







REVIEW

Comparative Study of Idioms in Romance and Germanic Languages

Estudio comparativo de modismos en lenguas románicas y germánicas

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the study of phraseological units with a comparison structure in English, Spanish and Ukrainian revealed these linguistic units' universal and culturally specific features. The lexical and semantic analysis showed that a significant part of the phraseological units is based on universal associations that can be easily translated between languages without losing meaning. At the same time, specific images inherent in a particular culture require adaptation that preserves the original's meaning and style.

Objective: the study is devoted to the comparative analysis of phraseological units in Romance and Germanic languages and the peculiarities of their translation into Ukrainian.

Method: the lexical-semantic, structural-grammatical and comparative-comparative methods were used in the study.

Results: the structural and grammatical analysis confirmed that comparison phrases have a similar syntactic structure in the three languages, but demonstrate different levels of flexibility in use. In particular, Ukrainian proved to be more variable in grammatical transformations, while Spanish and English adhere to stricter formal rules. The quantitative analysis of translation strategies showed that most phraseological units (60 %) are translated based on direct equivalence, 30 % require semantic adaptation, and 10 % require lexical substitution.

Conclusions: the study has confirmed that phraseological units with the structure of comparison are an essential element of the linguistic picture of the world, reflecting both universal and unique aspects of each culture. The results obtained may be helpful for further research in translation studies, lexicology and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Germanic Languages; Comparative Analysis; Lexical Equivalents; Linguistic Features; Linguistic Identity; Romance Languages; Phraseology.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el estudio de las unidades fraseológicas con estructura de comparación en inglés, español y ucraniano reveló los rasgos universales y culturalmente específicos de estas unidades lingüísticas. El análisis léxico y semántico mostró que una parte significativa de las unidades fraseológicas se basa en asociaciones

universales que pueden traducirse fácilmente entre lenguas sin perder significado. Al mismo tiempo, las imágenes específicas inherentes a una cultura concreta requieren una adaptación que preserve el significado y el estilo del original.

Objetivo: el estudio está dedicado al análisis comparativo de las unidades fraseológicas en las lenguas románicas y germánicas y las peculiaridades de su traducción al ucraniano.

Método: en el estudio se utilizaron los métodos léxico-semántico, estructural-gramatical y comparativo-comparativo.

Resultados: el análisis estructural y gramatical confirmó que las frases de comparación tienen una estructura sintáctica similar en las tres lenguas, pero demuestran distintos niveles de flexibilidad en su uso. En concreto, el ucraniano demostró ser más variable en las transformaciones gramaticales, mientras que el español y el inglés se adhieren a normas formales más estrictas. El análisis cuantitativo de las estrategias de traducción mostró que la mayoría de las unidades fraseológicas (60 %) se traducen basándose en la equivalencia directa, el 30 % requiere adaptación semántica y el 10 % sustitución léxica.

Conclusiones: el estudio ha confirmado que las unidades fraseológicas con estructura de comparación son un elemento esencial de la imagen lingüística del mundo, que refleja tanto aspectos universales como singulares de cada cultura. Los resultados obtenidos pueden ser útiles para futuras investigaciones en estudios de traducción, lexicología y comunicación intercultural.

Palabras clave: Lenguas Germánicas; Análisis Comparativo; Equivalentes Léxicos; Rasgos Lingüísticos; Identidad Lingüística; Lenguas Romances; Fraseología.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of expressing thoughts that reflects a person's material and inner world using various techniques and tools. Phraseology, as one of the voluminous layers of the language system, undoubtedly contains culturally significant encoded meanings alongside semantically open meanings. Such encoding does not appear in a unit immediately; it contains many components that develop and change and are in the process of constant transformation. Phraseological units are carriers of historical experience, culturally specific ideas and linguistic outlook, which forms the uniqueness of each language community and its linguistic identity. The national-cultural component of phraseology can be expressed in one of the components of phraseological meaning (denotation, signification, connotation) or each.⁽¹⁾ At the phraseological level, the connection between the history and culture of a nation and its language is particularly pronounced. The national peculiarity of phraseology is due to the special conditions of the whole sphere of life of a native speaker. Phraseology is part of the language that preserves ancient words that have outlived their usefulness, grammatical forms and syntactic constructions that have been rejected by time and literary norms. However, preserving the form also preserves the content: national customs, beliefs, historical events and traditions.

