



SYMBOLIC UNITS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK PROVERBS AND IDIOMS: A COMPARATIVE LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY

Xalikova Dildora Normurodovna

Assistant Teacher

Nordic International University

Abstract

Proverbs and idioms represent a condensed form of collective wisdom and cultural memory, in which symbolic units play a crucial role. This article investigates symbolic units in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms from a comparative linguocultural perspective. The study aims to identify dominant symbols, examine their semantic and cultural functions, and reveal similarities and differences rooted in historical, religious, and socio-cultural contexts. Using qualitative comparative analysis, a corpus of widely used English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms was examined, focusing on symbols related to nature, animals, body parts, colors, and numbers. The findings demonstrate that while many symbols show universal meanings, their interpretations and pragmatic uses differ significantly due to cultural worldviews. The study contributes to comparative phraseology, cultural linguistics, and translation studies.

Keywords: symbolism, proverbs, idioms, English language, Uzbek language, cultural linguistics

Annotatsiya

Maqollar va frazeologik birliklar xalqning madaniy xotirasi hamda dunyoqarashini mujassamlashtirgan ixcham lingvistik birliklar hisoblanadi. Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi maqol va iboralarda uchraydigan ramziy birliklar qiyosiy lingvomadaniy nuqtayi nazardan tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi ramziy birliklarning yetakchi turlarini aniqlash, ularning semantik va madaniy funksiyalarini ochib berish hamda tarixiy, diniy va ijtimoiy omillar bilan bog'liq o'xshash va farqli jihatlarni ko'rsatishdan iborat. Sifatli qiyosiy tahlil asosida tabiat, hayvonlar, tana a'zolari, ranglar va sonlar bilan bog'liq ingliz va o'zbek maqol va iboralari o'rganildi. Natijalar ramzlarning ayrimlari universal xarakterga ega bo'lsa-da, ularning talqini va qo'llanilishi madaniy dunyoqarash bilan chambarchas bog'liqligini ko'rsatdi.

Kalit so'zlar: ramziylik, maqollar, iboralar, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, lingvomadaniyat

Аннотация

Пословицы и фразеологические единицы являются концентрированным отражением коллективной мудрости и культурной памяти народа, в которых символические единицы играют ключевую роль. В данной статье проводится сравнительный



лингвокультурный анализ символических единиц в английских и узбекских пословицах и идиомах. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении доминирующих символов, анализе их семантических и культурных функций, а также в определении сходств и различий, обусловленных историческими, религиозными и социокультурными факторами. На основе качественного сравнительного анализа исследуются символы, связанные с природой, животными, частями тела, цветами и числами. Результаты показывают, что многие символы носят универсальный характер, однако их интерпретация и прагматическое употребление существенно различаются в разных культурах.

Ключевые слова: символизм, пословицы, идиомы, английский язык, узбекский язык, лингвокультурология

Introduction. Symbolism constitutes an essential mechanism through which language encodes cultural knowledge, collective experience, and value systems. Proverbs and idioms, as stable and formulaic expressions, represent one of the most culturally saturated layers of language. Their figurative nature allows symbolic units to function as cognitive shortcuts through which complex ideas, moral judgments, and social norms are communicated in a concise and memorable form. In this sense, proverbs and idioms serve not only as linguistic phenomena but also as repositories of cultural memory. In both English and Uzbek linguistic traditions, symbolic imagery embedded in proverbs and idioms reflects how speakers conceptualize reality, evaluate human behavior, and interpret natural and social phenomena. These symbolic units are shaped by historical experience, religious beliefs, economic activities, and patterns of everyday life. For example, symbols related to animals, nature, or numbers often emerge from a community's interaction with its environment and belief systems. Although phraseology has been widely studied in both English and Uzbek linguistics, comparative research focusing specifically on symbolic units remains relatively limited. Existing studies tend to examine idioms and proverbs from semantic or structural perspectives, while the symbolic and cultural dimensions are often treated indirectly. This article seeks to address this gap by providing a systematic comparative analysis of symbolic units in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms.

The study aims to identify the most frequent symbolic categories, analyze their semantic and cultural motivations, and reveal both universal and culture-specific features. The following research questions guide the analysis: Which symbolic units are most prominent in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms? How are these symbols interpreted within their respective cultures? What similarities and differences emerge when these symbolic systems are compared?

Methods. The present study adopts a qualitative comparative linguocultural methodology designed to uncover the symbolic meanings embedded in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of figurative language while taking into account cultural, historical, and cognitive factors that influence meaning



formation. The empirical material for the research was collected from authoritative lexicographic sources and scholarly collections. The English corpus was compiled from well-established dictionaries of proverbs and idioms, as well as examples frequently cited in linguistic literature. The Uzbek corpus was drawn from published collections of Uzbek folk proverbs and explanatory phraseological dictionaries, which reflect both classical and contemporary usage. Only widely recognized and culturally salient units were selected in order to ensure representativeness.

