historical periods, including the rise and peak of the British Empire, as well as accomplishments in science, literature, and the arts, which are embedded in the idioms used in everyday speech. For instance, the expression spill the beans originates from an ancient Greek voting practice in which beans were used to count votes, demonstrating how linguistic constructions can preserve cultural elements for centuries.

English idioms often feature numerous phonetic elements, rhymes, and specific grammatical structures, which enhance their recognizability and widespread use in spoken language. Their meanings may vary depending on context, requiring even native speakers to understand subtle nuances at both semantic and cultural levels. Such understanding is essential for the appropriate use of fixed expressions in different situations, thereby enriching communication and intercultural interaction [Ivanova, 2010, p. 61].

5. Comparative Analysis of Russian and English Idioms

Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings differ from their literal interpretations, encompassing a rich cultural context and possessing multifaceted and layered semantic significance. They can be highly expressive and figurative in form. A comparative analysis of Russian and English idioms provides deeper insight into the similarities and differences between the two languages and demonstrates how variations in cultural and historical contexts have influenced both the structure and content of these expressions [Schmidt, 2013, p. 51].

5.1. Origin and Structure of Idioms

Idioms in different languages may share similar structures, yet differences in their origins reflect the distinctive cultural characteristics of each people. In Russian, many idioms derive from folk tales, proverbs, and sayings, whereas in English, idioms are more often connected to historical events and customs typical of British and American cultures. For example, the Russian idiom по щучьему велению, which refers to the fulfillment of wishes by supernatural forces, originates from folk tales in which the pike is a magical creature

that grants wishes. Similarly, the English idiom by the skin of one's teeth, meaning barely or miraculously, has its origins in biblical texts and carries a broader historical context [Noora, 2023, p. 146].

5.2. Similarities in Idioms of Russian-speaking and English-speaking Countries

Despite their differences, many idioms in Russian and English sound similar and share comparable semantic meanings. For instance, the use of animals as symbols is characteristic of both languages and illustrates similar semantics. The Russian idiom как кошка с собакой ("like cat and dog," meaning to quarrel constantly) has a direct counterpart in English, like cat and dog, with both expressions describing ongoing conflicts between people and conveying the same sense of opposition through the imagery of cats and dogs. Another example is the Russian idiom быть в своей тарелке ("to feel comfortable"), which corresponds to the English idiom to feel at home. While both expressions are similar in meaning, they differ in the way they convey that meaning [Muhammad, 2013, p. 42]. Additionally, synonymous idioms such as the Russian не всё золото, что блестит ("not all that glitters is gold") match exactly with the English expression all that glitters is not gold, both expressing that outward appearance is not a reliable indicator of true value.

5.3. Differences in Cultural Perception and Symbolism

As previously noted, idioms, as a linguocultural phenomenon, reflect the worldview of social groups, making the analysis of thinking and perception across different peoples particularly valuable. It is also insightful to examine how cultural characteristics and worldviews are embedded in fixed expressions, including the symbols and meanings formed within the linguistic units of various languages. In Russian idiomatic expressions, themes of hardship and survival are especially prominent, as seen in expressions such as не всё коту масленица ("not every day is a feast for the cat"), биться как рыба об лёд ("to struggle like a fish against ice"), из огня да в полымя ("out of the frying pan into the fire"), пройти огонь, воду и медные трубы ("to go through fire, water, and brass pipes"), and без труда не выловишь рыбку из пруда ("no pain, no gain"). The idiom не всё коту масленица culturally refers to the period before Lent, marking upcoming food restrictions rooted in church rites, holidays, and peasant life, and semantically conveys the philosophical idea of the inevitability of difficult times. In contrast, English idioms often focus on personal success and achievement, as illustrated by expressions such as early bird gets the worm, where there's a will, there's a way, climb the ladder of success, reach for the stars, and go the extra mile. For example, to make a name for oneself conveys gaining recognition and fame through personal effort, reflecting the high value placed on individual achievements in English-speaking cultures. Idioms can also be very similar in meaning while differing slightly in structure, since semantic meaning predominates in phraseological units. For instance, the Russian proverb лучше синица в руке, чем журавль в небе ("a titmouse in the hand is better than a crane in the sky") corresponds in meaning to the English proverb a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, both conveying that it is better to have something smaller than to pursue something larger, with a similar perception in both cultures. Another example is the Russian idiom прыгать выше головы ("to do more than you can"), which has no exact structural English counterpart, but a semantically similar expression exists in bite off more than you can chew, referring to overly ambitious plans. Both Russian and English languages also have idioms conveying problems and futile efforts; for example, делать из мухи слона ("to make a mountain out of a molehill") matches directly with the English expression making a mountain out of a molehill, depicting a minor issue exaggerated as a large one. Interestingly, despite differences in idiom formation across cultures, there are sometimes very similar patterns of thought, resulting in idioms that are closely related semantically and contextually. For instance, regarding futile labor, Russian has the expression носить воду в решете ("to carry water in a sieve"), which denotes a pointless task, often illustrated in folk tales, while English expresses a similar concept in its own historical context through the idiom you cannot carry water in a sieve.