One of the most striking and widely used ways to describe the world is through simile, which allows us to identify the features of an object. A simile is one of the most common stylistic devices inextricably linked to cognition; it is intertwined with metaphor and is the basis for metaphorical transfer.⁽²⁾ The study of comparison phrases in English, Spanish and Ukrainian is relevant because they reflect each nation's unique cultural characteristics, worldview and mentality. Studying these units certainly contributes to a more detailed understanding of interlingual and intercultural relations and enrichment of translation and linguistic research.

This article aims to analyse phraseological units with the structure of comparison in English and Spanish and to describe ways of translating them into Ukrainian.

Literature review

Analysing theoretical sources has enabled the identification of several key areas of phraseology research. Thus, Bortfield,⁽³⁾ Liu,⁽²⁾ Mykhaylenko,⁽⁴⁾ and Oleniak⁽⁵⁾ studied phraseological units in a comparative manner. Their works compare phraseological systems of different languages and identify common and unique features, which allows for a better understanding of linguistic specificity and cultural characteristics.

Byram,⁽⁶⁾ Kövecses,⁽⁷⁾ Prieto,⁽⁸⁾ and Yagiz and Izadpanah⁽⁹⁾ consider the cultural aspect of phraseology. The researchers focus on how phraseological units reflect the national culture, values, and worldview of the linguistic community, which in turn emphasises the importance of the cultural context in the formation and understanding of stable expressions.

The cognitive approach to phraseology is presented in Cacciari et al.,⁽¹⁰⁾ Jackendoff,⁽¹¹⁾ Moon⁽¹²⁾ and Skandera,⁽¹⁾ who study the cognitive mechanisms underlying the understanding of idioms, in particular the role of context, associations and individual characteristics.

Liddicoat,⁽¹³⁾ Ruiz Gurillo,⁽¹⁴⁾ and Wałaszewska⁽¹⁵⁾ highlight the pragmatic dimension of phraseological

units. In their works, phraseological units are considered a tool for effective communication, contributing to intercultural understanding and the transmission of subtle meanings in speech.

Manca,⁽¹⁶⁾ Yagiz and Izadpanah⁽⁹⁾ study the role of phraseology in the didactic aspect, i.e., in language teaching. The researchers emphasise the importance of phraseology for developing intercultural competence, enriching vocabulary, and better understanding of native speakers' cultures.

These works demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of phraseology, which covers cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic aspects. This indicates the importance of phraseological units not only as linguistic units but also as an important component of intercultural understanding and effective communication.

English figurative comparisons have been studied in great detail, and in theoretical terms, there is a large body of work^(17,15,18) devoted to their analysis. In Spanish phraseology, similes are not distinguished into a separate group of stable units;^(14,19) they are only given a place among free figurative combinations in more general studies.

The Spanish linguist Prieto, considering the cultural significance of phraseology, notes that phraseology is not only linguistic facts, but also a cultural phenomenon since it is created in a society of people, includes the speaker and the listener in a single space, which they culturally share, which allows it to be decoded, and at the same time offers information in the form of a complex image that breaks the formality and often re-creates the context of language.⁽⁸⁾

It is a linguistic axiom that all aspects of language have their own peculiarity, reflected in certain linguistic signs. This statement is also true for phraseology since this area is most susceptible to the influence of extralinguistic factors.⁽³⁾ Interlinguistic coincidences are considered to be a phraseological fact; their presence is because universal life processes and axiological attitudes are relevant to many cultures.

METHOD

In this research, an integrated methodological framework has been used, including several linguistic approaches that ensure complex multi-dimensionality in analyzing phraseological units. With the help of a lexical-semantic method, the meaning of phraseological units has been studied, their internal semantic structure, the composition of their constituent components, and so on. That enabled the semantic relations within the phraseological expressions to be determined, and thus it showed the interconnections between their elements and how the meaning is constructed and expressed.

