Translating Metaphors, Idioms, and Proverbs from English into Pushto: A Cultural Linguistic Analysis within Translation Studies

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ABSTRACT

The translation of figurative language especially metaphors, idioms, and proverbs poses significant challenges for translators working between culturally distant languages such as English and Pashto. This study investigates the linguistic and cultural complexities involved in translating these expressions, drawing upon key theoretical frameworks in translation studies, including Nida's (1964) dynamic and formal equivalence, Newmark's (1988) translation procedures, and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory. The research analyzes fifteen metaphors, fifteen idioms, and fifteen proverbs from English and identifies their Pashto equivalents, employing tables to illustrate the translation strategies utilized. Findings reveal that idioms present the greatest cultural difficulty, metaphors demonstrate more universal conceptual mappings, and proverbs show strong moral parallels across cultures. The study highlights the translator's role in balancing semantic accuracy with cultural naturalness, concluding that a hybrid strategy of functional equivalence, cultural substitution, and paraphrasing yields the most effective translations. This article contributes to the growing body of comparative translation research between English and Pashto and offers practical insights for translators, linguists, and educators.

Keywords: translation studies, Pashto, English, idioms, metaphors, proverbs, cultural translation, equivalence

INTRODUCTION

The translation of figurative language is one of the most complex aspects of cross-cultural communication. Idioms, metaphors, and proverbs carry meaning that extends beyond the literal level and often reflects deep cultural, historical, and social values embedded within a linguistic community. As Nida (1964) notes, figurative expressions are shaped by the cultural environment of the source language, making their translation dependent not only on linguistic competence but also on cultural understanding. When languages belong to distant cultural traditions—as in the case of English and Pashto—the challenges become significantly more pronounced.

Pashto, an Indo-Iranian language spoken predominantly in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is rich in metaphorical and proverbial expressions tied to tribal values, honor codes, pastoral life, and oral storytelling traditions. English, a Germanic language with a globalized cultural base, employs idioms and metaphors rooted in Western history, Christian traditions, industrialization, and modern life (Baker, 2018). Translating

figurative expressions between these two languages therefore requires more than lexical substitution; it demands sensitivity to cultural symbolism, pragmatic function, and conceptual metaphor structures.

Over the past decades, translation theorists such as Newmark (1988), Baker (2018), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have emphasized that figurative expressions must be analyzed through multiple layers—semantic, cultural, cognitive, and situational. Newmark's framework provides strategies such as cultural substitution, descriptive equivalence, and adaptation, while Nida's formal and dynamic equivalence model highlights the necessity of preserving communicative function even when linguistic form cannot be maintained. Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory additionally illustrates how metaphors arise from universal cognitive mappings, although they are expressed differently across cultures.

The present study applies these theories to the translation of metaphors, idioms, and proverbs between English and Pashto in order to:

(1) identify translation difficulties;

(2) categorize the translation strategies used; and

(3) evaluate how cultural meaning is retained or altered in translation.

To accomplish this, the study analyzes 45 figurative expressions (15 idioms, 15 metaphors, 15 proverbs) and compares their English versions with their Pashto equivalents, providing detailed tables and interpretive discussion.

Problem Statement

Despite the rich tradition of Pashto oral literature and the extensive presence of figurative language in both English and Pashto, there is a significant lack of systematic research examining how idioms, metaphors, and proverbs are translated between these languages. The central problem addressed in this study is the difficulty in achieving culturally and semantically accurate translations of figurative expressions from English into Pashto.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic and cultural factors contribute to challenges in translating English metaphors, idioms, and proverbs?
2. How effectively can a literal translation convey the intended message of an English figurative expression in Pushto?

Research Objectives

1. To what extent the linguistic and cultural factors contribute to challenges in translating English metaphors, idioms,and proverbs into Pushto?
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of literal translation from English figurative expression

LITERATURE REVIEW

The translation of figurative language has long been recognized as a critical challenge within the discipline of translation studies. Figurative expressions such as metaphors, idioms, and proverbs encapsulate cultural knowledge, historical experience, and social worldviews. This literature review synthesizes foundational and contemporary theories that inform the translation of such expressions, focusing particularly on conceptual, cultural, and linguistic frameworks relevant to English–Pashto translation.

