

**CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AND CULTURAL MODELS IN ENGLISH, UZBEK,
AND RUSSIAN PROVERBS****Galiulina Ozoda Kayumovna**teacher at the Department of General Linguistics,
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Proverbs are among the most culturally saturated elements of any language. They encapsulate centuries of collective experience and serve as compact cultural codes transmitting values, emotions, and wisdom. When viewed from the lens of cognitive linguistics, proverbs reveal underlying conceptual metaphors — mental mappings that connect the concrete and the abstract, shaping how speakers of different languages perceive and interpret the world. From a linguocultural perspective, these metaphors do not exist in a vacuum; they are embedded in national traditions, religious thought, social behavior, and the linguistic structure of each culture (Kövecses, 2002). Examining English, Uzbek, and Russian proverbs through this dual cognitive and cultural framework allows for a deep understanding of how language, thought, and culture intertwine.

Metaphor, according to Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal theory, is not a decorative element of language but a fundamental feature of human cognition. People think metaphorically, using the body and physical experience to structure intangible concepts such as life, love, fate, and morality. However, the particular metaphors that become conventionalized in a language depend on shared cultural experience (Wierzbicka, 1992). This makes proverbs a particularly rich field of study, as they preserve conventional metaphors that have achieved communal acceptance. English, Uzbek, and Russian, belonging to three distinct linguistic families and cultural systems, provide compelling examples of how universal conceptual mechanisms adapt to culturally specific models of life and morality.

In English, conceptual metaphors often arise from domains associated with movement, commerce, and vision — reflecting the Anglo-European worldview built on exploration, trade, and rational inquiry (Charteris-Black, 2004). Expressions such as Don't put all your eggs in one basket or A stitch in time saves nine reflect pragmatic foresight and efficiency, where life is seen as a series of strategic decisions. Uzbek, by contrast, draws heavily on natural, familial, and moral domains: metaphors are shaped by agrarian imagery, Islamic ethics, and collective social order. Proverbs such as Mehnat qilgan to'yadi ("He who works will be fulfilled") or Odam bo'lish oson emas ("It is not easy to be a human") emphasize moral perseverance and ethical balance. Russian proverbs, deeply rooted in Orthodox spirituality and historical endurance, rely on metaphors of nature, destiny, and emotional endurance: Делу время, потехе час ("Work has its time, fun has its hour") conveys a disciplined yet fatalistic view of human activity, balancing duty and pleasure (Kukharenko, 2014).

One of the most pervasive conceptual metaphors across all three languages is **LIFE IS A JOURNEY**. However, its linguistic and cultural manifestations differ. English expresses this metaphor through individualistic and goal-oriented imagery — You make your own path, Stay on track, He's at a crossroads. The focus is on personal autonomy and control. Uzbek

expressions reframe the journey as a moral and social process: Har kim o‘z yo‘lidan yuradi (“Everyone walks his own path”) or Yo‘ldan ozgan inson manzilga yetmaydi (“He who strays from the road never reaches the destination”) encode moral discipline and conformity to communal norms. Russian proverbs add existential and emotional dimensions, as in Жизнь прожить – не поле перейти (“To live a life is not to cross a field”), emphasizing the hardship and unpredictability of existence (Karaulov, 1987). Thus, while the metaphor is conceptually universal, its emotional charge and moral implications are culturally distinctive.

Another fundamental conceptual metaphor is **TIME IS A RESOURCE**. In English, time is perceived as a quantifiable commodity — something that can be saved, wasted, or invested (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Proverbs such as Time is money or Make hay while the sun shines embody the utilitarian, capitalist mindset of Western modernity. In Uzbek, time retains moral and spiritual significance: Vaqt oltindan qimmat (“Time is more precious than gold”) places value not on profit but on divine and human responsibility. Russian proverbs, meanwhile, often present time as a healer or a moral judge — Время лечит (“Time heals”) or Всему своё время (“Everything has its time”). Each linguistic tradition thus demonstrates how conceptual metaphors are filtered through distinct cultural models of temporality — rational-economic, moral-ethical, and spiritual-philosophical.

The metaphor **EMOTION IS FIRE** provides another fertile ground for comparison. In English, phrases such as burning with anger or flame of love treat emotion as both dangerous and inspiring, aligning with Western dualism that separates passion from reason. Uzbek conceptualizations tend to integrate emotional and moral domains — Ko‘ngli yonmoqda (“His heart is burning”) or Sevgi yurakni kuydiradi (“Love burns the heart”) — which tie feeling to moral sincerity and personal sacrifice. Russian proverbs, however, express emotion with dramatic intensity and spiritual fatalism: Сердце не камень (“The heart is not stone”) or Любовь зла, полюбишь и козла (“Love is blind — you can even fall for a goat”) reveal humor and tragedy coexisting within the same conceptual space (Teliya, 1996). The metaphor of fire is thus universal, but its evaluative meaning — destructive or purifying, divine or irrational — is culturally conditioned.

