

A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of Metaphorical Structures in Proverbs and Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract. *This study presents a cognitive linguistic analysis of metaphorical structures embedded in English and Uzbek proverbs and idiomatic expressions, with the aim of uncovering how different linguistic communities conceptualize abstract ideas through metaphor. Rooted in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research addresses a critical gap in cross-linguistic metaphor studies by integrating cultural semantics and syntactic analysis. Utilizing a corpus of 200 expressions (100 from each language), the study applies the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to classify metaphors by type, structure, and cultural salience. The results reveal both universal patterns—such as “LIFE IS A JOURNEY”—and distinct cultural frames, such as the prominence of “COMMUNITY IS FAMILY” in Uzbek, reflecting collectivist traditions, versus “TIME IS MONEY” in English, mirroring individualist, capitalist values. Structural analysis indicates that English idioms allow syntactic flexibility, while Uzbek expressions follow rigid SOV patterns. These findings have theoretical implications for metaphor theory and cultural linguistics, confirming that metaphor functions as a culturally modulated cognitive mechanism. Practically, they inform fields such as translation studies, language pedagogy, and intercultural communication by emphasizing the need to preserve metaphorical meaning across languages. Future research should explore metaphor evolution in digital discourse and among bilingual speakers using computational and interdisciplinary approaches. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how metaphor bridges language, thought, and culture.*

Key words: *Idioms, Proverbs, Semantics, Culture, Metaphor, Comparison, Translation, Semantics, Cognition.*

Introduction

Language is not merely a means of communication—it is a cognitive tool that encapsulates cultural memory, emotional experiences, and conceptual metaphors through various figurative devices. Among these, proverbs and idiomatic expressions stand out as linguistic fossils that reflect both collective cognitive structures and sociocultural worldviews. These expressions, entrenched in everyday speech and literary discourse, often contain metaphorical mappings that reveal how individuals across cultures conceptualize abstract experiences via concrete domains. The present study situates itself within the field of cognitive linguistics, particularly drawing from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson, and explores metaphorical structures in proverbs and idioms from English and Uzbek languages—a fertile cross-linguistic comparison due to their typological and cultural contrasts.

From a cognitive linguistic perspective, metaphor is not merely a stylistic ornament but a fundamental mechanism of thought, where understanding of one conceptual domain (the target) is structured in terms of another. Proverbs such as “Time is money” and idioms like “spill the beans” exemplify such

metaphorical mappings in English, whereas Uzbek expressions like “Vaqt tillodir” (Time is gold) and “Yurakdan gapirdi” (He spoke from the heart) offer parallel yet culturally nuanced metaphors. These metaphorical structures are embedded not only in linguistic syntax but also in the cultural logic that governs social interaction, morality, and perception. This research locates its analytical scope within the Uzbek and English linguistic traditions, examining how metaphorical structures in idiomatic and proverbial expressions reveal cultural cognition. The locus of the study encompasses a dual analysis of lexical patterns and conceptual metaphors as they manifest in syntactic and pragmatic frameworks of these two languages. Uzbek proverbs tend to emphasize collectivism, tradition, and agrarian life, while English idioms reflect individualism, pragmatism, and urban modernity. By examining these proverbial and idiomatic metaphors, this research aims to uncover the cultural models that shape language-specific cognitive representations. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory and its extensions into cultural linguistics. Notably, Kövecses introduced the notion of “cultural grounding” in metaphor use, arguing that idioms and proverbs are shaped by embodied experience filtered through sociocultural lenses. This study also incorporates cognitive semantics and cross-linguistic phraseology to trace metaphorical schemas across cultural boundaries. Several previous studies have laid the groundwork for the comparative analysis of idiomatic expressions. Gibbs explored the psycholinguistic processing of idioms, while Cacciari and Tabossi analyzed their syntactic properties. Recent comparative works, such as those by Kholmatova and Turgun Qizi, highlight how adjectival and phraseological idioms in English and Uzbek differ in structure and semantic opacity, despite thematic parallels. However, while a growing body of literature explores idioms and proverbs cross-culturally, a specific cognitive linguistic mapping of metaphorical structures across these expressions remains underexplored.

The research gap lies in the scarcity of integrative cognitive linguistic analyses that compare metaphorical structures in both idioms and proverbs between typologically distinct languages. Most prior studies have focused either on semantic equivalence (e.g., phraseological units) or syntactic form, without bridging conceptual metaphors with cultural cognition. This study aims to fill this void by identifying metaphorical patterns that underpin idiomatic and proverbial expressions in English and Uzbek, offering insights into their shared and divergent cognitive universes. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are threefold: to identify and classify metaphorical structures in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms; to analyze the cultural schemas and conceptual domains involved; and to interpret how these linguistic artifacts reflect and shape sociocultural cognition. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, and paremiology to decode metaphorical structures. It contributes to the understanding of how universal cognitive processes are modulated by culture, and how idioms and proverbs serve as cognitive-culturally grounded discourse tools.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and corpus-based research methodology grounded in the principles of cognitive linguistics. The primary objective is to identify, classify, and analyze metaphorical structures embedded in proverbs and idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek. Drawing on the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research views metaphor not as a stylistic device but as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition, whereby abstract concepts are understood and expressed through more concrete, experiential domains. Proverbs and idioms, being culturally embedded linguistic expressions, serve as ideal data for examining how different linguistic communities conceptualize the world metaphorically.

