

## CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AS A REFLECTION OF CULTURAL WORLDVIEW: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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### ABSTRACT

*This article looks at how conceptual metaphors reflect and shape the cultural worldview in the English language. Using the frameworks of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2020) and Cultural Linguistics (Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2021), the study shows that metaphors in English are not just figures of speech but deeply cultural expressions that carry the values and attitudes of English-speaking communities. To better understand what is specifically English about these metaphors, the article compares English with Uzbek. Where the two languages share the same metaphors, the feature is likely universal. Where they differ, the feature belongs specifically to the English cultural worldview. The findings are relevant for cross-cultural communication and English language teaching.*

**Keywords:** *conceptual metaphor, cultural worldview, English language, Cultural Linguistics, linguistic world picture, cross-cultural comparison*

## КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫЕ МЕТАФОРЫ КАК ОТРАЖЕНИЕ КУЛЬТУРНОГО МИРОВОЗЗРЕНИЯ: СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО И УЗБЕКСКОГО ЯЗЫКОВ

### АННОТАЦИЯ

*В данной статье рассматривается, каким образом концептуальные метафоры отражают и формируют культурное мировоззрение в английском языке. Опираясь на теорию концептуальной метафоры и положения лингвокультурологии, исследование демонстрирует, что метафоры в английском языке представляют собой не просто образные выражения, а глубоко укоренённые культурные феномены, транслирующие ценности и установки англоязычных сообществ. В целях выявления специфики английских метафор в статье проводится сопоставительный анализ английского и*

узбекского языков. В тех случаях, когда оба языка используют сходные метафорические модели, можно говорить об их универсальном характере. Напротив, различия в метафорических структурах свидетельствуют о культурной специфике английского мировоззрения. Полученные результаты имеют важное значение для межкультурной коммуникации и методики преподавания английского языка.

**Ключевые слова:** концептуальная метафора, культурное мировоззрение, английский язык, лингвокультурология, языковая картина мира, кросскультурное сравнение.

## INTRODUCTION

Most people think of metaphors as something poets use — a way of making language more beautiful or creative. But in the last few decades, researchers in cognitive linguistics have shown that this view is too narrow. Metaphors are not just about style. They are fundamental tools of human thinking. When we say someone is "at the top of their career" or "fell to the bottom," we are not just being poetic — we are using a conceptual system that organizes how we understand success and failure in spatial terms.

This idea was first developed systematically by J. Lakoff and M. Johnson in their 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By*. They argued that our everyday conceptual system — the way we think and act — is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. We understand abstract things like time, emotion, and social relationships through more concrete experiences. This process is called conceptual metaphor, and it works through what Lakoff and Johnson call "mappings" between a source domain (something concrete and familiar) and a target domain (something abstract) [G. Lakoff., & M. Johnson., 1980].

What makes this especially interesting for cultural studies is that these mappings are not the same in every language. Different cultures develop different metaphors based on their specific history, geography, religion, and social values. This means that by studying the metaphors of a language, we can learn something important about the culture behind it.

The present article focuses on English. The main question is: what does the conceptual metaphor system of English tell us about the English cultural worldview? To answer this question more clearly, the article also looks at Uzbek as a point of comparison. Uzbek is a very different language — it belongs to the Turkic family, it developed in a Central Asian context, and it has been shaped by Islamic tradition and

nomadic culture. By comparing English and Uzbek metaphors, we can identify which features of English are universal and which are specifically cultural.

This type of research matters for practical reasons too. Students learning English as a foreign language — including students in Uzbekistan — need to understand not just the grammar and vocabulary of English but also the cultural assumptions built into its metaphor system. Without this understanding, real communication becomes difficult.

A conceptual metaphor is a way of understanding one thing in terms of another. It is not a single word or phrase but a systematic pattern that organizes how we think and speak about a whole domain of experience.

The most famous example is **ARGUMENT IS WAR**. In English, people regularly say things like “he attacked my argument,” “she defended her position,” “I shot down his idea,” or “we fought over that point.” None of these expressions seem unusual to a native English speaker. But they all reflect the same underlying idea — that arguing is like fighting a battle. This is a conceptual metaphor: the abstract domain of argument (the target) is understood through the structure of the more concrete domain of war (the source).

G.Lakoff and M.Johnson identified three main types of conceptual metaphor. **Structural metaphors** map the internal structure of one concept onto another, as in **THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS** (“a well-constructed argument,” “the foundations of his theory”). **Oriental metaphors** use spatial direction to organize abstract concepts, as in **GOOD IS UP** (“things are looking up”, “she’s at the top of her career”). **Ontological metaphors** treat abstract things as if they were physical objects, as in **THE MIND IS A MACHINE** (“my brain isn't working today,” “I need to recharge”).

More recently, Kövecses has argued that conceptual metaphors are not as fixed as the original theory suggested. In his *Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, he shows that the same basic metaphor can be realized in different ways depending on the cultural, situational, and discourse context of the speaker [ Z. Kövecses, 2020 ]. This means that even when two cultures share the same basic metaphor, they may use it differently and attach different values to it.

