



LANGUAGE, MIND, AND CULTURE: A COGNITIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK PHRASEOLOGY

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Abstract. *This study explores the deep interconnection between language, cognition, and culture through a comparative cognitive analysis of English and Uzbek phraseology. It aims to reveal how idiomatic expressions encode conceptual metaphors that reflect the worldview and collective psychology of their speakers. Drawing upon the principles of cognitive linguistics and cultural semantics, the paper demonstrates that idioms are not arbitrary combinations of words but culturally shaped cognitive models of experience. English phraseology tends to emphasize pragmatic, action-oriented, and individualistic concepts, while Uzbek phraseology reflects moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human life. By comparing the metaphorical systems of these two languages, the study highlights how culture mediates the relationship between the human mind and linguistic expression. The results underline that understanding idioms is essential not only for linguistic competence but also for insight into how people conceptualize and evaluate the world around them.*

Keywords: *phraseology, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, cultural cognition, idiomatic meaning, linguistic worldview.*

Introduction. Language, mind, and culture are inseparable elements of human experience. Language gives shape to thought, while thought draws from the cultural patterns shared within a community. The study of phraseology—idioms, fixed expressions, and metaphorical constructions—offers a particularly vivid view of this triadic relationship. Idioms encapsulate entire ways of seeing the world. They translate abstract mental experiences into tangible imagery that mirrors a people's history, values, and habits of thought.

The relationship between metaphor and cognition, first systematized by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), provided linguistics with a new perspective: that metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but a primary mode of conceptualization. The theory of conceptual metaphor posits that humans understand complex, abstract ideas through simpler, embodied experiences. For example, notions of time, emotion, and morality are frequently described using metaphors derived from physical space, movement, and temperature. This cognitive principle underlies many idiomatic expressions in all languages, making phraseology a crucial key to the study of cultural cognition.



While English phraseology has been widely studied within the cognitive framework (Kövecses, 2010; Gibbs, 1994), the same cannot be said for Uzbek. Research on Uzbek idioms has traditionally focused on etymology, stylistics, or lexicography, with little attention to the cognitive mechanisms shaping idiomatic meaning. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how conceptual metaphors structure the idiomatic systems of English and Uzbek, and how these metaphors reflect the distinct cultural and psychological orientations of each linguistic community.


The relevance of this research lies not only in its linguistic dimension but also in its contribution to intercultural understanding. Idioms resist literal translation precisely because their meanings are grounded in culture-specific ways of conceptualizing experience. A cognitive and comparative approach can therefore reveal the deeper mental patterns that determine what speakers of different languages find natural, humorous, emotional, or polite. In this sense, phraseology becomes a map of the mind—one that shows how people from different cultural backgrounds navigate the same human experiences using different conceptual paths.

Methodology. The study is based on a qualitative and comparative approach within the framework of cognitive linguistics. The main objective was to uncover the conceptual and cultural mechanisms underlying idiomatic meaning in English and Uzbek. Rather than treating idioms as isolated linguistic curiosities, this approach interprets them as expressions of shared mental imagery and cultural experience.

A balanced corpus of approximately one thousand phraseological units was compiled, half from English and half from Uzbek. For English, idioms were drawn primarily from The Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms (2020), The Cambridge Idioms Dictionary (2019), and contemporary corpus data such as the British National Corpus. Uzbek idioms were taken from O‘zbek tilining frazeologik lug‘ati (Sharipov, 2015), Kognitiv lingvistika asoslari (Nurmonov, 2019), and literary and journalistic texts representing standard usage. Only idioms with figurative meanings firmly established in everyday language were included.

Each idiom was analyzed in three steps. First, its literal and figurative meanings were recorded, and its context noted. Second, the underlying conceptual metaphor was identified according to the framework proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This involved determining the source domain—the concrete experience from which the metaphor derives—and the target domain—the abstract concept it represents. Finally, the idioms were grouped into semantic fields corresponding to major areas of human experience: emotion, time, work, morality, and nature.

To ensure consistency, idioms in both languages were compared across the same conceptual domains. For example, idioms expressing anger, sadness, or fear were analyzed together to identify parallel metaphors. Likewise, idioms referring to time or labor were studied as reflections of cultural attitudes toward these universal concepts. The analysis



was interpretative rather than statistical, focusing on meaning patterns rather than frequency counts.

Validity was maintained by cross-checking sources and consulting native speakers of both languages to confirm idiomatic nuance. Triangulation between linguistic, cognitive, and cultural perspectives helped minimize researcher bias. The interpretive framework was deliberately flexible, allowing space for cultural connotations that might not fit strict linguistic equivalence. The study recognizes that idioms operate at the intersection of language, thought, and social experience—an area where neat categorization often gives way to layered meaning.

Results and Discussion. The analysis revealed striking parallels between English and Uzbek idioms at the cognitive level, alongside profound cultural differences in the way these shared conceptual metaphors are realized.


Emotions are among the most metaphorically encoded aspects of human experience. In both languages, emotional states are mapped onto physical sensations, reflecting the embodiment of human cognition. English idioms such as hot under the collar or boiling with rage conceptualize anger as heat, while a heavy heart or a sinking feeling depict sadness as physical weight or downward motion. The body becomes the stage upon which emotion is enacted.