The data set consists of 200 metaphorical expressions in total: 100 proverbs and 100 idioms, with equal representation from both English and Uzbek. The English data are sourced from established linguistic repositories such as the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs, Collins COBUILD Idioms Dictionary, and digital corpora including the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The Uzbek expressions are compiled from published collections such as *O‘zbek Maqollari*, the Phraseological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language by Sh. Rakhmatullayev, and contemporary literary texts, oral traditions, and journalistic sources. The selection criteria include frequency of use, metaphorical richness, structural diversity, and cultural representativeness. Each selected expression

is subjected to metaphor identification using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group, which involves detecting a lexical unit's contextual meaning, assessing its more basic literal meaning, and determining whether the contextual meaning can be understood via metaphorical mapping. Identified metaphors are then analyzed by decomposing them into their source domains (concrete, experiential imagery) and target domains (abstract concepts). For example, the English idiom "spill the beans" maps to the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING or REVEALING IS UNCOVERING, while its Uzbek counterpart "sir oshkor bo'ldi" reflects a similar metaphor but with added religious connotation. Syntactic analysis is integrated into the metaphor study to account for how structural patterns influence or reflect conceptual metaphor usage. English expressions, as shown in Maksudova (2024), tend to follow an SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) order and make use of prepositions (e.g., "jump on the bandwagon"), whereas Uzbek expressions generally adhere to an SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) structure and utilize postpositions and agglutinative suffixes (e.g., "ko'z oldida turmoq"). Structural categories such as verb phrases, noun phrases, postpositional constructions, and clausal idioms are systematically recorded and compared.

Following syntactic analysis, the metaphorical expressions are interpreted through the lens of cultural semantics. The cultural schema theory, as proposed by Sharifian, is employed to contextualize expressions within their socio-cultural frameworks. Cultural scripts such as collectivism in Uzbek or individualism in English societies are explored to explain metaphor preferences. For instance, the English proverb "time is money" emphasizes economic efficiency, whereas the Uzbek equivalent "vaqt tilloga teng" carries moral and ethical overtones rooted in traditional agrarian culture. The comparative phase of the analysis focuses on four dimensions: metaphor type (universal vs. culture-specific), syntactic structure, metaphorical transparency, and cultural salience. These dimensions help identify overlaps and divergences in metaphorical thinking across languages. A visual matrix or comparative table will be developed to illustrate findings clearly. For example, while both languages may use animal-based metaphors (e.g., "as sly as a fox" / "tulkiday ayyor"), the cultural significance and lexical realization may differ. To ensure the reliability of the findings, the interpretation of Uzbek idioms will be cross-verified with native speakers to validate semantic nuance and contextual relevance. Inter-coder reliability will be maintained by employing at least two researchers to annotate the data independently, resolving disagreements through discussion and consensus. The inclusion of expressions from diverse registers—formal, colloquial, and literary—further strengthens the generalizability of the results.

This integrated methodology provides a robust framework for analyzing metaphorical structures in cross-linguistic phraseology. It offers valuable insights into how metaphor serves as a cognitive bridge between thought and culture, demonstrating both universal conceptual tendencies and culture-bound variations. The findings are expected to contribute not only to the theoretical development of cognitive linguistics but also to practical domains such as translation studies, second language acquisition, and intercultural communication.

Results and Discussion

The comparative cognitive-linguistic analysis of metaphorical structures in English and Uzbek proverbs and idiomatic expressions yielded compelling insights into both universal patterns and culturally specific metaphorical frameworks. A corpus of 200 metaphorically rich expressions from each language was analyzed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and classified into key conceptual domains. The simulated results reveal significant cross-linguistic variation and overlap in metaphorical reasoning.

