



Comparative Study of Phraseological Units in Spanish and Uzbek: Semantic and Cultural Aspects

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Abstract: This paper explores the comparative phraseological systems of the Spanish and Uzbek languages through the lens of cultural semantics. The study highlights the linguistic, national, and cultural specificity of idioms and fixed expressions, revealing how metaphorical and symbolic structures reflect the worldview, values, and traditions of the respective language communities. Special attention is given to color-based idioms, zoomorphic and somatic phraseologisms, and their symbolic meanings. The research emphasizes both universal tendencies and culturally bound differences in figurative language, contributing to cross-linguistic understanding and phraseological theory.

Keywords: phraseology, idioms, Spanish language, Uzbek language, culture, semantics, metaphor, symbolic meaning, color expressions

Phraseological units, as fixed and semantically complex expressions, are a fundamental part of every language's lexicon. They function as a reflection of the cognitive, emotional, and cultural experience of a nation. The present study is devoted to a comparative analysis of Spanish and Uzbek phraseological units, examining their structure, meaning, and cultural connotations, with a special focus on how these expressions reflect national mentality and world perception. The goal is to identify both universal tendencies and culture-specific characteristics in the phraseological systems of these two linguistically and historically distinct languages.

Phraseological expressions in both Spanish and Uzbek exhibit a high level of metaphorical imagery. Despite typological differences—Spanish being a Romance, inflectional language and Uzbek a Turkic, agglutinative one—both languages show rich inventories of idiomatic expressions that are used in everyday speech, literature, media, and folklore. They are often difficult to translate directly, since their figurative meanings are deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and symbolic contexts.

One of the major areas of convergence between the two languages is the use of metaphor and metonymy in building idiomatic expressions. In both languages, phraseological units commonly express emotional states, social behaviors, moral



evaluations, and traditional norms. For example, emotional states are expressed with colorful metaphors: *tener mariposas en el estómago* ('to have butterflies in the stomach') in Spanish describes nervousness or being in love, which finds a near equivalent in Uzbek as *ko'ngli g'ashlik qilmoq* ('to have a burdened heart'), even if not metaphorically identical. Uzbek idioms tend to focus more on the heart (*ko'ngil*, *yurak*) as a symbol of emotion, while Spanish uses the stomach, heart, or head interchangeably.

Color-based phraseologisms are especially valuable for comparative analysis. In both Spanish and Uzbek, color terms have deep symbolic meaning. White (*blanco / oq*) is generally associated with purity, honesty, or peace. For instance, the Spanish idiom *tener la conciencia blanca* ('to have a white conscience') denotes moral clarity, while the Uzbek *oq niyat* ('white intention') expresses sincere, good intentions. Black (*negro / qora*), on the other hand, represents misfortune, grief, or evil: *verlo todo negro* ('to see everything black') in Spanish and *qora kunlar* ('black days') in Uzbek both denote hopelessness and sadness.

Red color idioms show interesting divergences. In Spanish, *ponerse rojo* ('to turn red') means to blush due to embarrassment or anger, while in Uzbek *qizil ko'z bilan qaramoq* ('to look with red eyes') conveys intense anger or rage. The red color in Uzbek also has socio-political connotations, especially inherited from the Soviet era, where *qizil bayroq* ('red flag') had ideological meaning. In Spanish, *rojo* may also mean communist in political discourse. Therefore, the interpretation of color idioms is not only metaphorical but also shaped by historical and socio-political experience.

Zoomorphic phraseologisms—idioms based on animal behavior—also reveal the way each culture encodes animal symbolism. Spanish expressions like *llorar lágrimas de cocodrilo* ('to cry crocodile tears') describe false emotions or insincerity. The Uzbek equivalent, though not based on the crocodile image, is *yolg'on yig'i qilmoq* ('to cry falsely'), indicating a similar semantic field but a lack of the same metaphorical animal image. On the other hand, Uzbek has the idiom *bo'ri yurib, izini yashiradi* ('the wolf walks and hides its trail'), implying secrecy or cunningness, which does not have a direct equivalent in Spanish but may resemble idioms like *ser más listo que un zorro* ('to be smarter than a fox'), again showing cross-cultural parallels in animal symbolism.

Body-part (somatic) idioms are another rich source of comparison. In Spanish, *meter la pata* ('to put one's foot in it') means to make a blunder, and in Uzbek a similar idea is expressed as *xato qilmoq* ('to make a mistake') or idiomatically *pishib*



yetilmagan gap aytmoq ('to say an unripe word'). Spanish tends to use more vivid physical metaphors, while Uzbek phraseology, although it includes bodily imagery (tili uzun bo'lmoq — 'to have a long tongue', i.e., to gossip), sometimes leans toward more abstract forms. Nevertheless, the somatic metaphor remains a universal principle of figurative thinking across both cultures.

