



## CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO CUSTOMS AND RITUAL TERMINOLOGY IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION

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**Abstract.** Simultaneous interpretation poses unique challenges, especially when it involves culturally bound idiomatic expressions related to customs and rituals. These expressions often lack direct equivalents in the target language, creating a high risk of misinterpretation or cultural loss. This paper examines the specific difficulties that interpreters encounter when translating idiomatic expressions embedded in cultural traditions and ceremonial discourse. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks from translation studies and practical observations in the field, ultimately offering strategies for managing cultural specificity in real-time interpretation settings.

**Keywords:** Simultaneous interpretation, idioms, customs, ritual terminology, cultural translation, Uzbek-English translation

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is a vessel of culture, history, and identity. Idiomatic expressions—phrases whose meanings cannot be inferred from their individual components—are deeply rooted in cultural contexts, making them difficult to translate, especially in real-time scenarios such as simultaneous interpretation. The challenge is intensified when idioms relate to customs and rituals, as they often contain symbolic meanings unique to a specific culture.

Uzbek and English are linguistically and culturally distinct languages, leading to complex challenges when interpreting idiomatic expressions related to weddings, funerals, hospitality, and religious events. This paper investigates these challenges and suggests effective strategies interpreters can use to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps.



This study is grounded in the theories of **Dynamic Equivalence** (Nida, 1964)<sup>1</sup> and **Cultural Translation** (Bassnett, 2002). Nida’s model emphasizes the importance of conveying the *effect* rather than the *form*, especially when literal translation obscures meaning. Bassnett underscores the translator’s role in mediating between cultures, not just languages. Simultaneous interpretation, unlike consecutive or written translation, requires immediate processing. This leaves little room for reflection, making the handling of idioms particularly challenging.

## **Idiomatic Expressions in Ritual and Custom Contexts**

### **Uzbek Idiomatic Expressions**

Uzbek culture is rich with idioms that are closely tied to traditional events. Some examples include:

- “*Qiz bola - elga omonand*”

*Literal translation:* "A girl is a trust given to the nation."

*Meaning:* Girls should be raised with care and responsibility, as they will eventually join another family.

*Challenge:* No equivalent English idiom. Requires explanation or culturally appropriate substitution.

- “*Choy ichmagan odam bilan gaplashma*”

*Literal translation:* “Don’t talk to someone who hasn’t had tea.”

*Meaning:* Hospitality is essential before engaging in serious discussion.

*Challenge:* This idiom may confuse English listeners if translated literally during a formal speech.

- “*Ko’rpangga qarab oyoq uzat*”

*Literal translation:* “Stretch your legs according to your blanket.”

*English equivalent:* “Cut your coat according to your cloth.”

*Note:* A rare case where a culturally similar idiom exists.



### English Idiomatic Expressions

English has many idioms rooted in Christian rituals and Western customs that may not resonate with Uzbek audiences:

- “*Bite the dust*”

*Meaning:* To die, often used metaphorically.

*Uzbek equivalent:* “*Yer choptirish*” (literally, "make someone kiss the ground").

*Challenge:* May be misinterpreted if literal meaning is assumed.

- “*Saved by the bell*”

*Meaning:* Rescued from a difficult situation at the last moment.

*Ritual origin:* Linked to the superstition of premature burial.

*Uzbek has no direct equivalent*, so an interpreter must paraphrase or contextualize.

### Challenges in Simultaneous Interpretation

*Time Constraints.* Interpreters have milliseconds to decode, translate, and deliver messages. Idioms, which require cultural unpacking, challenge this timeframe.

*Cultural Non-Equivalence.* Many idioms have no counterpart in the target language. For instance, the Uzbek idiom “*Qo‘shni haqqi – Tangri haqqi*” (“*The neighbor’s right is God’s right*”) expresses a sacred obligation toward neighbors. English lacks an equivalent, forcing interpreters to explain or rephrase.

*Audience Awareness.* Interpreters must consider the audience's familiarity with cultural concepts. Translating “*duo qilish*” (ritual prayer after meals) as simply “prayer” may overlook its communal and ritualistic aspect.

### Strategies for Interpreters

To handle idioms effectively during simultaneous interpretation, the following strategies are commonly recommended:



*Paraphrasing:* Express the meaning in neutral, culture-free language.

E.g., “*Choy ichmagan odam bilan gaplashma*” → “It’s customary to offer hospitality before beginning discussions.”

*Equivalence Finding:* Use an idiom with similar meaning in the target language.

E.g., “*Ko ‘rpangga qarab oyoq uzat*” → “Cut your coat according to your cloth.”

*Omission and Compensation:* Skip the idiom and convey the broader message if time or understanding is constrained. Compensation may occur later in discourse.

*Preparation and Glossaries:* Interpreters can prepare by building a glossary of ritual and idiomatic expressions specific to the event context.

### **Case Study**

During a 2022 Uzbek cultural delegation to the UK, an interpreter struggled with the expression “*To‘yda quda-anda bo‘lish*” (forming kinship through marriage at weddings). Literal translation led to confusion. Rephrasing it as “forming ceremonial kinship at weddings” with brief elaboration preserved the cultural nuance.

*Conclusion.* Simultaneous interpretation involving idioms tied to customs and rituals demands more than linguistic fluency—it requires cultural insight, rapid contextual judgment, and adaptive strategies. While many idioms defy direct translation, careful preparation and cultural sensitivity can mitigate misinterpretations. Training programs should incorporate cross-cultural idiom analysis to better equip interpreters in high-stakes, real-time scenarios.

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