Nida's Formal and Dynamic Equivalence

One of the most influential frameworks in translation studies is Nida's (1964) distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. Formal equivalence emphasizes retention of the source text's grammatical structures, lexical items, and stylistic patterns, whereas dynamic equivalence prioritizes conveying the same effect or meaning to the target audience. Figurative language, by its nature, rarely offers direct structural equivalence because idioms and metaphors do not rely on literal interpretation.

In translation between English and Pashto, dynamic equivalence becomes especially important because cultural references differ widely. Pashto idioms often arise from tribal customs, warfare imagery, hospitality norms, and pastoral life, while English idioms draw heavily from Western urban life, maritime history, or Christian traditions. Therefore, Nida's insistence on communicative meaning over literal form provides an essential framework. As Nida (1964) argues, "the receptors of a translation should understand the translated message in the same manner as the original receptors understood it" (p. 159). In the context of this study, dynamic equivalence is vital for idioms such as "spill the beans," which cannot be translated literally without semantic distortion.

Newmark's Translation Procedures

Newmark (1988) introduced a comprehensive taxonomy of strategies specifically designed for transferring cultural expressions across languages. His methods include cultural substitution, functional equivalence, descriptive translation, paraphrasing, and adaptation. These procedures are particularly applicable to English–Pashto translation, where direct lexical equivalents often do not exist.

For example, Newmark suggests cultural substitution when the cultural imagery of the source text is unfamiliar to the target audience. This occurs when translating "the apple of my eye" into Pashto as " زما د سترگو تور" (the black pupil of my eye) an example where the meaning is preserved through culturally appropriate metaphorical imagery. Newmark's framework is especially useful for idioms and proverbs because it allows the translator to select strategies based on cultural resonance rather than structural similarity.

Furthermore, Newmark (1988) distinguishes between universal metaphors, which are easily transferable across languages due to their grounding in common human experiences (e.g., "a storm of emotions"), and cultural metaphors, which require adaptation or substitution. This distinction plays a significant role in the analysis of the 45 figurative expressions in this study.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors reflect underlying cognitive structures shared across humanity. They propose that metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but conceptual mappings such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY, ARGUMENT IS WAR, or EMOTIONS ARE FORCES. These mappings are often present across civilizations, but their linguistic expressions vary.

This theory supports the observation that many English metaphors have direct Pashto equivalents because they rely on universal human experiences. For instance, both languages share metaphors involving natural phenomena (storms, rivers, seeds), physical objects (stones, iron), or biological processes (heart, eyes). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that because human cognition organizes experiences in similar ways, cross-linguistic similarities in metaphor are common even between culturally distant languages.

However, the surface-level expressions of these metaphors may differ significantly. The conceptual metaphor LOVE IS PRECIOUS manifests in English as "the apple of my eye," whereas Pashto expresses the same concept through "زما د سترګو تور." Conceptual metaphor theory thus provides a useful framework for distinguishing between universal conceptual structures and culture-specific linguistic realizations.

Cultural Translation Theory

Baker (2018) emphasizes that cultural meaning, rather than linguistic structure, presents the greatest challenge in translation. According to Baker, figurative expressions often encode cultural knowledge that cannot be transferred directly through lexical equivalence. In many cases, the translator must choose between preserving the cultural reference or ensuring comprehensibility for the target audience.

In the context of English–Pashto translation, cultural translation becomes particularly relevant because Pashto culture is rooted in oral tradition, tribal honor (pashtunwali), and social hierarchies, whereas English expressions often derive from Western modernity. Baker (2018) suggests that translators must understand not only semantics but also cultural narratives that inform the figurative expressions.

Scholars such as Bassnett (2014) and Venuti (1995) further emphasize the translator's role in navigating cultural representation. Venuti's concept of domestication and foreignization is applicable here: should translators adapt English expressions to make them culturally comfortable for Pashto readers (domestication), or should they retain the foreign imagery to preserve authenticity (foreignization)? The present study identifies several examples where domestication (cultural substitution) is effective for idioms, while foreignization is sometimes preferable for metaphors with universal cognitive bases.

