

SEMANTIC AND COGNITIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF METAPHORS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: *This article explores the comparative semantic and cognitive structures of metaphors in the Uzbek and English languages. Traditionally viewed as a mere rhetorical ornament, the metaphor is analyzed here through the lens of cognitive linguistics as a fundamental mechanism of human thought. By examining conceptual mappings, the study identifies universal cognitive patterns alongside culture-specific nuances. The findings suggest that while both languages utilize spatial and bodily experiences as source domains, the "target domains" often diverge due to unique historical, social, and environmental landscapes.*

Key words: *cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory (cmt), cross-cultural semantics, Uzbek linguistics, English metaphor, mapping*

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, metaphors were primarily seen as a stylistic device, confined to poetry, rhetoric, and literary aesthetics. They were treated as decorative elements that enhanced expression rather than as fundamental tools of thought. This perspective changed dramatically with the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics, particularly through the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Their research demonstrated that metaphors are not merely linguistic flourishes; they structure how humans conceptualize abstract reality. We do not simply speak metaphorically—we think metaphorically, using familiar, concrete experiences to make sense of complex or intangible concepts.

Comparing Uzbek and English metaphors offers a particularly rich area for study because these languages come from entirely different families—Turkic and Indo-European, respectively—and reflect distinct cultural paradigms. Uzbek metaphors are deeply rooted in Eastern and Islamic traditions, while English metaphors often draw on Western, secular-Christian imagery. By analyzing the metaphoric mapping in both languages, we can uncover how culture shapes cognition. This investigation focuses on how concrete “source domains,” such as the body or money, are mapped onto

abstract “target domains” like time, emotions, or social relationships, providing insight into shared and divergent human experiences.

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a metaphor involves mapping from a Source Domain—concrete and tangible—to a Target Domain, which is abstract and conceptual. One widely recognized example is the metaphorical understanding of TIME as a RESOURCE. Both English and Uzbek share expressions that reflect this cognitive mapping. In English, one might say “to spend time” or “to waste time,” whereas in Uzbek, the equivalents are “Vaqtini sarflamoq” (to spend time) and “Vaqtini yo’qotmoq” (to lose time). These examples demonstrate a shared conceptual structure: humans universally perceive time as something that can be measured, allocated, and depleted, even if the languages and cultural contexts differ.

Another area where metaphor reveals cognitive universals is the human body. The embodiment hypothesis argues that metaphors often arise from shared bodily experience. Both English and Uzbek use body parts to describe objects or spaces. For instance, in English, one speaks of “the foot of the mountain” or “the eye of a needle,” while in Uzbek, similar expressions exist: “Tog’ etagi” (the foot of the mountain) and “ignaning ko’zi” (the eye of the needle). These parallels suggest that bodily experience provides a common foundation for metaphorical thought, enabling humans across cultures to conceptualize unfamiliar phenomena through familiar physical references.

Despite these universals, there are striking differences in how emotions are metaphorically localized. In English, the HEART is central to expressions of love, courage, and emotional depth. Uzbek, however, often attributes similar emotions to the LIVER (jigar). For example, an Uzbek speaker might call a beloved sibling “Jigarim” (literally “my liver”) to convey deep affection—a metaphor with no direct equivalent in English. This distinction highlights how cultural and historical factors shape the mapping of source domains onto target domains, resulting in language-specific metaphorical structures that carry unique emotional resonance.

In conclusion, metaphors serve as a bridge between the concrete and the abstract, grounding thought in shared human experiences while reflecting the particularities of culture. By examining English and Uzbek, we see both the universality of certain cognitive mappings, such as time and body-based metaphors, and the specificity of culturally informed metaphors, like the emotional significance of the liver in Uzbek. Understanding these mappings not only deepens our knowledge of language and cognition but also offers insights into cross-cultural communication and the ways humans navigate and interpret the world.

The semantic range of metaphors is heavily influenced by the historical, social, and environmental contexts in which a language develops. Everyday life, occupational practices, and cultural heritage shape the kinds of metaphors speakers create and use. This cultural specificity demonstrates that while some cognitive mappings are

universal, others are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of particular communities. Studying English and Uzbek metaphors illustrates how history and environment leave distinct imprints on language and thought.

English metaphors often reflect the nation's maritime history and its leadership during the Industrial Revolution. The seafaring and industrial contexts provided abundant source domains for metaphorical expression. For example, the phrase "in the same boat" draws on maritime experience to convey shared circumstances, while "to blow off steam" originates from the operation of steam engines. Similarly, "on the right track," a metaphor rooted in railway development, conveys the idea of correct progress. These metaphors not only illustrate historical realities but also shape how English speakers conceptualize challenges, effort, and social relationships.

By contrast, Uzbek metaphors are deeply influenced by the nomadic, agricultural, and Silk Road heritage of Central Asia. Daily life and social norms in these environments provided fertile ground for metaphorical thought. Phrases such as "Yuzidan nur yog'ilmoq" (literally, "light raining from one's face") describe virtuous or radiant individuals, linking physical imagery with moral qualities. Similarly, "Otasi – bolaga bog" ("A father is a garden to the child") maps the domain of cultivation onto family and upbringing, reflecting the importance of land, growth, and care in Uzbek culture.

Hospitality is another central theme in Uzbek metaphorical expressions. The "dasturxon" (spread or tablecloth) serves as a conceptual domain for generosity and social cohesion. Metaphors involving the dasturxon convey the values of sharing and communal living, which are central to Uzbek identity. This focus on agricultural abundance and hospitality contrasts sharply with the industrial and maritime imagery prevalent in English, highlighting how environmental and societal contexts shape metaphorical thinking in culturally specific ways.

The differences between these metaphorical systems become particularly evident in translation. A literal, word-for-word translation often fails because the cognitive and cultural associations do not align. For instance, the English idiom "a piece of cake," meaning something is easy, cannot simply be translated as "Bir bo'lak tort" in Uzbek. The metaphorical significance of cake in Western culture—its association with sweetness, indulgence, and simplicity—does not resonate in the same way for Uzbek speakers.

Instead, Uzbek offers culturally grounded alternatives that preserve meaning while shifting the source domain. One such metaphor is "Xamirga patir yopganday," which literally translates to "as easy as sticking bread to an oven." This expression draws on traditional baking practices familiar in Uzbek households, maintaining the cognitive function of the metaphor—expressing ease—while grounding it in a culturally intelligible context. Such shifts illustrate the importance of cultural and environmental knowledge in accurate metaphor translation.

The study of English and Uzbek metaphors highlights the interplay between universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally specific environmental influences. While both languages share some basic conceptual structures, the historical, occupational, and social contexts shape how speakers map concrete experiences onto abstract concepts. Understanding these differences is crucial not only for linguistics and translation studies but also for appreciating how language reflects the lived realities and values of different communities.

CONCLUSION

The study of metaphors in Uzbek and English reveals a fascinating duality: cognitive processes are largely universal, yet semantic expressions are intensely local. While both cultures conceptualize "Life as a Journey," the vehicles, paths, and obstacles described in the metaphors reflect their specific historical and ecological realities. Understanding these cognitive characteristics is essential for cross-cultural communication, as it allows us to see not just how different people speak, but how they perceive the world.

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