Registered in Germany Europa Revue Journal
ISSN: 1862-6564 Vol. 6 No. 9 (2026) Published September 21, 2026

TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR IDIOMS IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC ENGLISH TEXTS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF ENGLISH-UZBEK RENDERING

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UzSWLU, theory and practice of translation:Chinese, TXIT-2527

Abstract

This article examines how idioms and other figurative expressions found in business and economic English are rendered into Uzbek, extending a companion corpus-based study of general English-Uzbek idiom translation (Israilova, 2026) into a specialised register. A review of the emerging Uzbek literature on economic and business phraseology (Muxiddinova & Mannonova, 2025; Shodmonova, 2024; Yuldosheva & Turayeva, 2025; Jabborov, 2025) shows that, unlike general idiom translation, this sub-field is still framed mainly around terminology and lacks a published, example-rich corpus of business-idiom translation pairs. To address that gap, the present study compiles an eighteen-item corpus of business and economic idioms, combining examples already attested in the general idiom-translation literature (Oymirzayeva, 2025; Aytmuxamedova, 2025) with idioms proposed and translated by the author according to the classical equivalence framework of Nida, Vinay and Darbelnet, Baker, and Toury. The results show that paraphrase is the dominant strategy (44.4%), noticeably more dominant than in general idiom translation (30%), while full formal equivalence, although rarer overall, includes several striking cases in which business imagery (money, trade, the lion as a symbol of strength) transfers across the two cultures with almost no loss. The article argues that business idioms are, on the whole, harder to translate idiomatically than everyday idioms, because their imagery is drawn from abstract commercial concepts rather than from concrete, universally shared physical experience, but that a minority of trade-related idioms, especially those with roots in the shared history of Silk-Road commerce, achieve unusually close equivalence. The article closes by identifying the empirical validation of author-proposed equivalents as the principal task for future research.

Keywords

business idioms; economic discourse; idiom translation; equivalence; English-Uzbek translation; phraseology; translation strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

Business and economic discourse is saturated with figurative language. English-language reports, negotiations, and financial commentary routinely rely on idioms such as "cash cow," "corner the market," or "in the red" to compress complex evaluative judgments into a few memorable words. For a translator working between English and Uzbek, such expressions raise the same fundamental difficulty that idioms raise everywhere, namely that their meaning cannot be recovered from the literal sense of their parts (Fernando, 1996; Baker, 2018), but with an added complication: the imagery on which business idioms draw, cash crops turned to metaphor, sporting and gambling references, courtroom and boardroom scenes, is itself a product of a specific commercial and legal culture, so that the translator must resolve two overlapping gaps at once, the general idiomatic gap between English and Uzbek and the more specific gap between two different commercial and institutional histories.

A companion study by the present author (Israilova, 2026) analysed a corpus of twenty general-purpose English idioms and their Uzbek renderings, finding that functional equivalence and paraphrase together accounted for 60% of cases, full formal equivalence for only 10%, and outright non-equivalence for 15%. That study, however, deliberately excluded specialised registers. The present article asks whether the same distribution holds once the domain is narrowed to business and economic idioms specifically, and, more generally, what the Uzbek-language research literature on economic phraseology currently offers a translator working in this register.

A search of that literature shows rapid but still nascent development. Muxiddinova and Mannonova (2025) announce a comparative study of "phraseological units related to the field of economics in English and Uzbek," explicitly framing translation challenges and strategies as part of their scope, but the published abstract and available text remain at the level of a research programme rather than a worked example set. Shodmonova (2024) surveys interpretive and translation-equivalence approaches to English and Uzbek phraseological units in general, using a wide array of analytical

methods (etymological, semantic, cognitive, and lexicographic), again without publishing a worked corpus of business-specific pairs. Yuldosheva and Turayeva (2025) address the translation of English economic texts into Uzbek directly, and list idiomatic and phraseological expressions, alongside terminology, nominal phrases, and abbreviations, as one of five recurrent problem areas, concluding that translators need economic subject-matter expertise as well as language skill, but again without a published example inventory. Jabborov (2025) documents that metaphor and idiomatic expression are recognised features of English and Uzbek business terminology, particularly in finance, marketing, and management, but treats them as one feature among several rather than as the primary object of study. Taken together, these four studies confirm that business-specific idiom translation is a recognised problem in the Uzbek scholarly literature, but not yet one for which a detailed, citable corpus of translation pairs exists.

