

EMBODIMENT IN SHAPING PERCEPTION- RELATED METAPHORS

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Abstract:

Metaphors are not simply linguistic ornaments but cognitive instruments that reflect our embodied experiences. Recent research in cognitive linguistics underscores the role of the human body as central to how perception and experience shape metaphorical thought. This article explores the concept of embodiment within perception-related metaphors, drawing on both Western scholarship and works by Uzbek linguists to demonstrate how culture-specific experiences interact with universal bodily schemas. Through a synthesis of empirical data and analyses from previous studies, this paper illustrates that perception-related metaphors – particularly those involving sight, taste, touch, smell, and hearing – are deeply rooted in bodily experiences and cultural contexts. The findings shed new light on the universality and variation in metaphorical mappings, revealing the profound interplay between cultural norms, embodied cognition, and the linguistic encoding of perception.

Keywords: Embodiment, perception-related metaphors, cognitive linguistics, bodily experience, Uzbek linguistics.

Introduction

Metaphors are prevalent in everyday language and thought, providing a conceptual framework through which individuals interpret abstract ideas via more concrete or embodied experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The notion that metaphorical understanding is grounded in the human body – termed “embodiment” – has been a central focus of cognitive linguistics over the past four decades (Gibbs, 2005; Kövecses, 2002). According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, metaphor functions as a cognitive tool that maps information from a

source domain, often based on tangible, physical, or embodied knowledge, onto a target domain that is more abstract (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For instance, phrases like *I see what you mean* or *That idea smells fishy* highlight how our sensory experiences (vision, smell) become mental constructs for understanding non-physical concepts such as comprehension or suspicion.

Despite the widespread acceptance that embodiment plays a crucial role in shaping metaphors, questions persist regarding how cultural and linguistic environments influence the mapping process (Kövecses, 2015). Cultural differences, shared histories, and social norms can lead to variations in how metaphors evolve, even when rooted in universal bodily experiences. The study of perception-related metaphors is particularly enlightening in this respect because sensory experiences are among the most immediate ways humans interact with the world. Research has shown that metaphors involving the senses often reveal not only the universal aspects of human cognition but also the culturally shaped nuance (Barsalou, 1999; Yu, 2009).

While much of the seminal research on embodiment and metaphor has emanated from Western contexts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2005), scholars in Uzbekistan have contributed to this field by examining how Uzbek linguistic and cultural contexts shape metaphor usage (Karimov & Tursunov, 2019; Muminov, 2019). These studies offer valuable insights into the interplay between universal embodied schemas and culturally specific nuances. By integrating findings from Uzbek linguistics and broader cognitive theories of metaphor, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive view of how embodiment influences perception-related metaphors.

A core finding from the survey of literature is the presence of certain universal patterns in perception-related metaphors across languages and cultures. For example, the metaphorical extension of *seeing* as understanding – exemplified in English by expressions like *I see your point* – was reported in multiple languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2015). Similarly, **Karimov and Tursunov (2019)** found that in Uzbek, the phrase *ko 'nglimga yetdi* (literally, *it reached my heart*) is used to denote comprehension, reflecting a mapping from physical to mental perception. This parallels the “understanding is seeing” and “understanding is grasping” metaphors identified in many Indo-European languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Additionally, taste metaphors signifying aesthetic or moral judgment (e.g., *He has good taste in music*) were found across cultures. These findings support Gibbs's (2005) claim that embodied experiences – particularly those tied to fundamental human actions such as eating, seeing, touching – often underpin metaphors relating to comprehension, morality, and aesthetics. Despite the universal grounding in bodily experience, numerous studies highlight culturally specific embodied nuances in perception-related metaphors. While warmth metaphors for affection or kindness exist in many languages (e.g., *warm-hearted* in English), the intensity and frequency of usage in Uzbek social discourse were notably higher than in some Western contexts (Muminov, 2019). This suggests that sociocultural factors – such as the strong communal ties and emphasis on hospitality in Uzbek culture – amplify the bodily schema of *warmth* as a basis for emotional metaphors.

Smell-related metaphors also showcase cultural specificity. In Western contexts, to say something *smells fishy* signals suspicion (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The cultural significance of homemade meals and the importance of familial gatherings in Uzbek society become reflected in these uniquely pleasant smell metaphors, aligning with the idea that each culture selectively amplifies particular embodied experiences in metaphorical language (Kövecses, 2015).