The analytical procedure consisted of several stages. First, the selected proverbs and idioms were subjected to semantic analysis to determine their figurative meanings. Second, the symbolic components within each unit were identified and classified into thematic categories such as animals, natural phenomena, body parts, colors, and numbers. Third, each symbol was interpreted in its cultural context, taking into account historical background, religious traditions, and socio-cultural practices. Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify full correspondences, partial equivalents, and culturally specific symbols across the two languages. This multi-stage method made it possible to compare symbolic systems systematically while preserving the cultural specificity of each linguistic tradition.

Results. The analysis demonstrated that English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms employ a wide range of symbolic units that reflect both shared human experience and culture-specific worldviews. One of the most productive symbolic categories in both languages was animal imagery. In English phraseology, animals such as the fox, lion, sheep, and wolf frequently appear as symbols of character traits, including cunning, courage, obedience, and cruelty. These symbols are often rooted in Biblical narratives, medieval bestiaries, and long-standing literary traditions.

In Uzbek proverbs and idioms, animal symbolism is particularly rich and closely connected to the historical nomadic and agrarian lifestyle of the region. The horse occupies a central symbolic position, representing loyalty, honor, and strength, while the camel symbolizes endurance and patience. The dog may convey both loyalty and social inferiority, depending on context. Although some animal symbols overlap across the two languages, their evaluative meanings and emotional coloring often differ.

Natural elements also emerged as significant symbolic units. In English proverbs, water frequently symbolizes danger, uncertainty, or uncontrollable forces, whereas in Uzbek expressions water more commonly represents life, purity, and blessing. Fire in English idioms often conveys destruction or intense emotion, while in Uzbek phraseology it retains traces of sacredness and protection alongside destructive meanings.

Body-part symbolism revealed notable similarities between the two languages. The heart is widely associated with emotions and sincerity, the hand with power and action, and the eye with perception and awareness. However, color symbolism displayed clearer cultural



divergence. For instance, white in English primarily symbolizes innocence and purity, while in Uzbek culture it additionally conveys wisdom, seniority, and social respect. Numerical symbols such as three, seven, and forty were found in both languages, suggesting shared archetypal roots, though their pragmatic usage and frequency varied.

Discussion. The results of the study indicate that symbolic units in proverbs and idioms function as culturally grounded cognitive models through which abstract concepts are conceptualized and evaluated. The presence of similar symbolic patterns in English and Uzbek can be explained by universal human experiences, such as interaction with nature, the human body, and social relationships. These shared experiences give rise to comparable symbolic representations across cultures. At the same time, the differences observed in symbolic interpretation reflect distinct historical trajectories and cultural environments. The prominence of the horse and camel in Uzbek symbolism, for example, directly corresponds to the historical importance of animal husbandry and mobility in Central Asian societies. In contrast, English symbolism reflects agrarian, feudal, and later industrial experiences, which shape the figurative meanings of animals and natural elements.

Religious traditions play a particularly significant role in shaping symbolic meaning. Many English idioms and proverbs are influenced by Christian and Biblical imagery, which frames moral evaluation in terms of sin, virtue, and divine judgment. Uzbek phraseology, while strongly influenced by Islamic values, also preserves traces of pre-Islamic Turkic beliefs. These layered influences result in symbolic systems that are both stable and dynamic. From a translational perspective, the findings highlight the difficulty of achieving full equivalence when rendering proverbs and idioms across languages. Even when similar symbols exist, their cultural connotations may differ, leading to potential misinterpretation. A deeper understanding of symbolic units is therefore essential for effective intercultural communication, language teaching, and translation practice.

Conclusion. This study has shown that symbolic units in English and Uzbek proverbs and idioms embody both universal cognitive tendencies and culture-specific worldviews. While many symbols share common roots and appear in both languages, their meanings and pragmatic functions are shaped by historical experience, religious traditions, and socio-cultural conditions. The comparative analysis demonstrates that symbolism in phraseology serves as a valuable lens for exploring how cultures encode values and interpret reality. The findings contribute to the fields of comparative phraseology, cultural linguistics, and translation studies by emphasizing the importance of symbolic competence. Future research may expand the scope of analysis by incorporating larger corpora, applying quantitative methods, or examining symbolic units in contemporary media and digital discourse. Such studies would further enhance our understanding of the dynamic nature of linguistic symbolism in a globalized world.

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