A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH IDIOMS: METAPHORICAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

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Abstract: *This paper examines the metaphorical nature of idioms in Uzbek and English, focusing on how each language encodes cultural knowledge and conceptualizes experience through figurative expressions. By analyzing selected idioms from both languages, the study identifies shared metaphorical patterns—such as those pertaining to emotions, human behavior, and nature—as well as culture-specific images rooted in history, environment, and social values. The comparative approach highlights how similar concepts may be expressed through different metaphorical frames, revealing the deep cultural underpinnings of idiomatic usage. The findings contribute to cross-cultural linguistic studies and offer insights for language learners, translators, and researchers interested in metaphor theory.*

Keywords: *idioms, metaphor, comparative linguistics, cultural conceptualization, Uzbek language, English language.*

Introduction: Idioms are defined as phrases where the meaning is not directly derived from the literal definitions of the individual words (Daryabaeva, 2025). Idioms serve as one of the most expressive linguistic units in any language, reflecting cultural wisdom, social norms, and shared experiences. Their metaphorical character allows speakers to conceptualize

abstract phenomena through vivid imagery, making idioms a valuable subject for cultural and cognitive linguistic analysis.

Mirzaholova & Goyibboyeva (2019) noted that "Every country or nation has their own idioms that are specific to their own culture. And many idioms have synonyms in several countries, what refers to the equal shared human nature in many cultures". Uzbek and English, although belonging to different language families and cultural spheres, share universal human experiences that are frequently encoded metaphorically in idiomatic expressions. At the same time, each language contains culturally specific idioms shaped by unique historical, social, and environmental factors.

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of Uzbek and English idioms, focusing specifically on their metaphorical uses. It aims to:

- explore the conceptual metaphors underlying idioms in both languages,
- highlight similarities and differences in metaphorical imagery, and
- discuss what these patterns reveal about the cultural worldview of Uzbek and English speakers.

The study draws on examples from common speech, literature, and dictionaries, offering an analytical framework based on cognitive metaphor theory.

1. Theoretical background: metaphor and idioms

Metaphor, according to cognitive linguistics, is not merely a stylistic device but a fundamental mechanism of thought. Idioms often reflect conceptual metaphors, such as ANGER IS HEAT, LIFE IS A JOURNEY, or EMOTION IS A FORCE.

Understanding idioms, therefore, requires examining how each language maps concrete source domains onto abstract target domains.

2. Metaphorical Idioms in English

English idioms frequently draw on imagery from:

- Nature (e.g., under the weather- feeling sick or unwell, break the ice- to start a conversation or ease tension in a social situation, the calm before the storm- a quiet or peaceful moment before major activity, trouble, or change).
- Animals (e.g., the elephant in the room- an obvious problem everyone notices but avoids discussing, a wild goose chase- a pointless or hopeless pursuit, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush- it's better to hold onto what you already have than risk it for something uncertain, don't count your chickens before they hatch- don't assume something will happen before it actually does).
- Human body (e.g., keep an eye on- to watch or monitor something carefully, give a hand- to help or assist someone, don't bite the hand that feeds you- don't harm or act against someone who supports or helps you).
- Movement/Journey metaphors (e.g., at a crossroads- facing an important decision or choice, a long road ahead- a difficult or lengthy process still to come, in the same boat- in a similar situation, often facing the same problem as others).

These metaphors often reflect Western cultural values such as individualism, pragmatism, and a strong orientation toward action and progress.

3. Metaphorical Idioms in Uzbek

Uzbek idioms reflect imagery deeply rooted in Central Asian culture, including:

- Agriculture and pastoral life (e.g., otdan tushib eshakka minmoq — "to downgrade," literally "to get off a horse and mount a donkey")
- Family and social hierarchy (e.g., ko'ngli tog'dek — "his heart is like a mountain," meaning very generous)

- Nature and geography (e.g., ko‘ngliga qum qo‘ymoq — “to put sand in someone’s heart,” meaning to make someone uneasy)
- Traditional values and communal relationships.

Uzbek idioms often highlight respect, hospitality, and emotional sensitivity—key cultural components of Uzbek society.

4. Comparative Analysis: Similarities

Several metaphorical patterns appear in both languages:

- Emotion as physical sensation:

Uzbek: qoni qaynamoq (blood boiling)

English: boiling with anger

- Life as a journey:

Uzbek: yo‘ldan ozmoq (to lose the path)

English: to lose one’s way

- Mental activity as vision:

Uzbek: ko‘zi ochilmoq (eyes opening = gaining understanding)

English: open one’s eyes to something

These parallels indicate shared human cognitive patterns in conceptualizing emotions, wisdom, and personal growth.

5. Comparative Analysis: Differences

Despite similarities, key differences emerge:

- Sources of metaphors differ due to cultural environment

Uzbek idioms draw more heavily on pastoral and nomadic imagery.

English idioms often reflect maritime, urban, or industrial contexts.

- Cultural values influence metaphor choice

Uzbek idioms emphasize community, honor, and emotional depth.

English idioms tend to emphasize individual agency and practicality.

- Certain metaphorical images have no direct equivalents

Uzbek: tosh bosmoq (to put a stone on something = to suppress feelings)

English: (no identical metaphor; closest might be bottle up emotions)

These differences demonstrate how idioms encapsulate culturally specific ways of interpreting reality.

Conclusion: The comparative analysis of Uzbek and English idioms reveals that metaphor is a universal cognitive tool, yet its specific manifestations are shaped by cultural experience, environment, and worldview. While both languages share common conceptual metaphors grounded in universal human experiences, each also employs unique imagery reflecting its cultural identity.

Understanding these metaphorical patterns enhances cross-cultural communication, supports more effective translation practices, and deepens appreciation of the cultural richness embedded in idiomatic expressions. Ultimately, idioms serve as a linguistic bridge that connects language, culture, and human cognition.

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