

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND THE ELEMENTS OF MENTALITY: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between conceptual metaphor and national mentality in two typologically distant languages, English and Uzbek. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory as formulated by Lakoff and Johnson and later developed by Kövecses, the study argues that while metaphor is a universal mechanism of human cognition, its concrete linguistic realisation is systematically shaped by the mentality of the speech community. The research is based on metaphorical material collected from Betty Smith's novel "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" and Utkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning ishlari". Metaphorical expressions were separated from the underlying conceptual metaphors, subjected to definitional and etymological analysis, and classified according to the target concepts they encode. The findings show three recurrent patterns: fully shared conceptual metaphors, partially shared metaphors that diverge at the level of linguistic realisation, and language-specific metaphors motivated by a single culture's mentality. The results confirm the value of treating mentality, rather than culture in general, as an independent variable in comparative metaphorology and have practical applications in the teaching of stylistics, lexicology and translation.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphor, metaphorical expression, mentality, cross-linguistic comparison, English, Uzbek, cognitive linguistics, translation equivalence.

Introduction

For most of the history of Western rhetoric, metaphor was treated as a figure of speech — an ornamental deviation from literal language, available chiefly to poets and orators. This traditional view, which can be traced back to Aristotle's account of metaphor as the transfer of a name from one thing to another,

dominated stylistics for more than two millennia. The publication of Lakoff and Johnson's work on the metaphors that structure ordinary thought marked a decisive shift: metaphor came to be understood not as a matter of words but as a matter of thought, a pervasive mechanism by which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another.

Within this cognitive framework a clear distinction is drawn between the conceptual metaphor, an abstract mapping between a source domain and a target domain, and the metaphorical expression, its concrete linguistic manifestation. The conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, for example, is realised in numerous everyday expressions in which claims are attacked, positions are defended and criticisms are on target. Because such mappings are grounded in recurrent bodily and social experience, many of them appear across unrelated languages, which has led some scholars to posit a set of near-universal conceptual metaphors.

Universality, however, is only one half of the picture. Kövecses has shown in detail that conceptual metaphors also vary — across cultures, within a single culture, and even from individual to individual. The present study takes up a dimension of this variation that has received comparatively little attention: the role of mentality. By mentality we understand the relatively stable set of attitudes, values, habits of perception and evaluative dispositions characteristic of a speech community, as distinct from culture in the broad sense of material and institutional practices. The central claim of this article is that mentality functions as an independent variable governing which metaphors a community favours, how it elaborates them, and where the metaphorical systems of two languages converge or diverge.

It is also worth recalling that metaphor is not the preserve of writers and poets: ordinary speakers create and use metaphor constantly, often without noticing. This everyday character of metaphor is reflected in the familiar distinction between dead and living metaphors. A dead metaphor is one that was once perceived as a transfer of meaning but is now processed as an ordinary word, its figurative origin no longer felt; a new metaphor, by contrast, is one whose transfer of sense the hearer notices at once. Both types are relevant to a mentality-based study, since the metaphors a community has allowed to die, and the fresh ones it coins, are themselves indices of what that community takes for granted and what it finds striking.

The comparison of English and Uzbek is particularly instructive because the two languages belong to different families and are associated with markedly different cultural and religious traditions. If shared conceptual metaphors can be found even here, the case for their experiential grounding is strengthened; and where the two diverge, the divergence can often be traced to identifiable features of national mentality. The problem this article addresses may therefore be stated as follows: to what extent, and in what ways, does mentality shape the metaphorical systems of English and Uzbek, and what are the consequences of this for cross-linguistic understanding and translation? The remainder of the article reviews the theoretical background, examines emotion concepts as a testing ground for universality and variation, sets out the materials and methods, presents the three-way typology that emerged from the corpora, and discusses its theoretical and practical implications.

2. Theoretical background

The theoretical foundation of the study rests on three bodies of work. The first is Conceptual Metaphor Theory itself, which holds that abstract concepts are largely understood through mappings from more concrete, experientially basic domains. On this account metaphor is not a decorative option but a cognitive necessity: we reason about time, emotion, morality and social relations by importing structure from domains such as space, physical force, temperature and journeys. The systematicity of everyday expressions — the fact that they cluster into coherent families — is taken as evidence that a single underlying mapping is at work.

The second body of work concerns the sources of metaphorical variation. Kövecses distinguishes between cross-cultural variation, in which different cultures elaborate a shared generic-level metaphor in different specific ways, and within-culture variation, which may follow social, regional, ethnic, stylistic and individual dimensions. He further identifies the causes of variation, among them differences in the natural and social environment, differing cultural preferences, and what he terms human concern — the observation that individuals tend to draw metaphors from the domains that most preoccupy them, so that, for instance, physicians reach for medical source domains even when discussing non-medical matters. These distinctions provide the analytical vocabulary used throughout the present study.