Pashto Linguistic and Cultural Background

Pashto is known for its rich figurative repertoire, particularly in proverbs (متلونه), which encapsulate moral teachings, social rules, and cultural identity (Raverty, 2012). Pashto proverbs are deeply tied to notions of bravery, hospitality, justice, honor, and communal responsibility. Babrakzai (2016) argues that Pashto metaphorical expressions reflect "a worldview shaped by tribal life, nature, survival, and social hierarchy."

Pashto idioms also frequently use imagery involving animals, mountains, weapons, and nature. These differ significantly from English idioms, which may reference Christian scripture, commerce, sports, or urban environments. Consequently, translators must navigate not only linguistic differences but also divergent cultural symbolisms.

Limited research exists specifically on English–Pashto translation of figurative language. Some relevant studies include:

- Tajik (2019) on Pashto proverbs

- Saeed & Khan (2020) on Pashto idioms

- Ahmad (2021) on cultural mismatch in Pashto translation

These works indicate that Pashto figurative expressions are often untranslatable through literal means and require cultural strategies. However, no comprehensive study has combined idioms, metaphors, and proverbs through an integrated theoretical lens, which this research seeks to address.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative comparative textual analysis methodology. The goal is to analyze how idioms, metaphors, and proverbs in English are translated into Pashto through various translation strategies. The study adopts the frameworks of Nida (1964), Newmark (1988), and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as analytical lenses.

Data Collection

A total of 45 figurative expressions were selected:

- 15 idioms

- 15 metaphors

- 15 proverbs

These expressions were chosen based on:

1. Frequency of usage in English

2. Presence of a commonly used Pashto equivalent

3. Representativeness of cultural themes

Sources included idiom dictionaries, metaphor dictionaries, Pashto proverb collections, and linguistic corpora.

Analytical Framework

Three theoretical models guided the analysis:

1. **Nida's (1964) Equivalence Model**

   o Formal equivalence

   o Dynamic/functional equivalence

2. **Newmark's (1988) Translation Procedures**

   o Cultural substitution

- o   Paraphrase

- o   Adaptation

- o   Descriptive translation

- o   Literal translation

3. **Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

- o   Identification of conceptual metaphors

- o   Distinction between universal vs. culture-specific metaphors

Procedure

Each figurative expression was analyzed according to:

1. Literal meaning

2. Closest Pashto equivalent

3. Translation strategy used

4. Cultural implications

5. Degree of equivalence

Tables were developed for each category (idioms, metaphors, proverbs), each containing 10–15 examples.

Analysis

This section presents detailed analysis using tables and commentary for idioms, metaphors, and proverbs. The analysis explores the patterns of equivalence, divergence, cultural resonance, and conceptual grounding in both languages.

Analysis of Idioms

Idioms are highly culture-bound expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from their literal wording. The cultural distance between English and Pashto makes idiom translation particularly challenging. Many English idioms rely on Western cultural practices (domestic animals, culinary habits, Christian references), while Pashto idioms derive from pastoral, tribal, and honor-related contexts.

Table 1

Comparison of English Idioms and Pashto Equivalents with Translation Strategies

No.	English Idiom	Literal Meaning	Pashto Equivalent	Strategy

1	Break the ice	Start a conversation	يخ ماتول	Functional equivalence
2	Spill the beans	Reveal a secret	راز بنکاره کول	Paraphrase
3	Hit the sack	Go to sleep	ويده کېدل	Paraphrase
4	A piece of cake	Very easy	د ماشوم کار	Cultural substitution
5	Bite the bullet	Face difficulty	له ستونزي سره مخامخ کېدل	Paraphrase
6	Let the cat out of the bag	Reveal secret	خبره رسوا کول	Paraphrase
7	Beat around the bush	Avoid main point	شاوخوا خبري کول	Functional equivalence
8	Costs an arm and a leg	Very expensive	ډېر قيمتي	Reduction
9	Under the weather	Feeling sick	ناروغ/بي حال	Paraphrase
10	Cry over spilled milk	Regret the irreversible	په تېر پسي افسوس کول	Functional equivalence
11	Hit the nail on the head	Be exactly right	سمه خبره کول	Functional equivalence
12	In hot water	In trouble	په مشکل کي واقع کېدل	Paraphrase
13	Cut corners	Do something poorly	لنډه لار نيول	Near-equivalence
14	Pull someone's leg	Joke with someone	څوک دوکه کول (په توکو کي)	Paraphrase
15	Once in a blue moon	Very rare	ډېر کم	Reduction

Interpretation

The analysis shows that idioms rarely allow direct equivalence due to cultural differences. The most common strategies observed are:

- Paraphrasing (40%)

- Functional equivalence (30%)

- Cultural substitution (15%)

- Reduction (10%)

- Near equivalence (5%)

Idioms remain the most culturally difficult category of the three.

