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Somatic Phraseology in Russian and Uzbek: A Contrastive and Linguocultural Analysis

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Abstract

*The article offers a contrastive description of somatic phraseology in Russian and Uzbek. Idioms built on the components head, heart, hand, eye and tongue are classified according to four degrees of interlingual correspondence: full equivalence, partial equivalence with a shift of image, functional equivalence with a different somatic base, and zero equivalence. The analysis shows that the two languages differ less in the inventory of body parts they exploit than in the way these parts are distributed across semantic fields. Russian assigns emotional and moral evaluation predominantly to *dusha* and *serdtse*, whereas Uzbek concentrates the same field around *ko'ngil* and *yurak*, and uses *qo'l* and *ko'z* far more widely for social and ethical assessment. Consequences for the teaching of Russian to Uzbek-speaking students and for translation practice are formulated.*

Key Words: comparative linguistics, cultural connotation, equivalence, idiom, interference, phraseological unit, somatism, translation.

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Introduction

Phraseological units built on the names of body parts constitute one of the oldest and most stable layers of any lexicon. Because the human body is a universal object of experience, somatic idioms are frequently cited as evidence for the cognitive unity of languages. At the same time, the ways in which particular organs are recruited to express emotion, character, social status or moral judgement differ considerably, and these differences are culturally motivated rather than accidental. A contrastive study of somatisms therefore offers a convenient testing ground for the general question of how far figurative language is universal and how far it is culture-specific.

Russian and Uzbek are structurally unrelated: the former is a fusional Indo-European language, the latter an agglutinative Turkic one. They have nevertheless been in intensive contact for more than a century, and Russian is studied in Uzbekistan both as a language of general communication and as a language of professional instruction. In this situation, somatic idioms become a practical problem as well as a theoretical one: learners transfer the imagery of their first language into the second, producing expressions that are grammatically correct but idiomatically impossible. The present article describes the systematic sources of such transfer.

The aim of the study is to establish the types of correspondence between Russian and Uzbek somatic phraseology and to explain the observed asymmetries in terms of the different distribution of evaluative meaning across body-part names. The material comprises idioms containing the components *golova* / *bosh* (head), *serdtse* / *yurak* (heart), *ruka* / *qo'l* (hand, arm), *glaz* / *ko'z* (eye) and *yazyk* / *til* (tongue), together with the Russian *dusha* and the Uzbek *ko'ngil*, which behave as functional counterparts in a large number of contexts.

Materials and Methods

The units analysed were drawn from general and phraseological dictionaries of the two languages and from textbooks of Russian used in Uzbek-medium higher education. Only fixed, reproducible units with a non-compositional meaning were retained; free collocations and occasional metaphors were excluded. The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, each Russian unit is described in terms of its somatic component, its literal image and its idiomatic meaning. Second, an Uzbek unit expressing the same idiomatic meaning is identified, irrespective of whether it uses the same somatic component. Third, the pair is assigned to one of four correspondence types.

The four types are defined as follows. Full equivalence obtains when the two languages use the same body part, the same image and the same meaning. Partial equivalence obtains when the meaning coincides but the image is modified, for example by a different attribute or a different verb. Functional equivalence

obtains when the meaning coincides but the somatic base differs. Zero equivalence obtains when a unit has no idiomatic counterpart and must be rendered descriptively. The classification is qualitative; no claim is made about the relative frequency of the types in running text.

Results and Discussion

Full equivalence is comparatively rare and is concentrated in units that describe elementary physical or social gestures. Russian *polozha ruku na serdtse* and Uzbek *qo'lni ko'ksiga qo'yib* both denote sincerity through the same ritual gesture, and both are used as parenthetical markers of truthfulness. Russian *ot vsego serdtsa* and Uzbek *chin yurakdan* share the image of the heart as the seat of authentic feeling. Units of this type present no learning difficulty and are useful as an entry point in teaching, precisely because they confirm the learner's expectations.