A particularly interesting category of idioms involves moral and ethical judgments. Spanish idioms such as dar la cara ('to face the consequences') emphasize personal responsibility and honesty. In Uzbek, javobgarlikni bo'yniga olmoq ('to take the responsibility upon one's neck') provides a parallel image of accepting responsibility, reflecting the cultural importance of honor and dignity. Both languages show a strong reliance on metaphorical conceptualizations of the body, space, and social hierarchy to express values.

Proverbial expressions often overlap with phraseology and are strongly rooted in cultural worldview. For example, Al mal tiempo, buena cara ('Put on a good face in bad times') and the Uzbek Boshga tushgan — bardoshli bo'ladi ('One endures what befalls them') both promote endurance and optimism. Yet, cultural nuances can change the tone: Spanish proverbs often take a humorous or ironic form, while Uzbek proverbs are more didactic and moralizing, often tied to Islamic ethical principles or nomadic traditions.

Structurally, Spanish idioms tend to be syntactically fixed expressions, often with verb-preposition structures, while Uzbek idioms are formed from verb phrases, nominal constructions, or postpositional phrases. For example, estar en las nubes ('to be in the clouds') in Spanish has a parallel in Uzbek as xayol surmoq ('to dream or fantasize'), although the syntactic form is not identical. Nevertheless, both languages use spatial imagery to describe cognitive or emotional states.

The diachronic analysis of idioms in both languages reveals how historical layers influence current usage. Spanish idioms bear the imprint of Latin, Arabic, and indigenous Iberian influences, while Uzbek idioms are shaped by Persian, Arabic, Russian, and Turkic heritage. For example, many Uzbek religious idioms derive from Islamic sources: halol yeb, halol topmoq ('to earn and eat honestly') echoes Quranic ethical guidance. Similarly, Spanish idioms such as Dios aprieta pero no ahoga ('God squeezes but does not strangle') reflect Catholic theology and medieval Spanish religious culture. These idioms highlight how phraseology can serve as a record of historical and religious experience embedded in everyday speech.

Phraseological creativity is another area of comparative interest. Both languages demonstrate productivity in modifying idioms for humorous or rhetorical



effect. In modern Spanish media, idioms are often intentionally altered for irony or parody, while in contemporary Uzbek public discourse, idioms are reshaped in social media and youth slang, blending traditional forms with modern expressions. The stability and adaptability of idioms thus reflect their deep integration into the linguistic system and social consciousness.

Methodologically, this study was conducted by collecting over 500 idiomatic expressions from both languages, classified into thematic groups: color-based idioms, animal-based idioms, somatic idioms, social and moral idioms, and weather/nature-based idioms. Data were sourced from monolingual phraseological dictionaries, parallel corpora, and authentic literary texts from both classical and modern authors. For Spanish, works by Cervantes, García Márquez, and contemporary journalistic materials were analyzed. For Uzbek, texts by Abdulla Qodiriy, O'tkir Hoshimov, and modern writers were considered. The semantic equivalence, metaphorical structure, and cultural implication of each expression were analyzed to determine the degree of overlap and divergence.

The findings of the research indicate that despite significant typological and cultural differences, Spanish and Uzbek phraseologies are governed by similar cognitive mechanisms—especially in metaphorization, symbolic coding, and emotional evaluation. At the same time, the cultural and historical specificity of each language contributes to the unique flavor of their idiomatic expression. Cultural codes, values, historical background, and religious influence are all embedded in the idiomatic structures of each language.

In practical terms, this study has implications for language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Awareness of phraseological differences and similarities can improve translation accuracy, help avoid cultural misunderstandings, and enrich foreign language learning by introducing learners to culturally grounded language practices. For instance, a literal translation of *llover a cántaros* ('to rain from jugs') into Uzbek would cause confusion unless the equivalent expression *tovuq bo'kadigan yomg'ir yog'di* ('it rained so much even chickens drowned') is known. This emphasizes the need for phraseological competence alongside grammatical and lexical skills in bilingual communication.

In conclusion, the phraseological systems of Spanish and Uzbek offer a fascinating field for comparative linguistic and cultural study. Phraseological units serve not only as linguistic tools but as carriers of collective memory, ethical norms, emotional expression, and cultural identity. The comparative approach reveals both universal human experience and the rich diversity of cultural expression, reminding



us that language is not only a means of communication, but also a repository of shared and unique human perception.

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