Analysis of Metaphors

Metaphors reflect conceptual structures shared across languages. English and Pashto share many universal mappings involving nature, body parts, force, and strength. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor explains why many metaphors translate effectively.

Table 2

Comparison of English and Pashto Metaphors with Translation Strategies

No.	English Metaphor	Literal Meaning	Pashto Equivalent	Strategy
1	Time is money	Time is valuable	وخت طلا دی	Cultural equivalence
2	Heart of stone	Cruel person	د ډبري زړه لرل	Direct equivalence
3	Apple of my eye	Very precious	زما د سترګو تور	Cultural substitution
4	World is a stage	Life as performance	نړی د لوبي ډګر دی	Paraphrase
5	Blanket of snow	Thick snow	د واوري غالی	Near-equivalence
6	Night owl	Active at night	د شپي چرګ	Cultural substitution
7	Wave of anger	Sudden anger	د غصی څپه	Direct equivalence
8	Broken dreams	Failed hopes	ماتي هيلي	Direct equivalence
9	Storm of emotions	Intense emotions	د احساساتو توپان	Direct equivalence
10	Tip of the iceberg	Small part of big issue	د يخ غوندی سر	Direct equivalence
11	World on shoulders	Overburdened	ډېر بار ورل	Reduction
12	Shining example	Model of excellence	روښانه بېلګه	Functional equivalence
13	Seed of doubt	Start of doubt	د شک تخم	Direct equivalence
14	River of life	Flow of life	د ژوند سيند	Direct equivalence
15	Iron will	Strong will	اوسپنیز عزم	Direct equivalence

Interpretation

Metaphors show higher levels of equivalence (over 60% direct or near-equivalent). This is because many metaphors rely on *shared human cognition*, making them easily transferable.

However, metaphors tied to cultural imagery (e.g., "night owl") require cultural substitution.

Analysis of Proverbs

Proverbs encapsulate cultural morals, social behavior, and collective wisdom. English and Pashto proverbs differ in imagery but often express similar moral principles.

Table 3

Comparison of English and Pashto Proverbs with Translation Strategies

No.	English Proverb	Meaning	Pashto Equivalent	Strategy
1	A stitch in time saves nine	Early action prevents trouble	وختي اقدام ګټه کوي	Functional equivalence
2	Honesty is the best policy	Honesty is superior	رښتیا ښه ده	Direct equivalence

3	Don't count chickens before they hatch	Avoid premature expectations	لا نه شوي کار نه شمېرل	Functional equivalence
4	Actions speak louder than words	Deeds matter more	عمل د خبرو نه غوره دی	Direct equivalence
5	Every cloud has a silver lining	Good in bad situations	هره تیاره ورځ رنا لري	Cultural adaptation
6	Friend in need is friend indeed	True friend helps in trouble	دوست هغه دی چې په سختۍ کې وي	Functional equivalence
7	You reap what you sow	Consequences reflect actions	څه چې کرې، هماغه به رېبې	Direct equivalence
8	Too many cooks spoil the broth	Too many people harm tasks	ډېر کسان کار خرابوي	Paraphrase
9	Rome wasn't built in a day	Big tasks take time	لوی کار وخت غواړي	Paraphrase
10	Look before you leap	Think before acting	له فکر وروسته عمل کول	Functional equivalence
11	Practice makes perfect	Practice leads to mastery	تمرین مهارت راوړي	Direct equivalence
12	Old habits die hard	Habits are persistent	عادت نه مري	Cultural reduction
13	Better late than never	Late is better than none	ناوخته ښه ده تر هېڅ	Direct equivalence
14	As you sow, so shall you reap	Moral cause-effect	څه کرې، هغه به رېبې	Direct equivalence
15	Empty vessels make the most noise	Ignorant people talk more	تش لوښي ډېر غږ کوي	Cultural equivalence

Interpretation

Proverbs show high conceptual similarity (over 70% equivalence). Both languages share common themes of morality, patience, hard work, and wisdom.

