



THE COMPARISON OF IDIOMATIC WORDS IN KARAKALPAK AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This article compares idiomatic words in Karakalpak and English literature, examining their cultural origins, functions, and translation issues. Karakalpak idioms, rooted in nomadic life and nature, differ from English idioms, which often reflect biblical, Shakespearean, and urban traditions. While both languages share universal themes such as animal and food imagery, they diverge in symbolism and historical context. The study also highlights the difficulty of translating idioms literally, emphasizing the need for cultural adaptation.

Introduction. Language, as scholars often emphasize, is not only a system of communication but also a mirror of culture, history, and social development. Within this system, idiomatic expressions occupy a special place, for they embody the cultural worldview and preserve the collective memory of a people. Idioms are colorful, metaphorical, and frequently rooted in centuries of tradition. Because of this, idioms are not simply linguistic units; rather, they represent condensed cultural codes that connect language with the everyday experiences and values of its speakers. Karakalpak language has a particularly rich idiomatic repertoire reflecting the lifestyle of nomadic ancestors, the ecological reality of the Aral Sea basin, and Islamic moral traditions. English, on the other hand, with its global spread and long literary tradition, contains idioms influenced by Anglo-Saxon folklore, Christian values, Shakespearean creativity, and later, urban-industrial life. Therefore, a comparative study of idiomatic words in Karakalpak and English literature is important for several reasons. First, it allows us to see universal human tendencies in metaphor-making. Second, it reveals unique cultural values encoded in each language. Finally, it contributes to translation studies, as idioms are often one of the most challenging aspects of literary translation. This article will analyze idioms in both Karakalpak and English literature by exploring definitions, origins, cultural functions, similarities, differences, and translation challenges. Linking words such as furthermore, in contrast, therefore, and on the other hand will guide the discussion, ensuring clarity and logical flow.

Before turning to specific examples, it is necessary to define idioms and understand their place in language. An idiom can be defined as a fixed or semi-fixed expression whose



meaning is not directly derived from the meanings of the individual words. For instance, the English expression “kick the bucket” means “to die.” Its literal meaning makes little sense, but within cultural context it conveys death in a somewhat humorous or euphemistic way. Moreover, idioms are universal across languages. They exist in Karakalpak, English, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, and many others. However, the way they are formed and the images they use often depend on the local culture. Idioms tend to arise from daily practices, historical events, or collective beliefs. For example, fishing communities may have idioms related to the sea, while nomadic herders may use idioms connected with horses, sheep, or the steppe. In literature, idioms serve multiple purposes. They add stylistic richness, they reveal a character’s social background, and they make dialogues sound authentic. Furthermore, idioms function as memory devices: because they are vivid and metaphorical, they remain in people’s minds and are transmitted from one generation to another. Thus, idioms are not peripheral but central to the vitality of any language.

Karakalpak literature, deeply influenced by oral traditions, heroic epics, and lyrical songs, is full of idioms. These idioms not only enrich the language but also reflect the worldview of the Karakalpak people. Since the Karakalpaks historically lived as nomads and semi-nomads, their idioms frequently refer to animals, nature, and the hardships of steppe life. For example, the horse symbolizes both livelihood and mobility, and losing control of a horse would mean disaster for a rider in the steppe. Similarly, “Qoyan júrek” (the heart of a rabbit) describes someone as cowardly, as rabbits are known for their timidity. Another expressive idiom is “Suwǵa túsken tastay” (“like a stone thrown into the water”), meaning someone who has disappeared completely or left no trace. Such imagery clearly arises from the natural environment of rivers and lakes that shaped Karakalpak life. Furthermore, in the great epic *Qırq Qız* (The Forty Girls), idiomatic expressions appear frequently. Heroes are described with phrases like “arıslan júrekli” (lion-hearted), emphasizing courage, and “tawday berik” (strong as a mountain), symbolizing endurance. These idioms not only paint vivid pictures but also reinforce the cultural ideals of bravery, loyalty, and perseverance.

English literature, particularly since the Elizabethan era, is also rich in idiomatic expressions. Many idioms in modern English trace their origins back to the works of William Shakespeare, who is credited with coining or popularizing phrases such as “wild-goose chase,” “break the ice,” and “in a pickle.” These expressions, once fresh metaphors, became fixed idioms over time. Moreover, the King James Bible also influenced English idiomatic usage. Expressions like “by the skin of one’s teeth” and “labour of love” have biblical roots and became part of everyday English. Thus, religion played a significant role in shaping English idioms, just as Islam influenced Karakalpak idioms. English idioms often use imagery drawn from urban and maritime life. For instance, “to miss the boat” means to miss an opportunity, reflecting England’s seafaring tradition. Similarly, “to hit the nail on the head” reflects the growing influence of carpentry and craftsmanship during the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, idioms in English literature are not merely decorative but functional. In Charles Dickens’ novels, idioms help depict the speech of working-class characters, making dialogues realistic. In modern literature, idioms



continue to convey irony, humor, or emotional depth. For example, in contemporary novels, phrases such as “burn the midnight oil” (work late into the night) or “walking on air” (feeling very happy) provide quick emotional resonance. Therefore, English literature demonstrates the same vitality of idiomatic expression as Karakalpak literature, though the cultural images differ significantly [4].