This article responds to that gap directly. Its purpose is threefold: first, to assemble the first citable corpus of business and economic idiom-translation pairs for the English-Uzbek pair, combining genuinely attested examples from the general idiom-translation literature with new pairs proposed by the author under an explicit, reproducible coding scheme; second, to compare the resulting distribution of translation strategies with that obtained for general idioms in the companion study, in order to test whether register affects translatability; and third, to identify which categories of business imagery travel well between English and Uzbek and which do not, with a view to informing both translator training and further corpus-based research.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Two kinds of data were used. The first is the set of classical equivalence theories already applied in the author's companion study (Nida, 1964; Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995; Newmark, 1988; Fernando, 1996; Baker, 2018; Toury, 2012), retained here for methodological continuity across the two studies. The second is the emerging Uzbek-language literature on business and economic phraseology (Muxiddinova & Mannonova, 2025; Shodmonova, 2024; Yuldosheva & Turayeva, 2025; Jabborov, 2025; Raximjonova, 2025), consulted for its theoretical framing of the problem, and the

general idiom-translation literature already analysed in the companion study (Oymirzayeva, 2025; Aytmuxamedova, 2025; Turg'unboyeva, 2025), from which idioms with clear business or trade relevance were extracted. Because no published source offers a ready-made inventory of business-idiom translation pairs, the corpus for this study (Table 1) was compiled in two parts: four items (nos. 2, 10, 11) were drawn directly from the general idiom-translation literature, where the source studies had already supplied an attested Uzbek rendering for an idiom with clear commercial application; the remaining items were compiled by the author from standard inventories of English business idioms and given a proposed Uzbek rendering, informed by the theoretical framework in section 2.2 and by the translator's own bilingual competence. This mixed procedure is made fully explicit in Table 1, where the source column distinguishes attested examples from author-compiled ones, and its implications are discussed as a limitation in section 4.

The same five-category coding scheme used in the companion study was applied here, to keep the two studies comparable. Full equivalence describes a Uzbek rendering that is idiomatic and preserves substantially the same image as the English source. Functional (partial) equivalence describes a Uzbek rendering that is idiomatic and matches the source in meaning and pragmatic force but relies on a different image. Paraphrase describes a non-idiomatic Uzbek rendering that states the meaning directly, with no figurative image retained. Cultural substitution describes the replacement of the English image with a different, target-culture-specific image of equivalent force. Non-equivalence describes cases where no natural Uzbek rendering is attested and a literal calque would mislead, so that the expression is either paraphrased at length, left as an English loan, or omitted. As in the companion study, the categories draw jointly on Nida's (1964) formal/dynamic distinction, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) direct/oblique translation procedures, Baker's (2018) strategies for non-equivalence, and Toury's (2012) reminder that the acceptability of a given rendering is bounded by target-culture norms.

Eighteen English business and economic idioms were selected for their currency in English-language business writing and their coverage of distinct commercial domains:

finance and accounting ("in the red," "break even," "cook the books"), competitive strategy ("corner the market," "a level playing field," "think outside the box"), trust and personnel ("a safe pair of hands," "keep/stay afloat"), general commercial wisdom ("time is money," "the lion's share," "carry coals to Newcastle"), and negotiation ("the ball is in your court," "a win-win situation," "back to square one"). Each idiom was assigned a proposed or attested Uzbek rendering and coded into one of the five categories under the criteria stated in section 2.2. As in the companion study, coding is an interpretive act; to reduce arbitrariness, an idiom was coded as full equivalence only where the central image (not merely the meaning) survives translation, and as cultural substitution only where a genuinely different, independently attested Uzbek image is used rather than an ad hoc paraphrase.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the full corpus of eighteen business and economic idioms with their Uzbek renderings, assigned strategy, and source.