Cultural Linguistics is a field that studies the relationship between language and cultural cognition. It asks how the concepts, values, and ways of thinking of a cultural community are reflected in the language that community uses. M.Sadeghpour and F.Sharifian (2021) define Cultural Linguistics as the study of how "cultural conceptualizations" — the mental representations that communities build through shared experience — are encoded in language [M.Sadeghpour and F.Sharifian .,2021].

This approach is closely related to the concept of the “linguistic world picture” developed in Russian linguistics by scholars such as V.Maslova and L.Kubryakova. The linguistic world picture refers to the image of the world that is encoded in a particular language — not a copy of reality, but a culturally colored interpretation of it. Different languages encode different world pictures because their speakers have had different historical, geographical, and social experiences [Maslova .,2010 & Kubryakova .,1988].

For the present study, the key point is this: conceptual metaphors are one of the most important ways in which the linguistic world picture is encoded and transmitted. When English speakers call a greedy person a "cormorant" or describe life as a "journey," they are not just using words — they are participating in a cultural system of meaning that has been built up over centuries.

Cross-cultural comparison is one of the most useful methods for studying the cultural dimension of language. The reason is simple: features that seem natural or universal to speakers of one language often turn out to be culturally specific when compared with a different language. As Tianying and Bogoyavlenskaya note, the cultural adaptation of metaphors significantly affects how metaphorical language is interpreted across different communities [L.Tianying., & Yu.Bogoyavlenskaya .,2023].

Uzbek was chosen as the language of comparison for several reasons. First, it represents a completely different language family and grammatical tradition. Second, it developed in a cultural context — Central Asian, nomadic, Islamic — that is very different from the context that shaped English. Third, the English-Uzbek comparison has not been studied much in the existing literature on cross-cultural metaphor, making this a relatively new contribution.

The comparison works on a simple principle. Where English and Uzbek use the same metaphors, we can conclude that those metaphors are based on universal human experience. Where they use different metaphors — or where one language has a category that the other completely lacks — we have found something that is culturally specific.

One of the most widespread and culturally revealing conceptual metaphors in English is a human being is an animal. This metaphor produces a large family of expressions — called zoonyms — that use animal names to describe human characteristics. These expressions tell us a great deal about how English-speaking culture evaluates human behavior.

In English, this metaphor is organized around a predator-prey structure. On one side, there are expressions that describe people as predators: calling someone a *wolf*

suggests they are sexually aggressive; calling someone a *shark* suggests they exploit others for profit; calling someone a *vulture* means they profit from others' misfortune. On the other side, there are expressions that describe people as prey: a *sitting duck* is someone who is vulnerable and easily hurt; a *poor fish* is someone who is helpless and pitiable; a *rabbit* is someone who is timid and easily frightened.

This predator-prey structure is significant. It suggests that in the English cultural worldview, social life is understood as a kind of competition in which people are either powerful or vulnerable. This reflects a broader cultural value — the importance of individual strength and competitive success in Anglophone societies.

When we compare this with Uzbek, some interesting differences appear. Uzbek also uses the human is an animal metaphor, but the specific animals and what they represent are often different. For example, a beautiful person in Uzbek is compared to a *gazelle (ohu)* — an image drawn from centuries of Central Asian poetry in which the gazelle symbolizes grace and feminine beauty. In English, beauty might be described through *fox* or *foxy*, which carries a different cultural flavour — sharp, attractive, slightly dangerous. A patient person in Uzbek is compared to a *camel (tuya)*, which is central to the nomadic cultural tradition. English has no equivalent zoonym for patience.

Perhaps the most culturally revealing difference is that English has entire categories of zoonyms that simply do not exist in Uzbek. English has zoonyms for sexual attractiveness (*wolf, fox, stallion*) and zoonyms that have historically been used to describe racial characteristics. These categories are completely absent from Uzbek. Their presence in English reflects specific features of Anglophone social history — the public coding of sexual attractiveness as a social category, and the racial stratification that characterized English-speaking societies during the colonial period. It is important to note that the racially coded zoonyms represent a history of discrimination and should be understood critically rather than accepted as neutral descriptions.

Zhao, Zheng and Zhao point out that cross-cultural differences in metaphor systems are especially visible in domains related to social evaluation — precisely the domain where zoonyms operate [Zhao, Zheng., & Zhao.,2023]. The English zoonym system is richer and more varied than the Uzbek one, which itself reflects a cultural difference: English-speaking culture has developed a more elaborated public vocabulary for evaluating people's social characteristics.

Another dominant pattern in English conceptual metaphors is the idea that social interaction — especially professional and intellectual interaction — is like a

competition or a battle. We already mentioned argument is war. But this is part of a much wider system.

Business in English is regularly described through war metaphors: *market penetration, hostile takeover, killing the competition, targeting customers*. Career advancement is described through racing metaphors: *getting ahead, staying in the race, falling behind, being in the running*. Even relationships are sometimes described through economic metaphors: *investing in a relationship, paying attention, spending time*.

