

THE LEVEL OF EQUIVALENCE OF THE ENGLISH IDIOMS IN THE MACEDONIAN TRANSLATION OF THE NOVEL “*THE ARCHITECT’S APPRENTICE*”

Katerina Vidova

International Slavic University “St. Nicholas”, Sveti Nikole, North Macedonia
vidovakaterina44@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper analyses the level of equivalence of the English idiomatic expressions in the novel “*The Architect’s Apprentice*” by Elif Shafak, a Turkish-British writer, and their Macedonian translation equivalents. The motive for writing this paper arose from the fact that the novel “*The Architect’s Apprentice*” by Elif Shafak, initially written in English and later translated into many languages, including Macedonian, abounds in idioms and figurative phrases. These idioms, more than just linguistic expressions, are windows into a nation’s culture, wisdom, tradition, and way of thinking. Hence, translating from the source into the target language is a great challenge.

The research was conducted on a corpus of sentences excerpted from the novel written in English and its Macedonian translation. Therefore, the comparative method is used to examine the excerpted examples in both languages, i.e., the idioms were compared based on the correspondence between their lexical form and meaning from the source language into the target language. English and Macedonian idioms were analysed using monolingual dictionaries, both online and printed editions. Hence, based on the fact that in the translation process, three degrees of equivalence can be achieved in the target language: full (direct), partial (approximate), and non-equivalence, the excerpted idioms were divided into three groups.

Keywords: idiom, translation equivalents, translation, English, Macedonian

1. INTRODUCTION

As Hajiyeva (2025: 284) states, language is not only a grammatical and vocabulary system but an affluent reflection of culture, identity, and social interaction. She emphasizes that idioms and slang are among the most culturally embedded and linguistically complex elements. Idioms are one of the features of the language used in society (Amos & Abas, 2021). According to Hughes et al. (2021), idioms are defined as multi-word expressions whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal meaning of constituent words. Idioms and idiomatic expressions are a reflection of the way of thinking of a nation, its culture, traditions, perceptions, and beliefs, and therefore, translating the idioms from the source language into the target language can be a great challenge. Motivation for writing this paper arises from the fact that the novel “*The Architect’s Apprentice*”, originally written in English by the Turkish-British writer Elif Shafak, abounds with idiomatic expressions, phrases, and proverbs. Shafak initially wrote this novel in English and assisted with its translation into Turkish. This novel has been translated into fifty-eight languages, including Macedonian. Previous research regarding the translation of idioms of this novel includes “*A Comparative Analysis of French and Turkish Translations of the Proverbs and Idioms in The Architect’s Apprentice of Elif Shafak in the Light of the Interpretative Theory of Translation*” by Nasibe Erklan Çakir.

This research is conducted on a corpus of sentences with idioms excerpted from the novel “*The Architect’s Apprentice*”, and their translation into Macedonian. The aim of the research is to observe the following hypothesis, i.e., the English idioms can be translated into Macedonia with:

- Full (direct) equivalence;
- Partial (approximate) equivalence;
- Non-equivalence.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: INSIGHTS ON IDIOMS AND THEIR TRANSLATION

David Crystal, in his work “*A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*” (2008: 236), defines an idiom as “a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit.” Numberg-Sav & Wasow (1994: 492-493) state that idioms exhibit the following features of the language: conventionality, flexibility, figuration, proverbiality, informality, and affect. In *Tolkoven rečnik na makedonskiot jazik* (2014: 259), the group of authors defined the term phraseological expression or idiom as a fixed expression (phrase) and a statement with a figurative meaning, which is used as a ready-made unit in speech and represents a phraseological unit. Gruevska-Madzovska (2022: 177) defined the phraseeme as a basic unit in phraseology, i.e., a phraseological unit or phraseologism as a fixed expression with its own lexical meaning. As we have previously mentioned, the translation of idioms can be quite demanding because they present the culture and cultural heritage of one nation, and the translation involves transferring the culture from