Table 1. Corpus of business and economic idioms and their Uzbek renderings

№	English idiom	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
1	*Time is money*	Vaqt - bu pul	Full equivalence	Author-compiled; established Uzbek business aphorism
2	*Carry coals to Newcastle*	Buxoroga attorlik qilish	Cultural substitution	Turg'unboyeva 2025
3	*The lion's share*	Sherning ulushi	Full equivalence	Author-compiled
4	*To go bankrupt / go under*	Bankrot bo'lmoq	Full equivalence (loanword)	Author-compiled
5	*Corner the market*	Bozorni egallab olmoq	Functional equivalence	Author-compiled

№	English idiom	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
6	*Think outside the box*	Qolipdan chiqib fikr yuritmoq	Functional equivalence	Author-compiled
7	*A safe pair of hands*	Ishonchli qo'llar	Functional equivalence	Author-compiled
8	*Keep / stay afloat*	Cho'kmaslikka harakat qilmoq	Functional equivalence	Author-compiled
9	*Cash cow*	Sog'in sigir (daromad manbai)	Cultural substitution (calque)	Author-compiled
10	*The ball is in your court*	Navbat senga keldi	Paraphrase	Oymirzayeva 2025; Aytmuxamedova 2025
11	*The tip of the iceberg*	Muammoning kichik qismi	Paraphrase	Aytmuxamedova 2025
12	*Cut corners*	Ishni yengil-yelpi qilib bajarmoq	Paraphrase	Author-compiled
13	*In the red / in the black*	Zararda ishlamoq / foyda bilan ishlamoq	Paraphrase	Author-compiled
14	*Back to square one*	Yana boshidan boshlamoq	Paraphrase	Author-compiled
15	*A level playing field*	Teng sharoit / teng imkoniyat	Paraphrase	Author-compiled

№	English idiom	Uzbek rendering	Strategy applied	Source
16	*Cook the books*	Hisobotlarni buzib ko'rsatmoq	Paraphrase	Author-compiled
17	*Break even*	Na foyda, na zarar ko'rmoq	Paraphrase	Author-compiled
18	*A win-win situation*	Ikki tomon ham yutadigan holat	Non-equivalence (calque/loan competing)	Author-compiled

Table 2 summarises the frequency distribution of strategies across the corpus.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of translation strategies (n = 18)

Strategy	**N**	**%**
Full equivalence	3	16.7%
Functional / partial equivalence	4	22.2%
Paraphrase / descriptive translation	8	44.4%
Cultural substitution / adaptation	2	11.1%
Non-equivalence	1	5.6%
Total	**18**	**100%**

3.1 Full equivalence.Full equivalence was found in 3 of 18 cases (16.7%): "Time is money" → "Vaqt - bu pul," a calque so thoroughly naturalised in Uzbek business speech that it functions as an independent aphorism rather than a felt translation; "The lion's share" → "Sherning ulushi," in which the lion's cultural association with strength and dominance, inherited in Uzbek partly through the shared Persianate literary tradition, transfers with essentially no loss; and "To go bankrupt" → "Bankrot bo'lmoq," in which the English-derived international loanword "bankrot" has been fully assimilated into Uzbek economic vocabulary. All three cases share a common feature also noted for the

poultry and hunting idioms in the companion study's general corpus: full equivalence becomes available precisely where the underlying concept, the value of time, the dominance of the strongest party, or the legal fact of insolvency, is not merely translatable but already shared as an economic and cultural reality between the two communities.

3.2 Functional equivalence.Functional equivalence accounted for 4 of 18 cases (22.2%): "Corner the market" → "Bozorni egallab olmoq" (literally, "to seize/occupy the market"), "Think outside the box" → "Qolipdan chiqib fikr yuritmoq" (literally, "to think outside the mould"), "A safe pair of hands" → "Ishonchli qo'llar" (literally, "trustworthy hands"), and "Keep/stay afloat" → "Cho'kmaslikka harakat qilmoq" (literally, "to try not to sink"). In each case the Uzbek rendering keeps a live image, occupying territory, escaping a mould, trustworthy hands, not sinking, but substitutes a different vehicle for the same underlying concept. The "safe pair of hands" example is worth noting alongside the discussion of somatic idioms in the companion study: because it is body-part imagery (hands as an emblem of trust) rather than culture-specific commercial imagery, it transfers with comparatively little friction, again suggesting that embodied source domains travel better across languages than institutional or historical ones.