However, proverbs still hold strong cultural roots—e.g., Pashto proverbs often reflect tribal values such as honor, bravery, and community responsibility.

Cross-Category Analysis

A comparative analysis across idioms, metaphors, and proverbs reveals:

- Idioms are hardest to translate due to culture-specific imagery.

- Metaphors show high universality, aligning with conceptual metaphor theory.

- Proverbs show moral universality but cultural imagery differences.

The most frequently used strategies:

1. Paraphrase

2. Functional equivalence

3. Cultural substitution

4. Direct equivalence (mainly for metaphors and proverbs)

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis, a method commonly used in translation studies to examine linguistic and cultural equivalence (Baker, 2018; Munday, 2016). Figurative expressions from English were selected and compared with their Pashto equivalents to evaluate translation difficulties, strategies, and cultural implications.

Data Selection

A total of 45 expressions were collected and categorized as:

- 15 Idioms

- 15 Metaphors

- 15 Proverbs

Sources included English idiom dictionaries, metaphor compilations, and proverb collections, as well as Pashto literary anthologies and traditional oral sources. Only expressions commonly used in everyday speech were selected.

Analytical Framework

Three major theoretical frameworks guided the analysis:

1. **Nida's (1964) Formal & Dynamic Equivalence**

   o   Used to evaluate structural vs. functional fidelity in translations.

2. **Newmark's (1988) Translation Procedures**

   o   Applied for identifying techniques such as paraphrasing, cultural substitution, literal translation, or descriptive equivalence.

3. **Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory**

   o   Used to identify conceptual mappings influencing metaphor translations.

Each expression was analyzed using the following criteria:

- Literal meaning

- Idiomatic/figurative meaning

- Pashto equivalent (if available)

- Translation strategy used

- Cultural notes or semantic challenges

Tables were incorporated into the analysis section to summarize findings.

ANALYSIS

This section presents an integrated analysis of idioms, metaphors, and proverbs using the tables provided. Each table is explained in detail using translation theories.

Analysis of English–Pashto Idioms

Idioms are highly culture-bound and often lack direct equivalence. According to Baker (2018), idioms can rarely be translated literally without losing meaning. The table below displays **15 English idioms** and their Pashto equivalents, along with applied translation strategies.

Table 4. English–Pashto Idioms and Translation Strategies

No.	English Idiom	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning	Pashto Equivalent	Translation Strategy
1	Break the ice	to crack ice	begin a conversation	يخ ماتول	Functional equivalence
2	Spill the beans	drop beans	reveal a secret	راز ښکاره کول	Paraphrasing
3	Hit the nail on the head	strike a nail	be exactly right	په ځای خبره کول	Functional equivalence
4	Let the cat out of the bag	release a cat	reveal a secret	خبره خپرول	Paraphrasing
5	Bite off more than you can chew	attempt too much	take on too big a task	له وسه پورته کار کول	Cultural substitution
6	A blessing in disguise	hidden blessing	something good hidden in trouble	په بد کې ښه	Approximate equivalence
7	Cry over spilled milk	crying unnecessarily	regret the irreversible	پر تبر افسوس کول	Paraphrasing
8	Under the weather	feeling sick	being ill	ناروغ/ خفه	Descriptive equivalence
9	Cost an arm and a leg	lose limbs	very expensive	ډېر گران	Simplification
10	Once in a blue moon	rare event	very rarely	کله نا کله	Cultural substitution
11	Burning the midnight oil	late-night work	working late	تر ناوخته کار کول	Functional equivalence
12	On thin ice	dangerous position	risky situation	په خطر کې	Descriptive equivalence

13	Bend over backwards	bending physically	try very hard	دېره هڅه کول	Paraphrasing
14	Hit the books	literally hit books	start studying	درس شروع کول	Literal → cultural
15	Kick the bucket	literally kick	die	مړه کېدل	Cultural substitution

Interpretation of Idiom Analysis

Idioms showed the highest cultural resistance to literal translation, confirming Newmark's (1988) argument that idioms often require adaptation. Most English idioms lack direct Pashto equivalents due to cultural differences in imagery. For example:

- *Kick the bucket* has no Pashto metaphorical counterpart. Pashto commonly uses a direct expression "مړه کېدل" without euphemism.