one nation to another. Arsova-Nikolic (1999: 138) emphasised that accomplishing translation equivalence is related to bridging differences in language systems and differences in cultures that are expressed through them. Palumbo (2009: 42) stated that equivalence in translation is typically understood as a general term that refers to the relationship between a translation and its source text. Linguists who deal with phraseology and idioms in any language have a mutual point of view regarding phraseology, concluding that they are one of the most challenging language units to be translated into another language. Additionally, translating the idioms is not an easy task when we are talking about idioms that belong to diverse cultures. Baker (2018: 69) discusses the challenges that translators can encounter: “An idiom or fixed expression may have a similar counterpart in the target language, but its context or use may be different.” As stated by Vega Moreno (2007: 369), “the most essential feature of the idioms is the ability to move back and forth between literalness and looseness, creativity and standardization”. According to Nord (2018: 33), the best method for the translator to recreate the meaning of the idiomatic expression in the target language is to use a natural idiomatic expression in the target language with the same meaning, despite the different form. Taking into account the fact that English and Macedonian are different languages from a cultural and linguistic point of view, maintaining the idiomatic equivalence is quite difficult. Mihajlovski (2019: 55) stated that the register of words is particularly important for the appropriate fulfilment of the task of the translator. Trajkova-Strezovska and Damjanoski (2024: 164) claim “that a translation needs to encompass both the pragmatic and socio-cultural dimensions of the source text, while the translator has to aim towards reflecting the intended communication style of the original author.” Chanthong & Kaowiwattamakul (2024: 231) emphasised that translation is essentially concerned with the task of transferring a message in the target language in a manner that closely resembles the source language while appearing natural. Mainly, it resolves around a subtle balance between two crucial elements: form and meaning. Hughes et al. (2021) confirmed the fact that every language has idioms and that idioms present the language's peculiarities. Idioms exist due to reasons related to cultural and cognitive behavior. Hassan and Tabassum (2014: 17) claimed that, considering the fact that idioms are found in almost every language, some idioms are very specific culturally, and therefore defining an idiom is a very difficult task. Consequently, these authors state that “by understanding origins, a translator can translate it easily.” Larson (1984), Newmark (1998), and Fernando (1996) used the term “idiomatic translation.”

3. MEANS AND METHODS

The research addresses the issue of identifying the translation equivalents of the English idioms in the Macedonian translation of Elif Shafak's novel *The Architect's Apprentice*. It is qualitative and provides information about the level of equivalence of the Macedonian translation of the idioms. All research data have been analysed from a corpus excerpted from this novel.

According to (Baker, 2018; Arsova-Nikolic, 1999; Koller, 2004; Sazdovska-Pigulovska, 2020; Vidova, 2024), three levels of equivalence in the translation of idioms can be achieved:

- Full (direct) equivalence is accomplished when the translation equivalent is identical to the idiom from the source language in lexical, morphological, and structural aspects.
- Partial (approximate) equivalence is accomplished when the translation equivalent is partially equivalent to the idiom from the source language. Different lexical forms may be used, but the semantic component is preserved.
- Non-equivalence is applied when the non-existence of an identical or partially identical idiom in the target language can be found, or as a result of contextual and stylistic differences. The idiom is translated descriptively, without using an idiom.

In the analysis, the dictionaries used to explain the meaning of the idioms in the excerpted sentences are the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, the online version of *Tolkoven rečnik na sovremeniot makedonski jazik (2005-2025)* by Zoze Murgoski and *Tolkoven rechnik na makedonskiot jazik (2003-2015)* by a group of authors.

More than 100 excerpted sentences with idioms from the novel “*The Architects' Apprentice*” and their Macedonian equivalents were analysed. The paper presents only the selected data, divided into three groups.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. English idioms translated with full (direct) equivalence in Macedonian

- (1) A shudder ran through her, as if a sudden **chill had passed down her spine**. (Shafak, 2014: 18)

Снагата ѝ затрепери, небаре **морници ја пролазија по грбот**. (Шафак, 2016: 18)

The idiom ‘*send chills down someone's spine*’ (**to make someone feel very frightened**) is translated with an appropriate idiom in Macedonian.

- (2) He knew that a man who **stabbed his own companions in the back** would never be a true friend to anyone else. (Shafak, 2014: 29)

Знаеше дека оној што им **зарил нож в грб на своите другари**, не може никогаш никому да му биде вистински пријател. (Шафак, 2016: 32)

The idiom '*stab someone in the back*' (**to do something harmful to someone who trusted**) is adequately translated into Macedonian.