3.3 Paraphrase.Paraphrase was the single largest category, covering 8 of 18 cases (44.4%): "The ball is in your court" → "Navbat senga keldi," "The tip of the iceberg" → "Muammoning kichik qismi," "Cut corners" → "Ishni yengil-yelpi qilib bajarmoq," "In the red / in the black" → "Zararda ishlamoq / foyda bilan ishlamoq," "Back to square one" → "Yana boshidan boshlamoq," "A level playing field" → "Teng sharoit," "Cook the books" → "Hisobotlarni buzib ko'rsatmoq," and "Break even" → "Na foyda, na zarar ko'rmoq." In every one of these cases the specific commercial image of the English source, a tennis court, an iceberg, accounting ink colour, a board-game square, a sports pitch, cookery, is dropped entirely, and the Uzbek rendering states the underlying financial or procedural fact in ordinary language. This is markedly more frequent than in the companion study's general-idiom corpus (30%), and the reason is not hard to identify: several of these source images (a tennis court, red versus black bookkeeping

ink, a board game's starting square) depend on culturally specific institutions, games, or accounting conventions that have no ready counterpart in the Uzbek commercial tradition, so that paraphrase becomes the least distorting available option.

3.4 Cultural substitution. Cultural substitution accounted for 2 of 18 cases (11.1%). "Cash cow" → "Sog'in sigir" (literally, "milk cow") retains the agrarian image of an animal that is repeatedly milked for continuous yield, an image that, as in the companion study's discussion of poultry and hunting idioms, is available because cattle-keeping is a shared subsistence activity; the Uzbek rendering counts as a substitution rather than full equivalence because "sog'in sigir" is not yet an independently established Uzbek business idiom in the way that its English counterpart is, and currently functions more as a transparent calque than as native idiomatic usage. The clearer case is "Carry coals to Newcastle" → "Buxoroga attorlik qilish" (literally, "to sell perfumery/spices in Bukhara"), an example attested in Turg'unboyeva (2025). Where the general idiom-translation literature analysed in the companion study treated this idiom as a case of non-equivalence, on the grounds that the English coal-mining reference is opaque to an Uzbek reader, Turg'unboyeva's example shows that a culturally grounded substitute does in fact exist once the idiom's underlying logic, offering a commodity to a market already saturated with it, is matched to Bukhara's own historical reputation as a Silk-Road centre of the perfume and spice trade. This case is discussed further in section 4 as evidence that apparent non-equivalence can sometimes be resolved by locating the correct cultural-historical domain rather than by searching within the wrong one.

3.5 Non-equivalence. Only 1 of 18 cases (5.6%) was coded as non-equivalence: "A win-win situation." No independently attested, fully idiomatic Uzbek expression for this concept was found; the descriptive paraphrase "Ikki tomon ham yutadigan holat" ("a situation in which both sides win") is available and intelligible, but in contemporary Uzbek business and diplomatic usage the English term "win-win" is also frequently retained as an unassimilated loan, particularly in negotiation and policy contexts, which suggests that the concept itself, rather than lacking a translation, is still in the process of acquiring a settled Uzbek idiomatic form. This is a different kind of non-equivalence from the cases identified in the companion study ("the squeaky wheel gets the grease,"

a values conflict, or "carry coals to Newcastle" under its earlier, less complete analysis): here the gap appears to be temporary and terminological rather than deep and cultural, and may close as the concept becomes further embedded in Uzbek economic discourse.

4. DISCUSSION

Table 3 places the strategy distribution obtained here alongside that obtained for general idioms in the companion study.

Table 3. Strategy distribution compared across registers

Strategy	**General idioms (companion study)**	**Business/economic idioms (present study)**
Full equivalence	10%	16.7%
Functional equivalence	30%	22.2%
Paraphrase	30%	44.4%
Cultural substitution	15%	11.1%
Non-equivalence	15%	5.6%

The comparison suggests that register does affect translatability, though the effect is one of degree rather than of kind. Paraphrase rises sharply, from 30% for general idioms to 44.4% for business idioms, while full and functional equivalence together fall from 40% to 38.9%, and cultural substitution and non-equivalence together fall from 30% to 16.7%. The most plausible explanation is that many business idioms are built on source domains, specific sports, specific accounting conventions, specific corporate scenarios, that are narrower and more culturally local than the domains underlying everyday idioms (animals, weather, common body parts, kinship, agriculture), so that a genuinely equivalent or even a culturally substitutable image is less often available, and paraphrase becomes the default. At the same time, the presence of three full-equivalence cases ("time is money," "the lion's share," "bankrot bo'lmoq") indicates that where a business idiom happens to rest on a domain that is not culturally local, universal economic values such as the value of time, symbols of dominance shared across the wider Persianate and Islamic cultural sphere, or internationally circulating loanwords for

modern financial concepts, full equivalence remains available even in this more specialised register.

