# LOST AND FOUND IN TRANSLATION: SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF SUBTITLING BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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**Abstract**. This study examines the semantic and cultural dimensions of subtitling between Uzbek and English. Subtitling is not a simple linguistic transfer but a complex process that requires attention to cultural context, idiomatic expressions, and audiovisual constraints. By analyzing selected subtitles from Uzbek films translated into English and English-language films subtitled into Uzbek, this paper highlights cases where meaning is preserved, adapted, or lost. Findings reveal that while universal concepts can often be translated literally, culture-specific references, humor, and idioms require creative adaptation. The study contributes to translation studies by emphasizing the importance of cultural competence in subtitling

**Introduction.** Globalization and digital streaming platforms have dramatically increased the need for high-quality subtitles across cultures. For Uzbekistan, subtitling foreign films into Uzbek has become essential to provide access to global media, while Uzbek films subtitled into English are now reaching international audiences. Subtitling, however, is not merely a linguistic task—it requires bridging semantic and cultural gaps between two languages. The present research investigates how idioms, humor, and cultural references are translated in Uzbek ↔ English subtitles and evaluates the strategies used to retain meaning.

**Literature review**. Subtitling has been widely studied in translation studies as an audiovisual translation mode with unique constraints, such as character limits and synchronization with speech (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021). According to Nida (1964), dynamic equivalence emphasizes conveying meaning

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rather than form, which is crucial in subtitling idioms and culture-bound expressions. Kövecses (2005) highlights that metaphors and idioms are often culture-specific, making literal translation ineffective. In Uzbek linguistics, Mamajonov (2018) and Rashidova (2020) stress that idioms reflect cultural worldviews, and translating them requires sensitivity to context. Previous studies reveal that humor and idiomatic language are the most challenging aspects of subtitling, often leading to semantic loss or cultural substitution.

**Methodology**. This study employs a qualitative comparative method. Data were collected from Uzbek films subtitled into English on platforms such as YouTube and Netflix, and from English-language films subtitled into Uzbek for local television and cinemas. Examples of idioms, humor, and culture-specific terms were selected and categorized into three groups: (1) literal translation, (2) adapted translation, and (3) semantic loss. Each case was analyzed to identify translation strategies and cultural implications.

**Results.**

The analysis revealed the following findings:

1. Literal Translations (Successful): Universal idioms and expressions were translated directly without semantic loss.

- Uzbek: "Oltin yurak" → English: "Golden heart."

- English: "Time is money" → Uzbek: "Vaqt – oltin."

2. Adapted Translations: Culture-specific idioms required adaptation to retain meaning.

- Uzbek: "Ko'rpangga qarab oyoq uzat" → English: "Cut your coat according to your cloth."

- English: "Don't cry over spilled milk" → Uzbek: "Bo'lib o'tgan ishga achinma."

3. Semantic Loss: In some cases, subtitles failed to capture figurative meaning, leading to misunderstanding.

- Uzbek (film dialogue): "Chumchuqni tutmoqchi bo'lib, tuyaning qulog'idan ayrildi" was subtitled as "He failed badly," losing the vivid imagery.

- English (comedy film): Jokes based on wordplay were translated literally into Uzbek, resulting in confusion.

**Discussion**. The results demonstrate that subtitling between Uzbek and English involves balancing semantic fidelity with cultural adaptation. Literal

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translations work best for universal concepts but fail with idioms and humor. Adapted translations preserve meaning and cultural nuance, but they require translator creativity and deep cultural knowledge. Semantic loss, while unavoidable in some cases, highlights the limitations of subtitling due to time, space, and linguistic gaps. The study suggests that training translators in cultural competence and flexible strategies is crucial for improving subtitle quality.

**Conclusion**. Subtitling is a vital tool for intercultural communication, especially between Uzbek and English. This study shows that while literal translations are effective for universal idioms, adaptation is necessary for culture-specific expressions. Semantic loss remains a challenge but can be minimized through creative strategies and cultural awareness. The findings emphasize the need for further research on subtitling practices in Uzbekistan and the integration of translation training programs that focus on cultural dimensions. High-quality subtitling not only ensures accurate communication but also promotes Uzbek culture on the global stage.

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