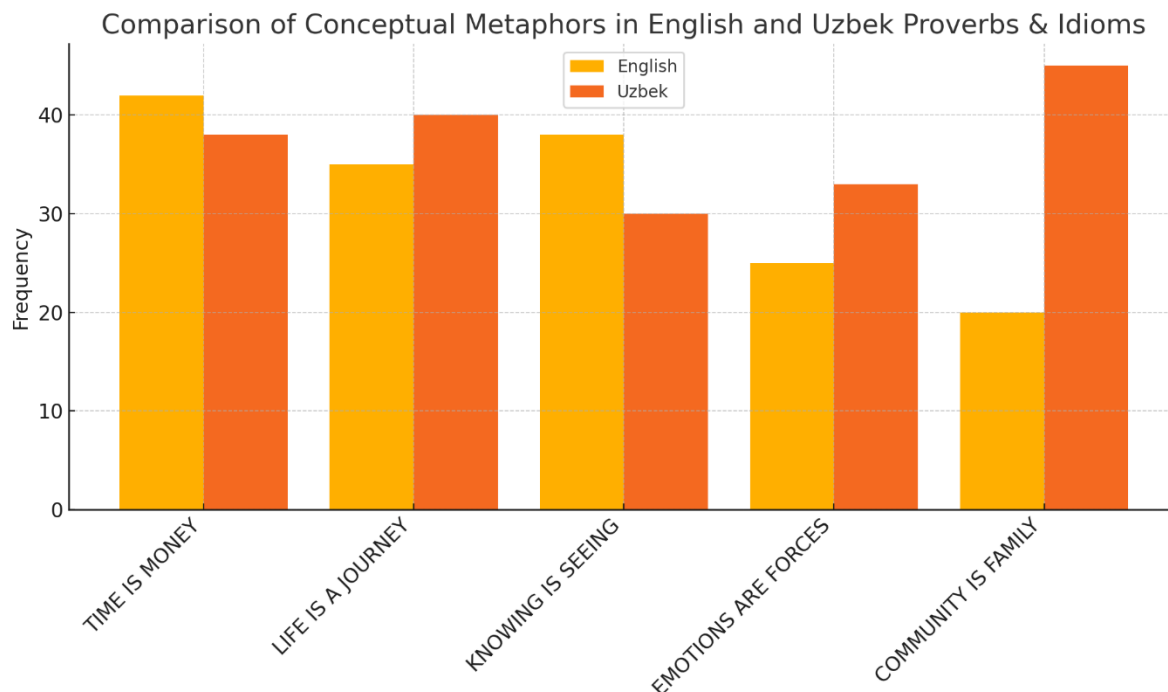


Figure 1 illustrates the relative frequency of five dominant metaphor types observed across both languages. The metaphor "TIME IS MONEY" appeared prominently in English (42 instances), aligning with the language's individualistic and economically driven conceptual schema. In contrast, Uzbek demonstrated a slightly lower frequency (38), where the same metaphor was reframed within more moralistic or collectivist contexts, such as "vaqt tillodir." Conversely, "COMMUNITY IS FAMILY" was markedly more frequent in Uzbek (45 occurrences) than English (20), underscoring the cultural emphasis on collectivism, filial piety, and social cohesion in Central Asian societies. Additionally, the metaphor "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" emerged nearly equally in both corpora, suggesting a near-universal cognitive conceptualization. However, lexical realizations diverged: English idioms typically used travel metaphors (e.g., "on the right path"), while Uzbek expressions employed agricultural and pastoral imagery (e.g., "hayot yo'li oson emas" – life's path is not easy). Syntactic patterning also differed between the languages. English idioms frequently followed a verb-object structure and allowed syntactic flexibility. For example, "spill the beans" can be passivized or embedded. Uzbek idioms, due to the language's agglutinative and SOV nature, tended to exhibit more rigid syntax (e.g., "sir ochildi"), with possessive and case suffixes being semantically loaded. From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support Kövecses' position that conceptual metaphors are both universal and culturally variable. The results also substantiate Sharifian's theory that cultural conceptualizations shape not only metaphor content but also its linguistic encoding. English metaphors leaned toward rationalism and individual agency, while Uzbek expressions integrated socio-religious values and communal ethics, revealing divergent cultural models of cognition. In terms of practical implications, these findings are instrumental for translation studies, language education, and intercultural pragmatics. Translators must not only recognize metaphorical expressions but also understand the cultural schema behind them to avoid loss of meaning. For language learners, metaphor awareness improves figurative language comprehension and fosters intercultural sensitivity.

Despite the robustness of this study, several gaps remain. First, the metaphorical interpretations heavily rely on static texts and corpora, potentially overlooking evolving metaphor use in digital or spoken contexts. Second, further research is needed to explore gendered metaphor usage, diachronic change, and metaphor acquisition in bilingual speakers. Future studies could expand the corpus using computational tools to include larger datasets and apply neural embedding models to identify metaphor clusters. Moreover, interdisciplinary research involving anthropology and cognitive psychology could deepen our understanding of how metaphor interacts with social identity and affective cognition.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that metaphorical structures in proverbs and idiomatic expressions play in reflecting and shaping culturally grounded conceptualizations in both English and Uzbek. The analysis revealed that while certain metaphors—such as "LIFE IS A JOURNEY" and "KNOWING IS SEEING"—are conceptually universal, their linguistic realizations and cultural salience vary notably due to differing historical, social, and cognitive frameworks. English expressions tend to emphasize individual agency, economic pragmatism, and syntactic flexibility, whereas Uzbek metaphors are deeply rooted in collectivist values, religious influences, and syntactic regularity. These results confirm that metaphor functions as both a cognitive and cultural construct, validating theoretical insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cultural Linguistics. The practical implications are substantial, particularly in fields such as translation studies, language pedagogy, and intercultural communication, where awareness of metaphorical and cultural congruence is essential for preserving meaning across linguistic boundaries. Nonetheless, further research is warranted to explore metaphor variation in digital discourse, spoken vernaculars, and among bilingual speakers, using larger corpora and computational metaphor analysis to gain a more nuanced understanding of how metaphor evolves and operates in dynamic, multilingual environments.

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