



COGNITIVE AND LEXICO-SEMANTIC FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS DESCRIBING HUMAN CHARACTER TRAITS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract: This article examines the cognitive and lexico-semantic characteristics of phraseological units that express human character traits in English and Uzbek languages. Through comparative analysis, this study reveals both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific conceptualizations of personality characteristics across these linguistically and culturally distinct language systems. The research demonstrates how phraseological units serve as linguistic repositories of cultural values, social norms, and collective psychological understanding of human nature.

INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units represent one of the most culturally rich and cognitively complex areas of language study. When describing human character traits, these fixed expressions go beyond literal meaning to encapsulate centuries of cultural wisdom, social observation, and psychological insight. The comparative study of English and Uzbek phraseology offers particularly valuable insights, as these languages belong to different language families (Germanic and Turkic, respectively) and reflect distinct cultural worldviews.

Character trait phraseology encompasses idiomatic expressions, proverbs, sayings, and fixed collocations that describe personality characteristics,

behavioral patterns, and moral qualities. These linguistic units function as cognitive models through which speakers conceptualize, categorize, and communicate their understanding of human nature.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive Linguistics Perspective

From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, phraseological units function as conceptual metaphors and metonymies that structure our understanding of abstract personality traits through concrete, experiential domains. Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory provides a foundation for understanding how both English and Uzbek speakers map source domains (typically physical, spatial, or sensory



experiences) onto the target domain of human character.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

The lexico-semantic approach examines the internal structure of phraseological units, including:

- Component analysis of constituent lexemes
- Semantic fields and thematic grouping
- Degrees of idiomativity and semantic transparency
- Motivation and etymology of expressions

Cognitive Mechanisms in Character Trait Phraseology

Metaphorical Conceptualization

Both English and Uzbek extensively employ metaphor to conceptualize character traits, though the specific source domains may differ due to cultural and environmental factors.

Temperature Metaphors: English frequently uses temperature-based metaphors for emotional dispositions:

- "warm-hearted" (kind, affectionate)
- "cold-blooded" (cruel, unemotional)
- "hot-headed" (quick-tempered)

Uzbek similarly employs thermal imagery:

- "issiq qonli" (warm-blooded, passionate)
- "sovuj yurak" (cold heart, indifferent)
- "qaynoq qon" (boiling blood, hot-tempered)

Animal Metaphors: Both languages draw extensively on animal characteristics to describe human traits, though cultural associations may vary:

English examples:

- "sly as a fox" (cunning)
- "busy as a bee" (industrious)
- "stubborn as a mule" (obstinate)

Uzbek examples:

- "tulkidek ayyor" (cunning like a fox)
- "qo'ydan yumshoq" (soft as a sheep, gentle)
- "arslandek jasur" (brave as a lion)

Spatial and Container Metaphors:

The conceptualization of character traits through spatial relationships reveals cognitive universals:

English: "narrow-minded," "broad-minded," "deep thinker," "shallow person" