

A COMPARATIVE COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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ABSTRACT:

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*Idiomatic expressions constitute a complex and culturally embedded component of language, combining fixed linguistic form with figurative meaning. This study examines idioms in English and Uzbek from a comparative perspective, focusing on their semantic structure, cognitive motivation, and cultural grounding. Using qualitative methods, the research analyzes selected idioms across domains such as emotion, cognition, and social interaction. The findings indicate that both languages rely on shared conceptual metaphors, including *EMOTIONS ARE MOVEMENT* and *UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010). However, important differences arise due to typological distinctions and cultural contexts, which shape idiom structure and imagery (Wierzbicka, 1997). The study also explores translation challenges, demonstrating that idiomatic meaning is often context-dependent and resistant to direct equivalence (Baker, 2018). The results contribute to phraseology, cognitive linguistics, and translation studies, while offering practical implications for language teaching and intercultural communication.*

INTRODUCTION

Idiomatic expressions represent one of the most intricate aspects of natural language, as they combine linguistic form with layers of cultural and cognitive meaning. Unlike literal expressions, idioms cannot be interpreted solely through the meanings of their individual components. Instead, their interpretation depends on shared knowledge, contextual understanding, and familiarity with cultural conventions. This characteristic makes idioms both a valuable object of linguistic inquiry and a persistent challenge for language learners. In contemporary linguistics, idioms are no longer viewed merely as stylistic embellishments. Rather, they are recognized as meaningful units that reflect how speakers conceptualize reality. Cognitive linguistics, in particular, has demonstrated that idioms are closely linked to conceptual metaphors grounded in bodily experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, abstract notions such as emotion, time, and understanding are frequently expressed through physical movement, spatial orientation, or sensory perception. The comparison of English and Uzbek idioms provides an especially productive area of study. While the two languages differ typologically—English being largely analytic and Uzbek agglutinative—they both exhibit rich idiomatic systems. These systems reveal both universal patterns of human cognition and culture-specific ways of interpreting experience. The present study aims to analyze idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek with a focus on their semantic, structural, and cognitive features. It also seeks to identify key similarities and differences between the two languages, as well as to examine the implications for translation and language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on idiomatic expressions has evolved significantly over time. Early approaches emphasized classification and structural properties. Vinogradov (1977) proposed a widely used framework distinguishing between phraseological fusions, unities, and combinations. While this model provided a useful starting point, it did not fully account for the cognitive mechanisms underlying idiomatic meaning. The development of cognitive linguistics introduced a new perspective. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that metaphor is central to human thought rather than a peripheral linguistic device. Their work demonstrated that idioms are often manifestations of broader conceptual metaphors. Kövecses (2010) further developed this approach, showing that metaphorical patterns are both systematic and culturally influenced. Cultural linguistics has also contributed to the understanding of idioms. Wierzbicka (1997) emphasized that idiomatic expressions encode cultural values and shared experiences. This perspective highlights the importance of cultural context in interpreting idioms and explains why many expressions lack direct equivalents across languages.

translation studies, Baker (2018) identified idioms as one of the most challenging areas due to their non-compositional nature. She proposed several strategies, including equivalence, paraphrase, and adaptation, each involving trade-offs between meaning and naturalness. Within Uzbek linguistics, Rahmatullaev (1992) provided a comprehensive analysis of phraseological units, emphasizing their connection to everyday life and cultural traditions. More recent studies have also explored the role of idioms in intercultural communication and language teaching (Gibbs, 2006; Boers, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on descriptive and comparative analysis. Idiomatic expressions from English and Uzbek were selected from dictionaries, linguistic studies, and authentic usage contexts. The selection focused on commonly used idioms across several semantic domains, including emotion, cognition, communication, and behavior. The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, idioms are examined semantically to determine their figurative meaning and degree of transparency. Second, their structural characteristics are analyzed in relation to the grammatical features of each language. Third, their cognitive and cultural motivations are explored through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory. The comparative approach allows for the identification of both similarities and differences, providing a balanced understanding of how idioms function in each language.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis reveals that idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek share a number of underlying cognitive patterns. One of the most prominent is the conceptualization of emotions through spatial orientation. Positive emotions are associated with upward movement, while negative emotions are linked to downward movement. This is reflected in expressions such as “over the moon” and “ko‘ngli osmonga chiqdi,” as well as “my heart sank” and “ko‘ngli tushdi.” These parallels suggest that emotional experience is structured in similar ways across languages. Another significant pattern involves the use of visual metaphors to describe understanding. Expressions such as “see the light” in English and “haqiqatni ko‘rmoq” in Uzbek indicate that knowledge is conceptualized as visual perception. This supports the broader metaphor UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING, which appears to be widely shared across cultures (Gibbs, 2006). Idioms related to communication also demonstrate comparable patterns. In both languages, speaking is often conceptualized as a physical process involving the release or control of objects. For example, “spill the beans” and “sirni ochib qo‘ymoq” both describe the act of revealing information. These expressions illustrate how abstract communicative processes are grounded in physical experience. Despite these similarities,

important differences emerge. English idioms tend to be structurally fixed, with little tolerance for variation. Uzbek idioms, by contrast, exhibit greater flexibility due to their agglutinative structure, allowing for grammatical modification without loss of meaning. Cultural differences are also evident. English idioms frequently reflect historical contexts such as maritime activities, trade, and sports. Uzbek idioms, on the other hand, are more closely tied to traditional life, agriculture, and social relationships. These differences highlight the role of cultural experience in shaping idiomatic expression.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study support the view that idioms operate at the intersection of cognition and culture. The similarities observed between English and Uzbek idioms suggest that human thought is structured by common conceptual patterns. At the same time, differences in structure and imagery demonstrate the influence of linguistic and cultural context. Idioms also play an important role in communication. They enhance expressiveness, allow for indirectness, and contribute to discourse cohesion. Their use often reflects social norms and communicative strategies, making them essential for effective interaction. From a translation perspective, idioms present significant challenges. Because their meanings are not directly tied to their components, literal translation is often ineffective. Translators must consider both meaning and function, choosing strategies that preserve communicative effect while adapting to cultural context.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined idiomatic expressions in English and Uzbek from a comparative perspective, highlighting both shared cognitive foundations and culture-specific features. The results demonstrate that idioms are shaped by universal patterns of human experience as well as by the unique characteristics of each language. The analysis confirms that idioms cannot be fully understood without considering their cognitive, structural, and cultural dimensions. It also underscores the importance of context in interpretation and use. Future research may explore idiom acquisition among language learners or investigate the role of idioms in specific genres of discourse. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language reflects both shared cognition and cultural identity.

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