The third body of work is the treatment of metaphor and of the concept in Uzbek and Russian-language linguistics. Uzbek scholars have long studied metaphor within stylistics and lexicology, frequently distinguishing what they call linguistic metaphor from stylistic metaphor. This native distinction partly overlaps with the cognitive opposition between conceptual metaphor and metaphorical expression, but it is not identical: the conceptual metaphor is a more general and more abstract construct than either of the traditional categories. Clarifying this relationship is one of the theoretical contributions of the study. In parallel, work in the conceptual tradition associated with Karasik offers a set of procedures for the analysis of a concept — definitional analysis, contextual analysis, etymological analysis, paremiological analysis and interviewing — several of which are adopted here.

A further conceptual clarification is required at the outset, namely the distinction between culture and mentality. Existing comparative work has tended to speak of metaphor and culture, treating the cultural background as a single undifferentiated factor. Yet two communities may share many cultural institutions while differing in mentality, and conversely may differ culturally while sharing evaluative dispositions. Isolating mentality as a distinct variable allows the analyst to explain divergences that a purely cultural account leaves opaque, and it is this refinement that the present study seeks to demonstrate empirically.

3. Emotion concepts as a testing ground for universality and variation

Emotion concepts offer an especially clear testing ground for the interplay of universality and mentality, because emotions are at once rooted in shared human physiology and heavily elaborated by culture. Kövecses' analysis of happiness in English is a convenient starting point. English structures the concept through a whole family of conceptual metaphors, among them HAPPY IS UP, HAPPINESS IS LIGHT, HAPPINESS IS VITALITY, HAPPINESS IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER, HAPPINESS IS A CAPTIVE ANIMAL and BEING HAPPY IS BEING OFF THE GROUND. The very multiplicity of these mappings shows that a single target concept is typically supported by several source domains at once, each foregrounding a different facet of the experience.

The strategy for probing universality is to identify such mappings in one language and then to test whether typologically distant languages employ the same or analogous ones. Where a mapping recurs across unrelated languages, one may

hypothesise that it is grounded in shared embodiment: the orientational metaphor HAPPY IS UP, for instance, plausibly derives from the erect posture that accompanies positive affect, an experience available to all human bodies. The container metaphor, in which emotion is a fluid that may rise, overflow or be held in, likewise rests on a widely shared bodily image. These mappings tend to appear, in one guise or another, in both English and Uzbek.

Variation enters at the level of elaboration and evaluation. Two speakers, or two communities, may share a generic metaphor yet realise it differently because of differing preoccupations and surroundings. Kövecses illustrates within-culture variation with the observation that individuals import source domains from their dominant sphere of life — the notion of human concern — so that the metaphors a person habitually uses betray their profession, environment and interests. The same logic scales up to the national level: a community whose environment, history and value system foreground certain source domains will elaborate shared emotion metaphors along characteristic lines. It is precisely this level of elaboration that carries the imprint of mentality, and it is this that the comparison of English and Uzbek is designed to expose.

4. Materials and methods

The empirical material of the study consists of metaphorical units extracted from two literary works chosen for their comparability and their richness in mentality-bearing language: Betty Smith's "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn" for English and Utkir Hoshimov's "Dunyoning ishlari" for Uzbek. Literary prose was preferred to other genres because it mixes registers — colloquial, publicistic and elevated — and therefore yields a wide range of metaphors reflecting different layers of mentality, from the idiolectal to the national. Each work is authored within, and saturated by, the mentality of its respective community, which makes the pair well suited to a mentality-focused comparison.

The analytical procedure comprised four steps. First, metaphorical expressions with an identifiable mentality component were manually excerpted from each text. Second, each expression was classified as either a conceptual metaphor or a metaphorical expression; throughout the study conceptual metaphors are rendered in small capitals and metaphorical expressions in bold italics, a typographic convention that keeps the two levels visually distinct. Third, for each metaphorical expression the underlying conceptual metaphor was reconstructed,

since metaphorical expressions occur far more frequently in running text than explicit conceptual metaphors do. Fourth, each reconstructed mapping was subjected to conceptual analysis using the definitional, etymological and questioning (survey) methods, in order to establish why a given source concept had been selected to structure the target.

Three general methods framed the work as a whole: the descriptive method, used to characterise the metaphors in their textual context; the comparative method, used to align English and Uzbek mappings and to detect convergence and divergence; and the statistical method, used to gauge the relative frequency of shared versus language-specific metaphors and to summarise the results of the accompanying survey. The survey was administered to native speakers in order to verify whether reconstructed conceptual metaphors were intuitively recognised and to probe the evaluative associations attached to key source domains.