The structural and grammatical method of research was exploited with the purpose of analyzing the syntactic and morphological organization of phraseological units. Such a method made it possible to identify grammatical regularities which governed the formation and functioning of such expressions in different languages. Thus, this study investigated how different syntactic structures, word orders, and morphological markers influence the underlying principles that govern grammatical behavior exhibited by phraseological units in the English, Spanish, and Ukrainian languages.

The comparative and contrastive method was widely used in this work and allowed making an in-depth analysis of phraseological units of different languages. With its help, it became possible to reveal the universal patterns, reflecting common cognitive and linguistic mechanisms cross-linguistically, and distinctive features determined by cultural, historical, and social contexts. By systematic comparison, this study has highlighted language-specific phraseological usages and indicated various ways in which different linguistic and extralinguistic factors influence the development of idiomatic expressions.

The empirical material for the research was a corpus of 100 phraseological units with a comparative structure in English, Spanish, and Ukrainian. The continuous sampling method was applied for the selection of these units to ensure the representativeness of the data for cross-linguistic analysis. In selecting the criteria, the study focused on phraseological expressions that explicitly include elements of comparison to allow for their semantic, syntactic, and grammatical characteristic analysis in the three languages in a structured manner.^(20,21,22)

RESULTS

The lexical and semantic analysis of phraseological units with the comparison structure in these languages revealed standard features and differences. In many cases, phraseological units are based on universal associations with natural phenomena, animals or objects, allowing them to convey meaning without significant changes in the three languages. For example, such images as *gorda como vaca* - *fat as a cow*, *alto como una torre* - *tall as a tower*, *grande como elefante* - *big as an elephant*, *pequeño como un ratón* - *small as a mouse* are understandable and universal, because the associations with the size, strength or insignificance of these objects are the same in many cultures.

At the same time, the analysed phraseological units revealed semantic differences due to cultural peculiarities. For example, the image *fresco como una lechuga* (fresh as a lettuce) is typical in Spanish. At the same time, in English, it can be replaced with *fresh as a daisy*, and in Ukrainian, it can be replaced with *fresh as a cucumber*. Another example is *loco como cabra* (crazy as a goat), which indicates the specifics of

Spanish culture, where a goat is associated with unpredictable behaviour. In English, this phraseology has the variant *crazy as a loon*, and in Ukrainian - *stupid as a donkey*. Similarly, *terco como una mula - stubborn as a mule* - illustrates the cultural commonality between Spanish and English, while in Ukrainian such comparisons are used less often.

Some of the analysed phraseologies show different degrees of detail or lexical variation. For example, the images of a turtle and a snail indicate slowness in the phrases *lento como una tortuga - slow as a turtle* and *lento como un caracol - slow as a snail*. The size of the base of comparison is the basis for the following examples: *pequeño como una pulga - small as a flea* and *alto como una montaña - tall as a mountain*. All these expressions convey a similar idea but differ in the choice of a specific image depending on cultural associations. For the phrase *dulce como la miel (sweet as honey)*, the universality of the image is observed, as honey is associated with sweetness in many cultures.

Polysemy is characteristic of many phrases referring to physical properties and abstract concepts. For example, *duro como el acero (hard as steel)* can be used both to describe physical hardness and to describe a person's stability or steadfastness. Similar examples include *fuerte como un toro - strong as a bull*, *fuerte como un oso - strong as a bear*, and *sabio como un filósofo - wise as a philosopher*, which can be applied to both physical and intellectual characteristics.

Thus, lexical and semantic analysis has shown that comparison phrases are an essential element of the linguistic worldview that reflects both universal and culturally specific features. The results of their analysis confirm the need for adaptation in translation to preserve each language's semantic and cultural heritage.

