

**PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AS CULTURAL MARKERS:
CHALLENGES OF CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH-
UKRAINIAN AUDIOVISUAL CONTENT**

In the modern globalized world, audiovisual products - such as series, films, and streaming content – have become powerful tools of intercultural communication. These texts often contain a high concentration of phraseological units representing figurative and culturally marked expressions. Phraseological units are linguistic constructs and cultural markers that reflect a nation's history, values, collective memory, and communicative conventions. Therefore, their accurate translation from English into Ukrainian, especially in audiovisual discourse, requires cultural awareness and strategic decision-making from the translator.

One of the main difficulties in translating idioms is interlingual asymmetry. As Mona Baker notes: «Culture-specific concepts are often embedded in idioms and present a serious challenge to translators when there is no direct equivalent in the target language» [1, p. 67]. For example, the English idiom «the elephant in the room» lacks a direct Ukrainian equivalent but conveys the idea of an obvious yet unspoken problem. In such cases, translators must choose between descriptive translation, functional substitution, or even complete transformation of the idiom to preserve meaning.

Another important issue is cultural specificity. The idiom «White House» refers to a physical building and a specific political institution, which holds connotative value for an English-speaking audience. According to Lawrence Venuti: «The illusion of transparency which domestication offers erases the linguistic and cultural differences that make translation visible» [5, p. 21]. Over-localization or literal rendering distorts the author's intention and weakens the

intercultural impact.

Various translation strategies are employed to deal with idioms in audiovisual texts: equivalent substitution, calque, descriptive translation, cultural adaptation, and omission. The choice of strategy depends on the idiom type, its discourse function, genre, and the target audience's expectations. For instance, «to spill the beans» in a humorous context may be translated as «випалити правду» or «розпатякатися» in Ukrainian to preserve both style and tone. As Christina Fernando emphasizes, idioms demand both semantic and pragmatic awareness of the target audience's cultural background» [2, p. 42].

In the context of global audiovisual communication, the accurate rendering of idiomatic expressions plays a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and pragmatic value of the original message. Phraseological units – idioms, fixed expressions, phrases, verbs, and colloquialisms – are deeply embedded in the source culture and language, functioning as stylistic elements and repositories of national mentality and worldview.

The translation of these units from English into Ukrainian becomes a multifaceted challenge, especially when the translator is dealing with audiovisual content that combines visual imagery, spoken language, and cultural reference points. The need to preserve both the meaning and cultural resonance of phraseological units pushes the translator to navigate between linguistic fidelity and communicative effectiveness.

Interlingual asymmetry remains one of the primary barriers. As Baker argues, idioms often encode cultural experiences and norms that do not exist in the target culture, thus requiring compensation strategies. For instance, «jump on the bandwagon» metaphorically suggests joining a trend, often for opportunistic reasons. While a literal translation into Ukrainian would be nonsensical, the translator must find an equivalent such as «сісти на хвилю популярності» or «пливти за течією» both of which approximate the meaning while maintaining stylistic alignment.

Another illustrative example is the English idiom «take the high road»,

which implies moral superiority or chasing a dignified response. Ukrainian equivalents might include «зберегти обличчя» or «повестися гідно» depending on context. In such cases, the translator is expected not only to decode the semantics of the phrase but also to reconstruct its pragmatic and emotional connotation in a culturally appropriate form.

According to Fernando, idioms are not only expressions of language but reflections of culture and experience. Therefore, cultural adaptation becomes an indispensable part of idiom translation, especially in genres like drama, comedy, or courtroom series (e.g., «Suits»), where idiomatic usage enhances character development, plot dynamics, and genre authenticity [2].

Venuti also highlights the cultural specificity of phraseological units, which draws attention to the ethical implications of domestication and foreignisation. Domestication may lead to the erasure of cultural distinctiveness, while foreignisation risks alienating the target audience. In audiovisual translation, this balance is particularly fragile, as subtitles or dubbing must be synchronized with the visual and temporal elements of the content.

Let us consider the idiom «read between the lines,» which implies interpreting implicit meaning. A literal translation would confuse the viewer. The Ukrainian equivalent, «вловити підтекст» or «зрозуміти натяк» preserves the cognitive structure of the idiom while ensuring accessibility. However, in subtitling, where space and timing are limited, such decisions must be concise, contextually relevant, and easily comprehensible.

The selection of a particular translation strategy often depends on the translator's judgment of the function the idiom serves in the original. In her taxonomy, Baker identifies several methods: using a similar idiom in the target language, paraphrasing, omitting the idiom, or translating its literal meaning when possible. For example, the phrase «to pull someone's leg» (to tease or joke) may be rendered as «підколоти когось» or «жартувати» in Ukrainian. While the latter preserves the general meaning, the former is more idiomatic and retains stylistic proximity [1].

Moon emphasizes that the pragmatic role of idioms in discourse must be considered in translation, as idioms often establish rapport, reinforce group identity, or convey humor. Failure to preserve these functions may weaken the character's credibility or narrative cohesion [3].

Another issue involves stylistic equivalents. Phraseological units often indicate a particular register – formal, informal, sarcastic, or humorous. Inadequate stylistic rendering may lead to a shift in character tone or unintended humorous effects. Consider the idiom «hit the sack» (to go to bed). If translated too literally or formally, it loses its informal, relaxed tone. An appropriate Ukrainian rendering might be «піти спати» or «завалитися спати,» depending on the context and audience.

Munday notes that audiovisual translators must act as cultural mediators who balance the semantic, syntactic, and stylistic aspects of both languages. Their decisions directly affect how characters, relationships, and the overall narrative are perceived by the target audience [4].

In the case of «Suits» a legal drama rich in legalese, office banter, and witty idioms, translators often face rapid-fire dialogues and overlapping speech. Translating idioms in such a context demands rapid recognition of idiomatic meaning, target-language alternatives, and synchronization with subtitles. For example, «let us not get ahead of ourselves» might be rendered as «не забігай наперед» – a concise, idiomatic, and contextually apt solution.

Thus, translating phraseological units as cultural markers in English-Ukrainian audiovisual content is a multidimensional task. It requires linguistic expertise, cultural sensitivity, and creative decision-making. Preserving the idiomatic richness of the original enhances the accessibility and impact of translated content while fostering effective intercultural communication.

To conclude, phraseological units are a key component of audiovisual content's cultural and communicative landscape. Their success in translation from English into Ukrainian hinges on the translator's ability to decode cultural meaning, select functional equivalents, and maintain stylistic coherence.

Awareness of idiom functions, combined with cultural competence and technical skill, ensures that translated audiovisual content remains engaging, authentic, and culturally resonant for the target audience.

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