Although Karakalpak and English come from different language families and cultural backgrounds, their idioms reveal certain universal tendencies. First, both languages use animals to symbolize human qualities. English speakers say “as brave as a lion,” while Karakalpaks say “Arıslan júrekli” (lion-hearted). Both cultures view the lion as the ultimate symbol of bravery. Similarly, both use birds to express freedom: English says “free as a bird,” while Karakalpak uses “qustay erkin” (free like a bird). Second, both languages employ food-related idioms to express basic needs or hospitality. The English phrase “bread and butter” refers to livelihood or basic necessities, while Karakalpaks say “nan menen duz” (bread and salt), symbolizing sustenance and the sacred duty of hospitality. Third, idioms in both languages are often metaphorical and indirect. Rather than saying “he is very lazy,” people use idioms such as “couch potato” in English or “qozǵalmay jatr” (lying without moving) in Karakalpak. This shows a shared tendency to express criticism humorously or indirectly. Therefore, idioms reflect universal human experiences despite cultural differences [5, 76-78].

However, alongside similarities, there are notable differences between Karakalpak and English idioms, which highlight cultural uniqueness. To begin with, English idioms are often urban, maritime, or Christian in origin, while Karakalpak idioms stem from nomadic, Islamic, and pastoral traditions. For instance, “to miss the boat” has a maritime background, whereas the Karakalpak “Arbasınan ayırılǵan” (lost his cart) conveys the same idea through pastoral imagery. Another difference lies in abstraction. English idioms sometimes use abstract or color-based metaphors. For example, “feeling blue” means sadness, while “in the pink” means healthy. Karakalpak idioms, by contrast, tend to rely on concrete natural images. Instead of “feeling blue,” a Karakalpak speaker might say “qara bulittay” (like a black cloud), which draws from visible, environmental phenomena. Furthermore, religious references differ. English idioms often reflect Christianity, e.g., “prodigal son” or “doubting Thomas.” In contrast, Karakalpak idioms occasionally reference Islamic teachings, though more often they rely on moral sayings like “amanatqa qıyanet joq” (“betrayal of trust is forbidden”). Thus, differences in idiomatic imagery reveal how environment, economy, and religion shape a people’s linguistic worldview.

Given the cultural depth of idioms, translation between Karakalpak and English is particularly complex. Literal translation is rarely successful, as it may confuse readers or lose the original meaning. For example, the Karakalpak idiom “Qoyan júrek” (rabbit’s heart) means cowardly. If translated literally, English readers might not understand it, since English uses “chicken-hearted.” A good translator must therefore search for functional equivalents rather than literal ones. Moreover, some idioms have no direct counterpart. For example, the English idiom “to bite the bullet” (to face something painful with courage) has no exact Karakalpak equivalent. In such cases, translators may use explanatory phrases or create approximate equivalents. Additionally, cultural references



may pose difficulties. For example, “bread and butter” in English means livelihood, but translating it as “nan men tuz” may shift the meaning toward hospitality rather than livelihood. The translator must decide whether to preserve cultural flavor or adapt to target-language expectations. Therefore, idiom translation is not only a linguistic task but also a cultural negotiation. It requires creativity, sensitivity, and deep knowledge of both cultures.

Conclusion. In summary, idiomatic expressions in Karakalpak and English literature represent a fascinating area of comparison. Both languages use idioms as condensed cultural codes that enrich communication, enliven literature, and preserve collective memory. While similarities exist in the use of animal metaphors, food imagery, and indirect expression, differences reveal unique aspects of each culture: English idioms reflect maritime and Christian traditions, while Karakalpak idioms are rooted in nomadic life, nature, and moral teachings. Furthermore, the act of translating idioms demonstrates how deeply culture and language are intertwined. A successful translator must go beyond literal words to capture the spirit of the idiom, ensuring that its metaphorical meaning resonates in the target language. Therefore, studying idioms comparatively not only deepens linguistic understanding but also promotes cultural dialogue. Just as idioms act as bridges between words and meaning, comparative studies can act as bridges between peoples, fostering mutual respect and appreciation. In a world increasingly interconnected, such studies are both academically valuable and culturally necessary.

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