The next step of our study was a structural and grammatical analysis of comparison phrases in Spanish, English and Ukrainian, which showed the commonality of the main syntactic scheme based on the use of the comparative conjunction: *como* (Spanish), *as* (English), *yak* (Ukrainian). For example, in the phrases *gordo como un cerdo (fat as a pig)* or *rápido como liebre (fast as a hare)*, the components are arranged in the same order, ensuring the construction's comprehensibility in all three languages. The results of the quantitative analysis are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Structural and grammatical analysis of phraseological units

Aspect	Spanish language	English language	Ukrainian language	Notes
Standard structure (adjective + comparison)	100 % (100)	100 % (100)	100 % (100)	The structure is the same in all three languages
Availability of articles	100 % (100)	100 % (100)	0 % (0)	Articles are missing in the Ukrainian language
Agreeing on gender and number of adjectives	0 % (0)	0 % (0)	100 % (100)	A characteristic feature of the Ukrainian language
Inversion (flexibility in word order)	10 % (10)	10 % (10)	90 % (90)	Ukrainian shows greater variability
Possibility of reducing the design	10 % (10)	10 % (10)	50 % (50)	The abbreviation is the most typical for the Ukrainian language
Use of advanced designs	30 % (30)	30 % (30)	40 % (40)	Clarification or stylistic enrichment is added

As we can see from the data presented in the table, grammatical differences are evident in the details. In Spanish and English, adjectives precede the comparison (*gordo como un cerdo, fat as a pig*). At the same time, in Ukrainian, inversion is allowed, e.g., *fat as a pig* or *as a pig, fat*, depending on stylistic needs. Spanish and English also use the articles (*un cerdo, a pig*), which are absent in Ukrainian (*svynia*), reflecting the grammatical specificity of each language. In Ukrainian, adjectives agree with nouns in terms of gender and number (*big as an elephant, big as a mountain*), while in Spanish (*grande como elefante*) and English (*big as an elephant*), there is no agreement.

In all three languages, phraseology shows a different level of flexibility. In Ukrainian, it is possible to shorten the construction, such as *thick as a cow* → *fat, a cow*. In Spanish (*gorda como vaca*) and English (*fat as a cow*), this transformation is less common. However, all three languages allow for the change of adjectival form according to the degree of comparison: *thicker than a bear* (Ukrainian), *más gordo como un oso* (Spanish), and *fatter as a bear* (English).

Some of the analysed phraseological units demonstrate an extended structure. For example, in *sabio como un filósofo (wise as a philosopher)*, the additional component (*philosopher*) serves as a clarification while maintaining the basic scheme of comparison. At the same time, the phrase *loco como cabra (crazy as a goat)* in Spanish has a short structure, while in English (*crazy as a goat*) or Ukrainian (*stupid as a donkey*), it can be stylistically enriched with additional words.

Thus, the comparison phrases in the three languages mostly have the same syntactic structure but differ in grammatical details such as articles, component agreement and syntactic flexibility. Ukrainian shows more

variability in the construction and transformation of structures, while Spanish and English remain more formally structured. These features are essential when translating to preserve phraseology's grammatical and stylistic integrity.

The study's next step was to consider the translation aspect of phraseological units. An analysis of how English and Spanish idioms are translated into Ukrainian showed the presence of both cross-linguistic equivalents and culturally determined differences. A significant part of the studied phraseological units has direct equivalents in all three languages due to the universality of images (*fat as a cow - gorda como vaca*) reflecting similar associations between natural phenomena, animals, and human characteristics.

However, some phraseology is culturally specific. For example, in Spanish, the expressions *caballo* (horse) or *cabra* (goat) may denote different character traits than their direct analogues in English or Ukrainian. In addition, translating such phraseology requires adaptation to the target language's language norm and stylistic features.