This competitive conceptualization of social life is not universal. In Uzbek culture, social relationships are more often described through metaphors of cooperation and complementarity. The proverb "*er-xotin — qo'sh ho'kiz*" (husband and wife are a pair of oxen) describes marriage not as a competition but as joint work toward a shared goal. The proverb "*ota-bola — bir bog', biri — gul, biri — bog'bon*" (father and child are one garden; one is the flower, the other the gardener) describes the parent-child relationship through an image of natural growth and care, not achievement or competition.

This difference points to something real about the English cultural worldview. The competitive metaphors are not accidental — they reflect a culture that values individual achievement, competitive success, and the ability to outperform others. This does not mean English culture is simply aggressive or that Uzbek culture is simply cooperative, but the dominant metaphors of each language do suggest different cultural orientations.

Proverbs are particularly good for studying cultural metaphors because they are so stable — they have been passed down through generations and preserve cultural attitudes that might have changed in other types of language. English proverbs about gender reveal some interesting and sometimes troubling features of the English cultural worldview.

One striking pattern is that English proverbs use metaphors that present female intelligence and beauty as dangerous or problematic. The proverb "*Women have long hair and short brains*" uses the metaphor intellectual capacity is physical substance — the idea that the brain has a limited, measurable content — and applies it negatively to women. The proverb "*Over the greatest beauty hangs the greatest ruin*" conceptualizes female beauty as a threat, using the spatial metaphor of something hanging dangerously over a person.

This metaphorical pattern — female excellence is danger — is completely absent from Uzbek proverbs. In Uzbek, female beauty is consistently presented as a positive quality. The proverb "*Ayolning sunbuli — yigitning guli*" (a woman's grace is

a young man's flower) conceptualizes feminine beauty through the positive metaphor of flowering and natural growth. The contrast between the two traditions is striking.

Ferrari and Siqueira have shown that proverbs typically encode several conceptual metaphors at the same time, and that the interaction of these metaphors produces complex cultural meanings. A good example from English is the proverb "*Man is the head, but woman turns it* [Ferrari & Siqueira.,2023]." This proverb uses at least three metaphors simultaneously: authority is physical position (the head is on top, therefore superior), influence is physical manipulation (turning the head), and gender relations are body parts (the relationship is described through the body). The result is a complex cultural message — formal male authority coexisting with real female influence — that is expressed through metaphor rather than stated directly.

### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis shows a clear pattern. Some conceptual metaphors in English are universal — they appear in Uzbek too and are probably based on shared human experience. The basic orientational metaphors (GOOD IS UP, MORE IS UP) appear in both languages. The basic structural metaphors connecting physical strength with power (a strong person as a bull or horse) appear in both languages too. And both languages use the human is an animal metaphor as a general system for evaluating people.

But other metaphors are specifically English. The predator-prey structure of social conceptualization is much more developed in English than in Uzbek. The negative evaluation of female intelligence and beauty in proverbs is specifically English — Uzbek does the opposite. And entire categories of zoonyms encoding racial and sexual characteristics exist in English but not in Uzbek.

How do we explain this? Kövecses offers a useful answer. He argues that conceptual metaphors emerge from the interaction of universal bodily experience and culturally specific contextual factors [Kövecses .,2020]. The universal factors produce the metaphors that appear in both languages. The culturally specific factors — the particular history, ecology, religion, and social organization of the community — produce the metaphors that are unique to one language.

For English, the culturally specific factors include the maritime and colonial history of British culture, the industrial revolution and its mechanical metaphors, the competitive and individualistic values of Anglo-American society, and the specific social history of gender relations in English-speaking cultures. These factors shaped the English metaphor system in ways that are clearly visible when English is compared with a culturally distant language like Uzbek.

As X.Hu points out, understanding these cultural dimensions of metaphor is not just an academic exercise. It has real practical importance for anyone learning English as a foreign language. A student who understands English grammar but does not understand that ARGUMENT IS WAR or that female excellence is metaphorically constructed as dangerous in traditional English proverbs will miss important cultural meanings in the language they are learning [Hu.,2024].

## CONCLUSION

This article has examined conceptual metaphor as a component of the English cultural worldview, using Uzbek as a contrastive reference. The main findings can be summarized as follows.

First, conceptual metaphors in English are not just cognitive tools — they are cultural expressions that encode specific values, attitudes, and historical experiences. The predator-prey structure of English zoonyms, the competitive metaphors of professional life, and the negative evaluation of female excellence in English proverbs all reflect specific features of the English cultural worldview.

Second, cross-cultural comparison with Uzbek is a productive method for identifying what is specifically English about these metaphors. The comparison revealed both universal features (the basic HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL metaphor, orientational metaphors) and nationally specific features (the predator-prey structure, racially coded zoonyms, gender metaphors in proverbs).

Third, the findings have practical implications for English language teaching. Students learning English need cultural competence as well as linguistic competence. Understanding the metaphor system of English is an important part of this cultural competence.

Future research could extend this analysis to digital English — the language of social media, online communication, and AI — where new conceptual metaphors are emerging that may reflect changing cultural values. The interaction between traditional English metaphors and the emerging global English of digital communication is a productive area for future study.

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