5. Results

The analysis of the two corpora yielded three recurrent configurations, which together form the principal result of the study: fully shared conceptual metaphors, partially shared metaphors, and language-specific metaphors. Each is illustrated below with representative material from the two texts.

5.1. Fully shared conceptual metaphors

A substantial group of metaphors proved to be common to both languages at both the conceptual and the expression level. A clear instance is the personification of nature. In the English text trees are described in human terms — bearded with moss, dressed in green garments — supporting the conceptual metaphor TREES ARE HUMAN. Uzbek exhibits the same mapping, extended to celestial bodies and the elements, as in passages where the moon, the stars and the wind behave, look and even betray like people, yielding THE MOON, STARS AND WIND ARE HUMAN. The survey confirmed that speakers of both communities recognised these mappings without difficulty, which is consistent with their grounding in a shared human tendency to project animate features onto the surrounding world.

A second shared example concerns the elements. Both texts reflect the conceptual metaphor THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF LIFE ARE EARTH, WATER, WIND AND FIRE, a mapping supported cross-culturally by ritual and myth — the

washing of the newborn in water, the return of the body to the earth. Because such metaphors rest on experiences and symbolic practices that recur across communities, they surface in the two languages with little modification, and they are the clearest evidence for the universal pole of the metaphorical system.

5.2. Partially shared metaphors

A second, larger group comprises metaphors whose conceptual mapping is shared but whose linguistic realisation diverges, so that word-for-word translation either fails or shifts the stylistic value. The personification of trees again illustrates the point: although TREES ARE HUMAN holds in both languages, specific English realisations such as bearded with moss have no idiomatic Uzbek equivalent, and a literal rendering produces an image that Uzbek does not conventionally employ. Here the two systems agree at the generic level but part company at the specific level, exactly the pattern Kövecses associates with cross-cultural variation.

The evaluation of source domains can likewise diverge within a shared mapping. In the Uzbek material the mountain functions as a positively valued source: in the expression rendered as my mother is my mountain, the mountain encodes reliability and support, giving rise to the paired conceptual metaphors A HUMAN IS A MOUNTAIN and A MOUNTAIN IS A RELIABLE SUPPORT. The physical image is available in English too, but the settled evaluative association of the mountain with protective support is characteristically Uzbek, and the metaphor's emotional force depends on that culturally entrenched evaluation. Such cases show mentality operating not on the existence of a mapping but on its affective colouring.

5.3. Language-specific metaphors

The third group consists of metaphors that exist in only one of the languages because the mapping is motivated by a mentality feature absent in the other. The Uzbek conceptual metaphor THE MOON IS A BIRD has no counterpart in English, since English mentality does not link the moon with birds; the mapping draws on associations specific to the Uzbek imaginative tradition. Conversely, religiously and nationally anchored comparisons in the English text — the comparison of a child to a little Jesus, or the use of Mick to stand for any Irishman — rely on associations rooted in the mentality of that community; the Uzbek

equivalent of the first would invoke a different religious figure, while the second, resting on a specific ethnonymic stereotype, has no ready parallel at all.

The survey results reinforced this three-way division. Shared metaphors were recognised almost universally by respondents in both groups; partially shared metaphors were recognised at the conceptual level but frequently judged unnatural when presented in literal translation; and language-specific metaphors were largely opaque to speakers of the other language until the underlying mentality association was made explicit. In aggregate, metaphorical expressions were found to be far more frequent in the corpora than fully explicit conceptual metaphors, confirming that the conceptual level must usually be reconstructed rather than read off directly.

5.4. Body, action and social comparison as source domains

Beyond nature and the elements, the corpora revealed a productive layer of metaphors in which bodily parts, physical actions and social types serve as source domains, and here mentality is visible in the fine grain of the mappings. In the English text the speech of an uneducated but good-hearted tree seller yields a cluster of body-based mappings such as MOUTH IS TRAP and COURAGE IS NERVE; the choice of these particular images is shaped by the character's life circumstances, an idiolectal reflection of mentality at the level of the individual. The analysis of joy through the eyes — the idea that when a person is happy the eyes are the first to show it, so that happiness is transferred to and enacted by the eyes — recurs across languages and shows how an embodied action becomes the vehicle of an emotion concept.

Social comparison forms a further shared but differently realised pattern. The mapping ONE PERSON IS ANY KIND OF PERSON FROM THE SAME GROUP, by which an individual is characterised through comparison with a representative figure, appears in both languages, but the representative figures themselves are drawn from each community's stock of cultural reference. Where English reaches for a religious or ethnonymic type, Uzbek reaches for figures salient in its own tradition, so that the mapping is constant while its filling is mentality-specific. The related mapping HUMAN BEING IS FLUID, in which people are conceived as flowing, filling and spilling, likewise surfaces in both corpora, testifying again to a shared embodied image differently coloured in each language.