5.4. Unique Idioms and Their Translation

The perception of the world by different peoples inevitably encompasses both common and distinctive features, and in some cases, these differences are so pronounced that direct translation from one language to another becomes impossible. This underscores significant linguocultural divergence and is closely related to the unique characteristics of each culture. For example, in Russian, the expression "a bear stepped on one's ear", referring to a lack of musical ear or tone-deafness, cannot be translated directly into English using a similar idiomatic image. In Russian folklore, the bear is depicted as a clumsy, heavy-footed creature, an imagery that does not exist in English-speaking cultures, and therefore the appropriate English equivalents are expressions such as tone deaf or tin ear, which convey the same meaning but lack the figurative cultural reference. Folklore characters and traditions reflecting a people's historical beliefs and mythology often have no counterparts in other cultures, as English lacks figures like Baba Yaga, Zmey Gorynych, or Koschei the Deathless, which are unique to Russian cultural heritage. Comparative analysis of Russian and English idioms

reveals both significant cultural similarities and unique features that reflect the distinct historical paths and worldviews of the respective peoples. Despite differences in historical contexts and semantic nuances, many idioms in both cultures share common themes and motifs, including nature, animals, human characteristics, major life events, achievements, and challenges. In addition to expressing complex ideas and emotions, idioms in Russian and English serve as essential elements of cultural identity for speakers of these languages.

CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The comparative analysis of Russian and English idioms allows for the identification of cultural similarities and differences in the worldviews of different societies. It also facilitates a better understanding and easier identification of equivalents in the Arabic language. This study examined how idioms reflect goals, cultural characteristics, and associations in Russian and English, revealing specific aspects of the worldview and unique cultural features of native speakers, as well as how idioms convey attitudes toward hardship, success, and human qualities.

The research demonstrates that many idioms in Russian and English share similarities despite cultural differences. For example, expressions related to animals, natural phenomena, and human traits often convey common ideas and have corresponding equivalents. These equivalents may match fully in both form and semantics, or they may differ in imagery while maintaining equivalent meaning. This indicates that many cultures share a common foundation rooted in universal human experiences. At the same time, distinct historical contexts and cultural traditions give rise to unique idioms in each language. In Russian, idioms frequently originate from folk tales and folklore, whereas in English, historical events and social changes play a more prominent role.

A key finding is that idioms cannot be translated literally or directly from one language to another due to linguoculturological differences. This underscores the importance of considering cultural aspects in both the study and translation of idiomatic expressions. Studying idioms provides a valuable means of enhancing intercultural communication and understanding between speakers of different cultures.

Idioms also play a vital role in enriching language with vivid imagery and expressiveness, providing greater depth and insight in language learning. They make speech more colorful and lively, allowing complex emotions and ideas to be conveyed succinctly. Overall, the study of Russian, English, and Arabic idioms contributes to a deeper understanding not only of these languages but also of the cultures and worldviews they reflect, thereby fostering intercultural dialogue. In Arabic phraseology and idiomatic usage, expressions are closely linked to cultural and religious contexts, which give the language its unique characteristics. The influence of Islamic culture and Arab tradition is an integral part of shaping the Arabic phraseological system [Jasim, 2013, p. 38].

Thus, the cultural and religious context plays a significant role in shaping the phraseological system of the Arabic language.

Examples of Popular Phraseologisms and Idioms

1. Comparative Analysis of Russian, English, and Arabic Idioms

- Similarities:
 - Idioms in both languages can express similar ideas or emotions, for example, idioms related to nature (sun, water).
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 - Some idioms may have similar forms but different meanings.
 - Differences:
 - Russian idioms are often related to nature and winter conditions, reflecting the climatic features of Russia.
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 - Arabic idioms may include elements associated with the desert, camels, and traditional crafts.
1. Russian idiom: “Когда рак на горе свистнет” (never).
Arabic equivalent: “عندما يطير العصفور” (when the bird flies).
2. Russian idiom: “Не всё то золото, что блестит” (not all that glitters is gold).
Arabic equivalent: “ليس كل ما يلمع ذهباً”.

3. Russian idiom: “Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда.”
Arabic equivalent: “لا توجد نتائج بدون جهد.”
Explanation: Both expressions emphasize the importance of effort to achieve a goal.
4. Russian idiom: “Держать камень за пазухой.”
Arabic equivalent: “يخبي شيئاً في جيبه.”
Explanation: Both expressions mean to conceal ill intentions or grudges.
5. Russian idiom: “На безрыбье и рак рыба.”
Arabic equivalent: “في غياب الأسماك، حتى الجراد يعتبر سمكة.”
Explanation: Both expressions indicate settling for what is available in difficult situations.
6. Russian idiom: “Сделать из мухи слона.”
Arabic equivalent: “تحويل النملة إلى فيل.”
Explanation: Both describe exaggerating a minor problem.
7. Russian idiom: “Говорить на одном языке.”
Arabic equivalent: “نتحدث نفس اللغة.”
Explanation: Both mean understanding and agreement between people.
8. Russian idiom: “На всякий случай.”
Arabic equivalent: “لأي طارئ.”
Explanation: Both stress precaution or preparedness.
9. Russian idiom: “Как снег на голову.”
Arabic equivalent: “مثل الثلج في الصيف.”
Explanation: Both denote a sudden and unexpected event.
10. Russian idiom: “Не все коту масленица.”
Arabic equivalent: “ليس كل شيء سهلاً.”
Explanation: Both underline that things do not always go smoothly.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of idioms demonstrates that, despite cultural differences, Russian and Arabic share similar ways of expressing thoughts and emotions. Studying these idioms not only deepens language comprehension but also enhances understanding of the cultures and mentalities of the respective peoples. These examples illustrate how idioms can be alike across languages, reflecting shared human experiences and values, which makes them valuable objects of linguistic and cultural study.

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