(3) You say I have to **shut my mouth**, but how can I keep silent when God speaks through me? (Shafak, 2014: 79)

Ми велите **затни си ја устата**, но како да молчам кога Бог зборува низ мене? (Шафак, 2016: 79)

The idiom '*shut one's mouth*' (**to say someone in a rude way to stop talking**) is fully and adequately translated into Macedonian.

(4) Gulbahar made Chota the happiest elephant in the world,' Jahan said with a bashful smile. Then, with a new realization, he added: 'You've done it again, Balaban. You've **saved my skin**.' (Shafak, 2014: 158)

„Гулбахар го направи Чота најсреќниот слон на светот“, рече Џахан со срамежлива насмевка. А потем, со ново сознание, додаде: „Ова ти е вторпат, Балабан. Пак **ми ја спаси кожичката**.“ (Шафак, 2016:174)

The idiom '*save your skin*' (**to protect yourself from danger or difficulty**) is translated with a complete idiomatic correspondent in Macedonian.

(5) He would rather **keep an eye on Yusuf**. (Shafak, 2014: 264)

Реши **да го држи Јусуф на око**. (Шафак, 2016: 286)

The idiom '*keep an eye on*' (**to watch someone or stay informed about the person's behaviour**) is translated into Macedonian with an appropriate idiom.

(6) The Captain kept his gaze steadfastly on the mahout. 'What? You **look like you've seen a ghost**.' (Shafak, 2014: 120)

Капетанот не го тргаше погледот од махутот. „Што е? Си **побелел како дух да си видел**.“ (Шафак, 2016: 134)

The idiom '*look like as you've seen a ghost*' (**to look very shocked**) is translated with an identical idiom into Macedonian.

4.2. English idioms translated with partial (approximate) equivalence into Macedonian

(7) The truth was that Shah Sultan, like many others, had expected the Grand Vizier to spare the prisoner at the eleventh hour. **This would be killing two birds with one stone**. (Shafak, 2014: 119)

Вистината е дека Шах-султан, како и многу други, очекувала големиот везир да ја поштеди грешницата во последен час. **Така ќе отепал две муви со една рака**. (Шафак, 2015: 133)

The idiom '*kill two birds with one stone*' (**to succeed in achieving two things in a single action**) is translated into Macedonian with an idiom with a similar meaning but different lexemes.

(8) You should go now. The Chief White Eunuch might come by at any moment. I wouldn't want to **be in your shoes** if he finds you here.' (Shafak, 2014: 176)

„А сега, оди. Главниот бел евнух ќе пристигне секој миг. Не би сакал **да сум ти в кожа** ако те затече тука.“ (Шафак, 2016: 194)

The idiom '*be in someone's shoes*' (**be in a situation, usually a bad or difficult situation, that another person is in**) is translated with an idiom with a close meaning but different lexical form in Macedonian.

(9) We need to **clear your name**. (Shafak, 2014: 205)

Мора да **ти го обелиме образот**. (Шафак, 2016: 226)

The idiom '*clear someone's name*' (**to prove that someone is not guilty of a crime**) is translated with an idiom with a similar meaning, but with a different lexical component.

(10) How could Selim's mosque be within close proximity to Suleiman's mosque, when the son **could not hold a candle to the father?** (Shafak, 2014: 256)

Како може Селимовата џамија да биде блиску до Сулејмановата, кога синот не можеше **ни за малиот прст да му се фати на татка си?** (Шафак, 2016: 277)

The idiom '*can't hold a candle to*' (**not be as good as the person or thing mentioned**) is translated into Macedonian with an idiom with corresponding meaning but different lexical constituents.

(11) **We reap what we sow**, said Lutfi Pasha. (Shafak, 2014: 119)

„**Што ќе си надобиш, тоа ќе си сркаш**“, рекол Љуфти-паша. (Шафак, 2016: 132)

The idiom '*reap what we sow*' (**to experience the result, often the bad one, of something you did in the past**) is translated with an idiomatic expression with a similar meaning but dissimilar lexical correspondents.

(12) Jahan **searched high and low**. (Shafak, 2014: 154)

Џахан **бараше и под дрво и под камен**. (Шафак, 2016: 170)

The idiom '*search high and low*' (**to search everywhere for something**) is translated into an idiom with a close meaning but a different lexical form in Macedonian.