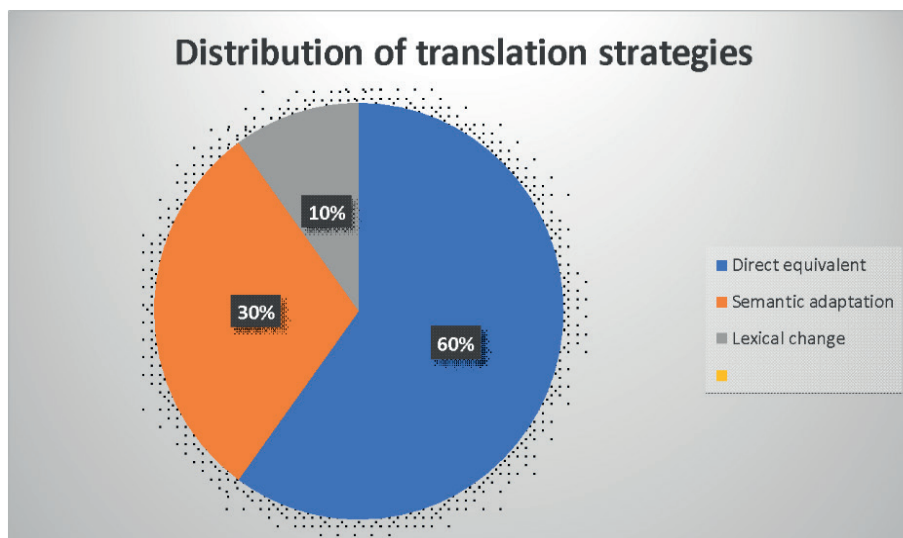


Figure 1. Distribution of translation strategies for 100 English and Spanish phraseological units in Ukrainian

The analysis revealed the following translation strategies:

- Direct equivalent: i.e. all three languages use the same image (*fuerte como un toro - strong as a bull*);
- Semantic adaptation: when there is no direct analogue in one of the languages and the closest variant is used (*rápido como liebre - fast as a hare*);
- Lexical substitution: a culturally specific image is replaced by one that is more understandable to another culture (*fresco como una lechuga - fresh as a cucumber - fresh as lettuce*).

Quantitative indicators of the distribution of these translation strategies are presented below. As we can see, the direct equivalent is the most common way of translating the analysed phraseology.

DISCUSSION

The study results show that phraseological units with the comparison structure in English, Spanish and Ukrainian are informative material for studying universal and culturally specific features of the linguistic worldview. The lexical and semantic analysis showed that many phraseological units are based on universal images related to nature, animals or objects. For example, expressions such as *gorda como vaca* (fat as a cow) or *fuerte como un toro* (strong as a bull) are equally understandable in all three languages due to similar associations.

However, the analysis also revealed significant semantic and cultural differences, which is also emphasized in other relevant researches.^(4,5,6) These relate to specific images with different emotional or cultural connotations in the three languages. For example, in Spanish, the image *fresco como una lechuga* (fresh as lettuce) is typical, while in English, *fresh as a daisy* is used, and in Ukrainian, *fresh as a cucumber*. These differences require careful adaptation in translation to preserve not only the meaning but also the style.

The structural and grammatical analysis confirmed that the basic scheme of phrase construction remains similar in the three languages: adjective + comparative conjunction + noun. For example, *gordo como un cerdo* - fat as a pig - has the same syntactic structure in all three languages. However, grammatical features,

such as articles in English and Spanish or gender and number agreement in Ukrainian, cause some differences. In addition, Ukrainian demonstrates much greater flexibility in constructing phrases, such as the possibility of inversion (as a pig or fat).

The quantitative analysis showed that out of 100 phraseological units, 60 % are translated based on direct equivalence, 30 % require semantic adaptation, and 10 % require lexical substitution due to the lack of appropriate images in the target language. The results underline the importance of choosing an appropriate translation strategy to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance.

Thus, the analysis of phraseological units with a comparison structure has confirmed their role in preserving linguistic and cultural identity and their universality in interlingual communication.^(7,9,13) Understanding the similarities and differences between languages contributes to effective translation, which ensures both accuracy and preservation of the cultural context.

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of phraseological units in English, Spanish, and Ukrainian revealed the presence of universal patterns and culturally specific features. A lot of units are based on shared associations, allowing for direct translation, while culturally unique imagery requires adaptation to maintain meaning and style. The structural and grammatical analysis confirmed a generally similar syntactic structure across the three languages but underlined the differences in flexibility: Ukrainian allows more grammatical variation, while Spanish and English follow stricter formal rules. The analysis of translation strategies showed that in 60 % of phraseological units, direct correspondences are possible, 30 % need semantic adaptation, and 10 % involve lexical substitution, which underlines the role of cultural and linguistic factors in translation.

The findings emphasize the importance of comparative phraseology as a source for both universal and culture-specific worldviews. The research will contribute to a deeper understanding of interlinguistic relations and translation studies, lexicology, and intercultural communication.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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