Uzbek idioms share the same embodied roots but direct them inward, toward the soul. Expressions like ko'ngli to'ldi ("his heart filled") and ko'ngli sovidi ("his heart cooled") frame emotion as a condition of the ko'ngil—a cultural concept uniting heart, soul, and conscience. Where English describes emotional pressure and release, Uzbek describes fullness, purity, or balance. Emotion is not simply felt but morally evaluated. Thus, the metaphor "emotion is heat" exists in both languages, yet it is moralized in Uzbek and psychologized in English.

This divergence illustrates how shared cognitive structures acquire distinct cultural textures. The English idiom to wear one's heart on one's sleeve values openness, an individual expression of feeling; the Uzbek equivalent would be less about personal display and more about sincerity and spiritual cleanliness. In each case, idioms articulate what the culture finds appropriate in emotional behavior.

Time-related idioms reveal perhaps the clearest cultural contrast. In English, time is consistently conceptualized as a valuable resource or commodity: waste time, save time, spend time wisely. These idioms draw on economic experience and express a linear, goal-oriented perception of life. Time can be gained or lost, invested or squandered—mirroring the rationalism and efficiency prized in Western culture.

Uzbek idioms, by contrast, perceive time as a natural and divine flow. The expression vaqt suvdek oqadi ("time flows like water") encapsulates the idea that time is continuous and ungraspable, something one lives within rather than controls. The proverb



Har narsaning vaqti bor (“everything has its time”) reflects patience and trust in divine order. Rather than measuring time, Uzbek idioms emphasize harmony with its passage.

Idioms about work and effort reveal another layer of cognitive-cultural difference. English idioms, born of industrial and capitalist traditions, often present labor as a form of struggle or energy expenditure: work one’s fingers to the bone, put one’s shoulder to the wheel, no pain, no gain. The underlying metaphor is work is motion or effort—an input-output model reflecting achievement through perseverance.


In Uzbek, labor is viewed less as struggle and more as a moral and creative act. The idiom qo‘li gul (“his hand is a flower”) praises skill and craftsmanship, not endurance. Mehnat qilgan to‘yadi (“he who works will be satisfied”) connects work with moral fulfillment and divine blessing. The effort itself is not commodified but sanctified. Where English idioms focus on the product, Uzbek idioms celebrate the process.

Idioms are also moral texts. They encode behavioral norms, warning or guiding speakers toward culturally valued conduct. In English, moral clarity is frequently depicted through the metaphor of cleanliness or transparency: to come clean, a clean slate, keep one’s nose clean. The physical imagery of vision and purity expresses morality as visible integrity—doing right is to be “clear” or “unsoiled.”

In Uzbek, moral idioms rely on internal light and restraint: ko‘ngli yorug‘ (“his heart is bright”), tilini tiymoq (“to restrain one’s tongue”), ko‘zi to‘q (“his eyes are satisfied”). Morality here is not outward but inward. It resides in a balanced soul, a heart free from greed or malice. This aligns with traditional Islamic ethics, where restraint and contentment signify spiritual maturity.

Across all domains, the data confirm two major conclusions. First, idioms in both languages are structured by universal embodied metaphors: heat, light, weight, and movement consistently underlie emotional and moral concepts. Second, the cultural interpretation of these metaphors varies systematically. English idioms are grounded in external, pragmatic, and individualist imagery, while Uzbek idioms are rooted in internal, moral, and collectivist imagery.

This pattern suggests that phraseology functions as a kind of cultural cognition—a system of metaphors through which speakers make sense of life. The English worldview values clarity, control, and achievement; the Uzbek worldview values harmony, restraint, and sincerity. Both perspectives express genuine human needs: one to master the world, the other to live meaningfully within it.



Conclusion. The comparative cognitive study of English and Uzbek phraseology demonstrates that language, mind, and culture form a unified system. Idioms are not random or decorative; they are the linguistic embodiment of conceptual metaphors that organize human thought. The same cognitive mechanisms that produce idioms—embodiment, analogy, metaphor—are shared by all people, yet each culture fills them with unique meanings drawn from its own environment, history, and values.


English idioms mirror a worldview shaped by industrial modernity and individual responsibility. They emphasize precision, energy, and achievement. Uzbek idioms reflect a worldview shaped by communal life, spirituality, and moral introspection. They express harmony, patience, and humility. In both languages, the metaphorical imagination transforms everyday experience into symbolic meaning, turning physical sensations into moral lessons and cultural wisdom.

These findings have practical as well as theoretical implications. For translators, recognizing the conceptual metaphor behind an idiom is essential for accurate and culturally sensitive translation. For teachers and learners, idioms provide an entry point into the mentality of another culture, promoting deeper understanding beyond vocabulary. For linguists and anthropologists, idioms offer empirical evidence of how cognition adapts to social environments.

In the end, the study of phraseology reminds us that to understand a language is to understand a way of thinking. Every idiom is a small story about how people have learned to make sense of their world—through work and patience, through laughter and restraint, through body and soul. The English and Uzbek examples show that while cultures differ in imagery, they are united by the same human need to transform experience into meaning. Through language, the mind and culture find their shared expression.

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