4.3. English idiom translated with non-equivalence into Macedonian

(13) As long as everyone **knows their limits** we live in peace. (Shafak, 2014: 34)

Сè додека секој си **знае до кај му е чергата**, има слога и мир. (Шафак, 2016: 37)

The idiom '*know one's limits*' (**to know how much one is able to do**) is translated descriptively without using an idiom in Macedonian.

(14) It **was the talk of the town** that two men who did not get along had been promoted, by some twist of fate, exactly around the same time, as if God wished to see whether they would clash – and, if so, who would survive. (Shafak, 2014: 108)

Тоа беше главна тема во градот, дека по некоја игра на судбината во исто време се назначени двајца мажи што не се согласуваат, небаре Бог сакаше да види дали ќе се судрат – и ако се судрат кој ќе приживее. (Шафак, 2016: 120)

The idiom '*be the talk of the town*' (**to be what everyone is talking about**) is translated directly into Macedonian by omitting the use of an idiom.

(15) Clearly, his brute of an uncle had **scared the young one out of his wits**. (Shafak, 2014: 51)

Очигледно, неговиот чичко-свер **му всади уплав** на слончето. (Шафак, 2016: 58)

The idiom '*scare someone out of their wits*' (**to make someone very frightened**) is translated descriptively in Macedonian without using an idiom.

(16) Michelangelo **was bent on** coming here. Said so in his letters.' (Shafak, 2014: 151)

„Микеланџело беше **на ниет** да дојде. Така пишуеше во писмата.“ (Шафак, 2016: 168)

The idiom '*be bent on*' (**to be very determined to do something**) is translated descriptively by using the archaic word *ниет* in Macedonian.

(17) If any one of you **changes his mind**, let me know in a few days' time.' (Shafak, 2014: 161)

„Ако некој од вас се **попишмани**, нека ми каже за неколку дни.“ (Шафак, 2016: 178)

The idiom '*change one's mind*' (**to change one's decision or opinion about something**) is translated in Macedonian with the verb *попишмани* without using an idiom.

(18) Like lightning, Chota's howdah was placed on Mahmood, Jahan's jacket was handed to Buziba – that awful jacket that Jahan had hated with his entire being but now **thought the world of**. (Shafak, 2014: 251)

Брзи како молња, седлото на Чота го турија на Махмуд, елекот на Џахан му го подадоа на Бузиба – ужасниот елек што Џахан го мразеше од дното на душата, но што одеднаш **му стана толку мил**. (Шафак, 2016: 273)

The idiom '*think the world of someone*' (**to have a very high opinion of someone**) is translated descriptively by omitting an idiom.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of eighteen chosen examples out of a one-hundred-excerpted corpus of sentences with idioms from the novel "*The Architect's Architect*" and their Macedonian translation proved that six examples were translated with complete equivalence, six were translated with partial equivalence, and six were translated with non-equivalence. Analysing the idioms from this novel by Shafak and their Macedonian equivalents proves that English and Macedonian are different languages. On the other hand, English, as a part of the West Germanic group of languages, and Macedonian, part of the South Slavic group of languages, share certain typological similarities as both are analytic languages. Both languages, as part of the Indo-European language family, share similarities and differences regarding the use of idioms and idiomatic expressions as cultural heritage in a broader context of languages, cultural regions, and interculturality. Consequently, the translator, besides being proficient in the source and target language, should be well acquainted with the region where the novel was created, the plot, as well as the history, tradition, and social and cultural differences of the time period and setting of the action presented in the novel. Hajiyeveva (2025: 291) claims that a translator is not only a language technician but a cultural intermediary who is entitled to interpret between two linguistic units. Translators navigate between idiomatic subtleties and cultural references, and they make interpretive resolutions that shape how texts are perceived across cultures by the reading audience. The successful translation of idioms is not solely a linguistic duty, but a bridge among cultures. Taking into consideration that the idioms are one of the most challenging translation units of the language, we can conclude that the strategies for accomplishing the level of equivalence in translating the idioms and the overall translation of this novel in Macedonian are successful.