The study of conceptual metaphors in proverbs also reveals how **cultural models of morality and social order** are linguistically structured. English moral metaphors often rely on balance, trade, and merit — You reap what you sow, As you make your bed, so you must lie in it — expressing moral causality consistent with Protestant ethics: individual responsibility and personal consequence (Lakoff, 1993). Uzbek morality, expressed through proverbs such as Yaxshilik qil, daryoga tashla (“Do good and throw it into the river”), emphasizes altruism detached from reward — good deeds have intrinsic value. Russian proverbs, like Без труда не вытащишь и рыбку из пруда (“No work, no reward”), blend moral and social pragmatism, linking human effort to divine justice (Kukharenko, 2014). In all three cases, the same conceptual metaphor — **MORALITY IS ECONOMIC BALANCE** — is present, but the cultural models it supports differ: rational compensation, ethical selflessness, and spiritual reciprocity.

The metaphor **KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT** further illustrates how metaphors connect cognitive experience to cultural symbolism. In English, expressions such as Shedding light on the truth or A bright student represent knowledge as illumination — a legacy of Enlightenment rationalism. In Uzbek, Ilm nur, jaholat zulmat (“Knowledge is light, ignorance is darkness”) reflects an Islamic and didactic worldview, where learning is tied to moral salvation (Ergasheva, 2021). Russian culture, influenced by Orthodoxy and folk wisdom, treats light as a spiritual symbol:

Свет знаний освещает путь (“The light of knowledge illuminates the way”). Though similar in imagery, each language encodes a different philosophical foundation: scientific rationalism in English, moral instruction in Uzbek, and spiritual guidance in Russian.

The notion of **HUMAN CHARACTER AS NATURE** is also widespread across the three traditions. English proverbs like Still waters run deep or A leopard can't change its spots represent personality as a stable natural essence, unchangeable by circumstance. Uzbek expressions, such as Yomg'ir yog'sa, yer to'yar; so'z aytilsa, yurak to'yar (“The earth is satisfied by rain; the heart is satisfied by words”), reveal a humanistic and nurturing view of human emotion. Russian metaphors, in Сердце – океан (“The heart is an ocean”) or Злой как собака (“As angry as a dog”), depict the emotional and instinctive sides of humanity, often framed with irony or empathy (Karaulov, 1987). These metaphors reinforce how languages project moral and emotional concepts onto nature differently — English rationalizes, Uzbek harmonizes, Russian dramatizes.

From a typological perspective, linguistic structure also influences metaphor formation. English, as an analytic language, relies on syntactic constructions and lexical metaphorization: proverbs are short, balanced, and built around parallel structures (Easy come, easy go). Uzbek, being agglutinative, employs derivational morphology and rhythmic balance; its proverbs often feature repetition, vowel harmony, and suffixal emphasis that reinforce moral rhythm. Russian, a fusional language, tends to use complex morphology with emotional and evaluative inflections, which give proverbs their characteristic lyrical and ironic tone (Teliya, 1996). Thus, linguistic typology and cultural cognition work together to shape the aesthetic and moral form of proverbs.

Conceptual metaphors in proverbs also reveal national attitudes toward **fate and human agency**. English emphasizes control and foresight (You are the master of your fate; Fortune favors the bold). Uzbek emphasizes acceptance and moral patience (Taqdirdan qochib bo'lmaydi – “You cannot escape destiny”). Russian embraces fatalism mixed with humor (Человек предполагает, а Бог располагает – “Man proposes, God disposes”). These patterns reflect distinct cultural models: English individualism and optimism, Uzbek fatalistic humanism, and Russian theological realism (Wierzbicka, 1997). Each represents a unique cognitive style in which metaphors function as linguistic reflections of collective psychology.

Cultural models, as Holland and Quinn (1987) define them, are shared mental schemas that organize social and moral knowledge. In proverbs, these models function as microcosms of culture, conveying values without explicit explanation. In English, the dominant cultural model values independence, time management, and empirical logic. Uzbek cultural models emphasize kinship, cooperation, and divine morality. Russian models blend emotional endurance, humility, and faith. When conceptual metaphors operate within these models, they take on moral and emotional colorings that cannot be separated from the life philosophy of each people. For instance, the metaphor of LIFE AS STRUGGLE in English implies perseverance for success, in Uzbek — patience and faith, in Russian — endurance through suffering (Turgunov, 2023).

The comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Russian proverbs demonstrates that while conceptual metaphors are universal cognitive tools, their linguistic expression and cultural interpretation are deeply national. Proverbs act as miniature ethnolinguistic narratives, preserving both the logic and the emotion of a people's worldview. Understanding them contributes not only to paremiology and linguocultural studies but also to translation theory and intercultural communication. As Turgunov (2025) notes, linguistic form is inseparable from cultural cognition; every linguistic symbol encodes both thought and value.

Ultimately, conceptual metaphors in English, Uzbek, and Russian proverbs reveal that languages differ not because people think differently, but because they highlight different aspects of shared human experience. Each culture illuminates universal themes — life, time, love, work, fate — through its own linguistic imagination. By decoding these metaphors and cultural models, we gain access to the collective mind of nations, understanding that behind every proverb lies not only wisdom, but the soul of a people.

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