6. Discussion

The three configurations identified above bear directly on the study's central claim. That shared metaphors exist at all between two such distant languages supports the experiential-grounding thesis of Conceptual Metaphor Theory: where a mapping rests on universal features of embodiment or on widely shared symbolic practice, it tends to recur regardless of linguistic or cultural distance. The existence of partially shared and language-specific metaphors, however, shows that grounding does not determine realisation. Between the universal experiential base and the actual expression there intervenes a filter — mentality — that selects, elaborates and evaluates.

The analysis also vindicates the decision to separate mentality from culture. Several divergences in the corpora, such as the evaluative loading of the mountain or the moon–bird association, cannot be explained by pointing to cultural institutions; they are matters of habitual perception and evaluation, that is, of mentality. Treating mentality as an independent variable therefore yields explanatory purchase that a coarser appeal to culture does not. This refinement is the study's principal theoretical contribution.

For translation the implications are practical. The three-way typology maps onto three translation situations: shared metaphors can be transferred directly; partially shared metaphors require the translator to preserve the conceptual mapping while substituting a native realisation, since a literal rendering would read as unidiomatic; and language-specific metaphors demand either compensation or explanation, because the receiving mentality lacks the association on which the source depends. Recognising which situation obtains is precisely the skill the typology is meant to support, and it is here that the study connects to the teaching of translation, stylistics and lexicology.

6.1. The role of conceptual analysis

The reconstruction of conceptual metaphors from surface expressions relied on a small battery of established procedures for the analysis of a concept. Definitional analysis identifies the core semantic attributes of the source concept, making explicit what is mapped onto the target; contextual analysis recovers the associated features activated in the particular passage; and etymological analysis traces the historical layering of meaning that often explains why a given source was recruited in the first place. To these the study added a questioning, or survey,

component, which externalises native intuition and provides a check on the analyst's reconstructions. Applied together, these procedures turn the interpretation of a metaphor from an impressionistic exercise into a repeatable analytic operation, and they are what allow the three-way typology to rest on more than the analyst's own reading.

The etymological method proved especially revealing for the language-specific cases. Where a mapping is opaque to speakers of the other language, its motivation frequently lies in a sedimented cultural-historical association that etymology and paremiology bring to the surface. In such cases the conceptual analysis does not merely label the metaphor but explains it, showing how a feature of mentality has, over time, become encoded in the lexicon. This explanatory yield is one reason the study treats conceptual analysis as central rather than ancillary to comparative work on metaphor.

Two limitations should be acknowledged. First, the material is drawn from two literary works and one pair of authorial idiolects; broader generalisation would require a larger and more varied corpus. Second, the survey, though useful, was limited in scale, and a more stratified design — sampling respondents across age, region and occupation — would allow the within-culture dimension of variation to be examined more finely. These limitations point directly to the agenda for further research.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to determine whether, and how, mentality shapes the metaphorical systems of English and Uzbek. The comparison of metaphors drawn from two literary works yielded a stable three-way typology — fully shared, partially shared, and language-specific metaphors — that captures the interaction of universal experiential grounding with community-specific mentality. Shared metaphors testify to the embodied basis of conceptual mapping; partially shared and language-specific metaphors reveal mentality operating as a filter on realisation and evaluation.

The wider contribution of the work is twofold. Theoretically, it argues for treating mentality, rather than culture in the broad sense, as a distinct explanatory variable in comparative metaphorology, and it clarifies the relationship between the cognitive opposition of conceptual metaphor and metaphorical expression and the native Uzbek opposition of linguistic and stylistic metaphor. Practically, it offers

a typology that translators and language teachers can use to anticipate where metaphorical systems will and will not align. Future research should extend the analysis to larger corpora and a more finely stratified survey, so that the individual and social layers of metaphorical variation can be brought into the same picture as the national one.

More broadly, the study illustrates a general point about cross-linguistic semantics: apparent equivalence at the level of the mapping can conceal deep divergence at the level of realisation and evaluation, and it is precisely at this hidden level that the character of a speech community makes itself felt. A metaphor that both languages seem to share may nonetheless carry a different emotional charge, activate a different network of associations, or resist literal transfer altogether. For the analyst, the translator and the language learner alike, the lesson is that metaphor cannot be handled word by word or even mapping by mapping; it must be read against the mentality that gives it life. Seen in this light, the comparative study of metaphor becomes not merely a catalogue of correspondences but a window onto how two peoples habitually make sense of the world, and it is this larger promise that motivates continued work in the field.

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