The "carry coals to Newcastle" case merits particular attention because it revises a conclusion of the companion study. There, working only from the general idiom-translation literature available at the time, the idiom was coded as non-equivalent because no Uzbek rendering had been located. The present study, drawing on a more specialised source (Turg'unboyeva, 2025), finds a rendering, "Buxoroga attorlik qilish," that is arguably a closer cultural substitution than any of the alternatives considered for other "opaque-referent" idioms in the companion study's own corpus. This suggests a methodological lesson beyond the immediate topic of business idioms: apparent non-equivalence in the existing literature may sometimes reflect the boundaries of a particular study's source material rather than a genuine absence of an equivalent in the target language, and a systematic search across specialised as well as general idiom-translation literature, and ideally across historical and regional-studies sources, may recover renderings that a narrower search misses.

The "win-win" case, by contrast, illustrates a genuinely different phenomenon from anything observed in the companion study: non-equivalence that appears to be a snapshot of an ongoing process of lexical borrowing rather than a stable gap. Modern Uzbek economic and political discourse is absorbing a steady stream of English business and management vocabulary, and "win-win" may simply be a concept still in transit between an English loan and a settled Uzbek idiom. This raises a question the present, literature-based method cannot answer on its own: a corpus study of contemporary Uzbek economic journalism and policy documents would be needed to determine whether "win-win" is already being domesticated (for example, through calquing, phonological adaptation, or the coining of a native idiom) or whether it remains, for the time being, code-switched English.

The study's central limitation is methodological and should be stated plainly: unlike the companion study's corpus, which was pooled entirely from published, peer-reviewed examples, the majority of the present corpus (14 of 18 items) consists of Uzbek renderings proposed by the author rather than independently attested in the published

literature, precisely because that literature does not yet offer such examples for this register. The proposed renderings are grounded in the same theoretical framework used throughout, and several ("bozorni egallab olmoq," "bankrot bo'lmoq," "vaqt - bu pul") are demonstrably established in ordinary Uzbek economic usage rather than newly coined for this study, but others ("qolipdan chiqib fikr yuritmoq," "cho'kmaslikka harakat qilmoq") are the author's own reasoned proposals and have not been tested against native-speaker judgment or corpus frequency data. The percentages in Table 2 should therefore be read as a working hypothesis about how business idioms behave under translation, generated from the best currently available evidence, rather than as a finding independently replicated across multiple published sources in the way that Table 2 of the companion study was.

5. CONCLUSION

This article set out to determine whether business and economic English idioms behave differently from general idioms when translated into Uzbek, and what the existing Uzbek research literature currently offers a translator working in this register. It found that the literature on English-Uzbek business and economic phraseology, while growing (Muxiddinova & Mannonova, 2025; Shodmonova, 2024; Yuldosheva & Turayeva, 2025; Jabborov, 2025; Raximjonova, 2025), has not yet produced a published, example-rich corpus of business-idiom translation pairs comparable to what exists for general idioms, and it responded to that gap by compiling an eighteen-item corpus combining attested and author-proposed renderings under the same coding scheme used in a companion general-idiom study (Israilova, 2026). The resulting distribution shows paraphrase as the dominant strategy (44.4%, compared with 30% for general idioms), consistent with the view that business idioms typically rest on narrower, more institutionally specific source domains than everyday idioms; it also shows that a minority of business idioms, particularly those grounded in universally shared economic values or in the historically shared commercial life of the Silk Road, achieve full or near-full equivalence, and that at least one apparent case of non-equivalence from the general-idiom literature ("carry coals to Newcastle") turns out to be resolvable once the search is extended to more specialised sources.

Two directions for further work follow directly from the study's own limitation. First, the author-proposed renderings that make up the bulk of the present corpus should be tested empirically, through translator surveys, back-translation experiments, or frequency counts in Uzbek business and financial corpora, to establish which are already naturalised and which remain provisional. Second, given the apparent case of "win-win" as a concept in transit, a targeted corpus study of contemporary Uzbek economic journalism, policy documents, and business media would help establish more generally how quickly, and by what mechanisms, English business idioms are being domesticated into Uzbek, a question that a literature-based method such as the present one cannot resolve alone but can usefully identify.

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