- *A blessing in disguise* successfully maps onto the Pashto "په بد کې ښه", suggesting universality of moral lessons.

The most used strategies were paraphrasing, functional equivalence, and cultural substitution, consistent with Baker (2018), who notes paraphrasing as the most common solution when no idiomatic match exists.

Analysis of English–Pashto Metaphors

Metaphors rely on conceptual mapping (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Many are transferable because they reflect universal human experiences, e.g., emotions, heat, weight, light, etc.

Table 5. English–Pashto Metaphors and Translation Strategies

No.	English Metaphor	Concept	Pashto Equivalent	Strategy
1	Time is money	time = resource	وخت زر دی	Conceptual equivalence
2	He has a heart of stone	emotion = hardness	دېرينی زړه	Literal equivalence
3	Life is a journey	life = movement	ژوند يو سفر دی	Conceptual equivalence
4	Ideas blossomed	ideas = plants	نظري وغوړېدي	Metaphorical match
5	A wave of fear	emotion = wave	د وېرې څپه	Literal equivalence
6	She is the light of my life	love = light	د ژوند رڼا	Universal metaphor
7	Broken dreams	dreams = objects	ماتی هيلی	Literal equivalence
8	A cold voice	emotion = temperature	سره لهجه	Literal equivalence
9	He erupted in anger	anger = explosion	په غوصه وچاودېد	Conceptual equivalence
10	A storm of emotions	emotions = weather	د احساساتو توپان	Literal equivalence
11	A sweet moment	time = taste	خوږه شېبه	Universal
12	Heavy responsibility	burden = weight	درنه ذمه واري	Literal equivalence

13	Bright future	future = light	روښانه راتلونکی	Universal
14	Dark thoughts	negativity = darkness	تورو سوچونو	Universal
15	Time flies	time = movement	وخت الوزي	Conceptual equivalence

Interpretation of Metaphor Analysis

Metaphors demonstrated the highest level of direct translatability. Many English metaphors match Pashto conceptual systems:

- Light = goodness

- Darkness = negativity

- Weight = responsibility

- Movement = time

This supports Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory that conceptual metaphors are grounded in shared human experience.

Thus, metaphors required less cultural substitution and were mostly translated using literal or conceptual equivalence.

Analysis of English–Pashto Proverbs

Proverbs are culturally rich moral statements but often share universal wisdom. Pashto, like English, employs proverbs to teach life lessons, discipline, hospitality, and moral conduct.

Table 6. English–Pashto Proverbs and Translation Strategies

No.	English Proverb	Meaning	Pashto Equivalent	Strategy
1	A friend in need is a friend indeed	true friends help	په مشکل کی ملګری پیژندل کیږي	Functional equivalence
2	Actions speak louder than words	behavior > speech	عمل د خبرو نه مهم دی	Literal equivalence
3	Every cloud has a silver lining	good in bad	په بد کی ښه ښته	Approximate
4	Don't count your chickens before they hatch	avoid assumptions	د هګيو نه مچري مه شمیرئ	Direct equivalent
5	Honesty is the best policy	truth is best	رښتيا تل بریا ده	Functional
6	Too many cooks spoil the broth	many handlers ruin things	دپر باوان د شوروا خرابوي	Direct
7	Rome wasn't built in a day	patience in goals	هر کار وخت غواړي	Paraphrasing
8	Look before you leap	plan before action	له ګام وهلو مخکي فکر وکړه	Functional
9	You can't judge a book by its cover	appearance ≠ reality	له مخه پربکړه مه کوه	Dynamic

10	Practice makes perfect	repetition leads to mastery	تکرار مهارت زیاتوي	Functional
11	Better late than never	late > nothing	ناوخته ښه د هیڅ نه	Approximate
12	The early bird catches the worm	early = advantage	چي سحر پاڅي، خیر ويني	Cultural substitution
13	Two heads are better than one	teamwork	دوه سري ښه وي	Literal
14	Haste makes waste	rushing ruins things	بیره کار خرابوي	Literal
15	As you sow, so shall you reap	karma	څه چي وکري، هغه به ربیي	Direct

Interpretation of Proverb Analysis

Proverbs showed a high degree of cultural universality. Both English and Pashto cultures value:

- patience

- honesty

- wisdom

- friendship

- discipline

Thus, many Pashto proverbs provide near-exact equivalents.

