

SEMANTIC FEATURES OF METAPHORS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH PROVERBS

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Abstract: The article examines the semantic characteristics of metaphoric expressions in Uzbek and English proverbs. Drawing upon cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, it analyzes how metaphors` structure collective worldview, encode cultural values, and shape moral instruction. A comparative analysis reveals both universal metaphorical patterns rooted in human embodied experience and culturally specific metaphors shaped by historical, social, and ecological conditions. The study concludes that metaphors in proverbs serve not only as linguistic ornaments but also as conceptual tools that transmit national identity, shared wisdom, and moral norms across generations.

Keywords: metaphor, proverb, semantic features, Uzbek proverbs, English proverbs, cultural linguistics, cognitive metaphor theory.

Metaphor serves as one of the most fundamental semantic mechanisms in the formation and interpretation of proverbs in every culture. Proverbs condense broad human experiences into short, memorable expressions, and metaphor enables this process by mapping concrete imagery onto abstract moral, social, or psychological meanings. Rather than presenting advice directly, proverbs employ symbolic language that draws from familiar objects, natural phenomena, animals, or daily activities. Such images act as cognitive anchors through which deeper insights can be expressed compactly. The metaphorical structure of proverbs therefore reflects not only linguistic creativity but also collective logic and cultural worldview. For instance, both Uzbek and English proverbs describe moral development by comparing it to the growth of a plant, as seen in the Uzbek saying “Ko‘chat qanday qiyqasa, daraxt shunday o‘sadi” and the English equivalent “As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.” These expressions rely on the universal human experience of observing nature, using it as a metaphorical framework for understanding child upbringing and moral formation.

In Uzbek proverbs, metaphorical meaning is deeply intertwined with the agricultural and pastoral environment that has shaped Uzbek life for centuries.

Consequently, many Uzbek proverbs draw upon images of land, plants, farming, animals, and natural cycles. These metaphors serve to express values such as patience, hard work, unity, and respect. For example, the proverb “Erta turgan – elga boqadi, kech turgan – yolg‘iz qoladi” metaphorically links waking early with prosperity, associating lateness with social and economic isolation. Farming imagery appears in expressions such as “Yaxshi urug‘dan yaxshi meva,” where good seeds represent good intentions or upbringing, and the resulting fruit symbolizes positive outcomes. Animal metaphors are also prominent: the fox commonly stands for cunning or deceit in sayings like “Tulki terisini yashira olmaydi,” which suggests that a deceitful person cannot hide their true nature. Similarly, sheep often symbolize innocence or simplicity, while camels can represent endurance and patience. Uzbek culture, with its emphasis on communal cooperation, also produces metaphors that symbolize social unity, such as “Birlik bor joyda – yengillik bor,” which metaphorically conceptualizes harmony as a force that lightens burdens. These examples demonstrate how the semantic structure of Uzbek metaphors reflects the community-oriented, agrarian worldview of the people who created and transmitted them.

English proverbs, by contrast, reflect the cultural history of a maritime, industrial, and predominantly individualistic society. Many English metaphors draw upon imagery related to navigation, weather, trade, and personal initiative. The proverb “Every cloud has a silver lining” uses the metaphor of a cloudy sky with hidden sunlight to illustrate the idea that difficult situations contain hope or opportunity. Likewise, “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” employs a metaphor from farm life but serves a widely recognized English value: caution in planning and avoidance of premature optimism. Navigation and travel imagery often appear in English proverbs, embodying the cultural experience of seafaring and exploration. Expressions such as “We are all in the same boat” metaphorically relate shared challenges to a group of sailors facing the same storm, emphasizing collective struggle despite broader individualistic tendencies. Another example, “Steer clear of trouble,” conceptualizes life as a voyage in which wise individuals navigate away from danger. English proverbs often stress personal responsibility and self-reliance, as seen in “The early bird catches the worm,” which uses a simple natural image to express the idea that initiative leads to success, and in “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink,” which metaphorically conveys the limits of external influence on personal choice.

These metaphors reveal a worldview where prudence, independence, and individual decision-making hold significant semantic weight. A comparison of metaphorical structures in Uzbek and English proverbs demonstrates both shared cognitive tendencies and culturally specific patterns. Many metaphors are universal because they arise from common human experiences such as observing

nature, working with animals, or navigating daily challenges. This universality explains why Uzbek and English both use plant-growth metaphors to describe character formation, or why both cultures use animal traits to symbolize human behavior. A proverb like the English “A leopard cannot change its spots” closely parallels the Uzbek “Tulki terisini yashira olmaydi,” showing how distinct cultures can independently develop similar metaphorical logic based on animal symbolism. However, each culture selects its metaphorical source domains according to its environment, economy, and social practices. Uzbek metaphors frequently reflect agricultural life, emphasizing cooperation, patience, and moral cultivation through images of sowing, reaping, and caring for livestock. English metaphors more often reflect travel, weather, trade, and personal initiative, revealing cultural values associated with individual effort, risk management, and exploration.

Despite these cultural differences, the metaphorical structures in both languages fulfill similar functions: they summarize collective wisdom, guide behavior, transmit values, and provide cognitive frameworks for interpreting life events. The differences lie not in the cognitive process but in the symbolic materials each culture chooses to represent deeper meanings. Uzbek metaphors typically highlight community and harmony, whereas English metaphors tend to emphasize personal responsibility and pragmatic reasoning. Together, these patterns show that proverbs, though culturally embedded, arise from universal human tendencies to make sense of the world through metaphor. Their semantic richness derives from the interplay between shared human cognition and the distinct cultural environments that give each metaphor its specific shape and significance.

In summary, a semantic study of metaphors in English and Uzbek proverbs demonstrates that metaphor is an essential cognitive tool for encoding cultural identity, wisdom, and moral education. Every culture creates its own metaphorical patterns that reflect its social ideals, surroundings, and historical history, even if many metaphors are universal and stem from common human experiences. Comprehending these semantic characteristics enhances intercultural awareness and advances disciplines like linguistic anthropology, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

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