REFERENCES

Amos, N. T. & Abas, I. H. (2021). An investigation on the comprehension of English idioms among MOI primary school children in Nairobi. *Advances in Language and Literature Studies*, 12(4), 1-8

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354775350_An_Investigation_on_the_Comprehension_of_English_Idioms_Among_Moi_Primary_School_Children_in_Nairobi

- Арсова-Николиќ, Л. (1999). *Преведување: теорија и практика*. Скопје: Универзитет „Св. Кирил и Методиј“.
- Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words: A Textbook on Translation*. Third Edition. London and New York: Routledge.
- Cambridge Online Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bent-on>
- Chanthong, P. & Kaowiwannattanakul, S. (2024). A Study for Translating English Idioms in Subtitles from Riverdale Series into Thai. *World Journal of English Language* Vol. 14, No.3, 2024, 231-241
<https://www.sciedupress.com/journal/index.php/wjel/article/download/24879/15799>
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Sixth Edition. Blackwell Publishing.
- Fernando, C. (1996). *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. Oxford University Press.
- Груевска-Маџоска, С. (2022). *Лексикологија на македонскиот јазик*. Скопје: Ми-Ан.
- Hajiyeva, B. (2025). Translating Idioms and Slang: Problems, Strategies, and Cultural Implications. *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum* Vol. 2, No.2 (2025): Specailis Editio 2025, 284-293
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390129750_Translating_Idioms_and_Slang_Problems_Strategies_and_Cultural_Implications
- Hassan, S. M. & Tabssum, M. F. (2014). Strategies for translating idioms. *British Journal of English Linguistics*. Vol. 2, No.3, pp. 14–19, December 2014, 14-29
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358585387_Strategies_of_Translating_Idioms
- Hughes, C., Filimonov, M., Wray, A., Spasić, I. (2021). Leaving No Stone Unturned: Flexible Retrieval of Idiomatic Expressions from A Large Text Corpus. *Machine Learning & Knowledge Extraction* 2021, 3, 263-283
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349590753_Leaving_No_Stone_Unturned_Flexible_Retrieval_of_Idiomatic_Expressions_from_a_Large_Text_Corpus
- Koller, W. (2004). Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft. & Aufl. Quelle & Meyer.
- Larson, M. (1984). *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence*. New York. University Press of America.
- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/change%20one%27s%20mind>
- Михајловски, Д. (2019). *Преведување книжевност*. Скопје: Просветно дело.
- Мурговски, З. (2005-2025). *Толковен речник на современиот македонски јазик*. <https://zoze.mk/tolkoven/>
- Newmark, P. (1998). *A Textbook of Translation*. Longman.
- Nord, C. (2018). *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functional Approaches Explained*. Second Ed. London: Routledge.
- Nunberg, G.-S. I. A. & Wasow, T. (1994). Idioms. *Language*, 70(3), 491–538.
- Palumbo, G. (2009). *Key terms in translation studies*. London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Sazdovska-Pigulovska, M. (2020). *Definition and Classification of Phraseological Expressions and Problems of Idiomatic Equivalence in Translation*. PALIMPSEST/ПАЛИМПСЕСТ Vol. 5. No. 9 (2020), 15-28
<https://js.ugd.edu.mk/index.php/PAL/issue/view/223>
- Trajkova Strezovska, Z. & Damjanoski, M. (2024). *Pragmatic and Sociocultural Adaptation in Literary Translation*. FACTA UNIVERSITATIS. Series Linguistics and Literature Vol 22, No. 1, 2024, 163-179
<https://repository.ukim.mk/bitstream/20.500.12188/31849/1/PRAGMATIC%20AND%20SOCIOCULTURAL%20ADAPTATION%20IN%20LITERARY%20TRANSLATION-%20Facta%20Universitas%202024.pdf>
- Толковен речник на македонскиот јазик*. (2003-2014). Ред. Кирил Конески, I-VI Скопје: Институт за македонски јазик „Крсте Мисирков“.
- Vega Moreno, R. E. (2007). *Creativity and Convention. The Pragmatics of Everyday Figurative Speech*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Vidova, K. (2024). *Idiomatic expressions in English and their Translation Equivalents in Macedonian*. *Philological Studies*, 22 (1), 61-79 <https://journals.ukim.mk/index.php/philologicalstudies/article/view/2700>

SOURCES

- Shafak, E. (2014). *The Architect's Apprentice*. Viking London: Published by the Penguin Group.
- Шафак, Е. (2016). *Чиракот на архитектот*; [превод од англиски јазик Мирјана Буразер Китановска]. – Скопје: Три.