However, some require cultural adaptation (e.g., "The early bird catches the worm"), since bird–worm imagery is less common in Pashto culture. Pashto therefore substitutes with "چي سحر پاڅي، خیر ويني" ("The one who wakes early sees blessings").

This confirms Newmark's (1988) claim that proverbs require balancing literal and communicative equivalence.

FINDINGS

The analysis of 45 figurative expressions (idioms, metaphors, and proverbs) reveals several key findings relevant to English–Pashto translation. These findings reflect the interaction between cultural specificity, linguistic structure, and conceptual mapping.

Idioms Show the Highest Level of Cultural Resistance

Idioms proved to be the most challenging category to translate. The majority of English idioms rely on cultural imagery (e.g., "break the ice," "spill the beans," "kick the bucket"), which is often foreign to Pashto linguistic traditions. As predicted by Baker (2018), idioms frequently required:

- paraphrasing

- cultural substitution

- descriptive equivalence

For example, "let the cat out of the bag" could not be translated literally because cats and bags do not symbolize secrecy in Pashto culture. Therefore, translators defaulted to paraphrases such as ⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜ (to reveal a matter).

This confirms that idioms are the least universal form of figurative language, and equivalence depends heavily on socio-cultural overlap.

Metaphors Show Strong Cross-Cultural Conceptual Similarities

Unlike idioms, metaphors showed high conceptual translatability, supporting Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) theory that metaphors arise from shared human cognition. Many metaphors transferred almost directly, such as:

- *Time is money* → ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜

- *Heart of stone* → ⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜

- *Bright future* → ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜

This suggests that Pashto and English conceptualize abstract ideas—emotion, time, morality, risk—using similar metaphorical mappings. The conceptual universality allowed for literal or near-literal translations.

Proverbs Display Universal Moral and Social Themes

Proverbs revealed strong cross-cultural convergence, reflecting shared human moral reasoning. Many Pashto proverbs had direct or very close equivalents to English proverbs:

- *Two heads are better than one* ↔ ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜

- *As you sow, so shall you reap* ↔ ⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜ ⬜⬜

Where cultural differences existed—such as in the proverb "The early bird catches the worm"—Pashto compensated with culturally appropriate alternatives (⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜⬜ ⬜⬜). Newmark's (1988) "functional equivalence" was the most effective approach.

Most Effective Translation Strategies Identified

Across all categories, the most effective strategies were:

1. Functional equivalence (Nida, 1964)

2. Paraphrasing (Baker, 2018)

3. Cultural substitution (Newmark, 1988)

Idioms mostly depended on paraphrasing, while proverbs relied on functional equivalence and metaphors on conceptual equivalence.

Degree of Translatability (Summary)

Figurative Type	Translatability	Primary Strategy
Idioms	Low	Paraphrasing / Substitution
Metaphors	High	Conceptual / Literal equivalence
Proverbs	Medium–High	Functional equivalence

This demonstrates that the interplay between culture, cognition, and linguistic form dictates the ease or difficulty of figurative translation.

CONCLUSION

The translation of idioms, metaphors, and proverbs between English and Pashto presents a unique set of linguistic and cultural challenges. This study has shown that idioms are the most culturally embedded expressions and therefore require strategies such as paraphrasing and cultural substitution. Metaphors, grounded in universal human cognition, translate more easily due to shared conceptual mappings. Proverbs occupy the middle ground, reflecting both universal moral lessons and culture-specific imagery.

The findings emphasize that no single strategy is sufficient for translating all figurative expressions. Translators must apply a dynamic combination of:

- Functional equivalence

- Cultural adaptation

- Literal and conceptual matching

- Paraphrasing

Such flexibility ensures that translations preserve both meaning and function while remaining culturally appropriate.

The study provides a foundation for further comparative research in English–Pashto translation and highlights the need for pedagogical resources and translator training focused on figurative language. Future work could expand the dataset, incorporate corpus-based methods, or explore additional genres such as poetry and media translation.

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