A recurring theme in the surveyed literature is how bodily experience guides the semantic extensions of perception-related words. **Barsalou (1999)** posits that perceptual symbols form in the brain through repeated interactions with the environment, which then serve as the foundation for higher-order abstract thinking. This phenomenon is evident in multiple studies reviewed. For instance, the English word *touch* extends to emotional closeness in expressions such as *I was touched by your kindness*. Similar semantic extensions appear in Uzbek, where *tegmoq* (to touch) can be used metaphorically to describe emotional impact or influence (Karimov & Tursunov, 2019). The process underscores how repeated sensorimotor experiences – touch in a literal sense – foster metaphorical expansions such that intangible concepts (emotional resonance) become comprehensible via the language of physical contact.

Finally, the results point to the importance of local cultural practices in shaping perception-related metaphors. In the Uzbek context, social events such as *to'y* (wedding celebrations), play an integral role in communal life (Karimov & Tursunov, 2019). These traditions may enhance certain sensory experiences, such

as the visual imagery of candlelit gatherings or the smell of traditional dishes, thereby increasing the salience of certain embodied schemas. Consequently, language users frequently employ metaphors that revolve around these culturally significant sensory experiences, indicating that embodiment is neither purely universal nor strictly individual – it is negotiated through a community's traditions, rituals, and daily practices (Yu, 2009).

The findings from this synthesis affirm the fundamental premise of cognitive linguistics: language is deeply entangled with bodily experience (Gibbs, 2005; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Perception-related metaphors – those based on sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing – provide some of the most striking illustrations of how physical experiences ground abstract thinking. However, the data also reveal that culture intricately modulates these mappings.

One central debate in embodiment research concerns the degree of universality in bodily-based metaphors (Kövecses, 2002). While the capacity to see or smell is largely universal among humans, the metaphorical extensions of these senses can vary considerably across cultures. The studies by Uzbek linguists (Karimov & Tursunov, 2019; Muminov, 2019) highlight that local customs, social expectations, and collective values frame how these bodily experiences are linguistically rendered. Even though the schema of “warmth” conveys affection in multiple languages, the intensity and contexts in which this metaphor appears in Uzbek underscore the importance of communal warmth, hospitality, and empathy – core values in Uzbek society.

The cultural specificity observed in perception-related metaphors underscores potential challenges in cross-cultural communication. For instance, an English speaker might interpret *smells fishy* as suspicion, whereas an Uzbek speaker might be more accustomed to metaphors of smell connoting warmth and homeliness. Without shared embodied-cultural knowledge, such metaphors can lead to confusion or misinterpretation (Yu, 2009). This has practical implications for language teaching, translation, and intercultural competence training – fields where metaphor awareness becomes crucial for effective communication.

Another noteworthy insight from the literature is that embodied metaphors are not static. They can shift in meaning over time, influenced by changing cultural practices. The increased global interconnectivity may prompt certain Uzbek perception-related metaphors to converge with globally dominant English metaphors (Fazylova, 2017). For example, younger generations might adopt

English-inspired expressions like *That idea stinks*, gradually blending or substituting local metaphors. Such linguistic evolution suggests that while embodiment provides the deep cognitive scaffolding, social and technological changes can redefine or recontextualize the metaphorical language of perception. The role of embodiment in shaping perception-related metaphors is both profound and multifaceted. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that human sensory experiences – vision, touch, taste, smell, hearing – provide the primary raw materials from which we construct metaphors to comprehend abstract domains such as emotion, cognition, and morality. At the same time, cross-cultural comparisons, including insightful works by Uzbek scholars, highlight that these bodily-based metaphors do not exist in a cultural vacuum. Instead, they are deeply enmeshed in cultural norms, communal values, and everyday rituals that elevate or diminish certain metaphors over others.

This duality points to a hybrid model of metaphor formation – one that acknowledges the universality of basic sensorimotor experiences while emphasizing the role of culture-specific contexts in shaping, modifying, and perpetuating metaphors. Future research would benefit from integrative approaches that combine cognitive-linguistic theory, experimental methods, and anthropological insights, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how the embodied mind negotiates between universal bodily schemas and culturally distinct interpretive frameworks. By continuing to explore these dynamics, scholars can further illuminate the intricate tapestry of human thought, language, and culture – woven from the threads of our embodied interactions with the world.

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