Partial equivalence is the largest group. Russian *golova idyot krugom* and Uzbek *boshi aylanmoq* both locate confusion in the head, but the Russian construction lexicalises circular motion of the surroundings while the Uzbek one lexicalises the rotation of the head itself; the difference is small yet sufficient to generate calques. Russian *zolotye ruki* and Uzbek *qo'li gul* both praise manual skill, but the Russian evaluative attribute is a metal and the Uzbek one a flower, so that the connotation shifts from value to beauty. Russian *shirokaya dusha* and Uzbek *ko'ngli keng* agree in meaning but not in the noun that carries it.

Functional equivalence is the most instructive group, because it reveals the different organisation of the evaluative field. Uzbek uses *qo'l* productively for moral and social characterisation: *qo'li ochiq* denotes generosity, *qo'li egri* denotes a propensity to theft, *qo'li kalta* denotes an inability to act because of a lack of means. Russian expresses the same three meanings through different bases: *shchedraya ruka* retains the hand, but *chist na ruku* is negated rather than affirmed, and the sense of powerlessness is rendered by *ruki korotki* only in the marked register of threat. Conversely, Russian assigns a large share of emotional evaluation to *dusha*, which has no direct Uzbek counterpart: *dusha ne lezhit*, *kamen s dushi*, *dusha v pyatki ushla* are rendered in Uzbek through *ko'ngil* and *yurak* or through non-somatic constructions.

The eye behaves differently in the two systems. Uzbek *ko'z* is heavily used in the field of desire, envy and the evil eye: *ko'zi to'ymas* characterises insatiability, *ko'z tegmoq* denotes harm caused by an envious glance. Russian has a formally comparable unit, *sglazit*, but it is derived from the verb and does not participate in a productive series; the Russian eye idioms cluster instead around perception and emotional display, as in *glaza razbegayutsya* or *glaza na mokrom meste*. This asymmetry is not a lexical accident: it reflects the continued cultural salience of the evil-eye concept in the

Uzbek-speaking community and its residual, largely folkloric status in modern Russian usage.

The tongue is the most convergent of the components examined. Both languages treat it as the organ of indiscretion and of eloquence: Russian *yazyk bez kostey* and *dlinnyy yazyk* correspond closely to Uzbek *tili uzun*, while Russian *yazyk ne povorachivaetsya* corresponds to Uzbek *tili bormaydi*. The convergence is plausibly explained by the fact that speech is evaluated in similar terms in most speech communities, so that the metaphorical mapping from organ to behaviour is highly constrained.

Zero equivalence occurs mainly with units that encode culture-specific situations. Russian *povesit nos*, whose image is a lowered nose, has no somatic counterpart in Uzbek and is normally rendered by a verb of mood. Uzbek *yuzi yo'q*, literally he has no face, denotes shamelessness within a system in which *yuz* functions as a marker of social honour; the Russian translation requires either a descriptive phrase or a non-somatic idiom such as *poteryat sovest*, which shifts the moral category from public face to inner conscience.

Three pedagogical consequences follow. First, somatic idioms should be introduced in contrastive pairs rather than in alphabetical lists, so that the learner encounters the difference in image at the moment of acquisition. Second, the productive series of the first language must be made explicit, since it is the series, not the individual unit, that is transferred: a student who knows *qo'li ochiq*, *qo'li egri* and *qo'li kalta* will tend to construct a parallel Russian series with *ruka*. Third, the

grammatical behaviour of the Russian unit needs to be taught together with its meaning, because Russian idioms impose case government and aspectual restrictions that have no counterpart in the Uzbek original.

For translation, the analysis suggests a simple procedure. The translator first determines whether the source unit belongs to a productive series or stands alone; series members can usually be rendered by a corresponding series member, whereas isolated units require a search for functional equivalents. Only when no functional equivalent is available is descriptive translation justified, and in that case the evaluative charge of the original, rather than its image, must be preserved.

Conclusion

Russian and Uzbek somatic phraseology draw on the same inventory of body parts but distribute evaluative meaning across that inventory in different ways. Full equivalence is restricted to units grounded in shared gestures; the bulk of the material shows partial or functional equivalence, and the residue of zero equivalence is concentrated in culturally specific concepts such as the evil eye and public face. The practical value of the four-way classification lies in its predictive force: it identifies in advance the points at which interference is likely and therefore where contrastive presentation is required. Further work should extend the description to units with the components *oyoq* / *noga* and *bo'yin* / *sheya*, and should test the proposed typology against learner corpora.

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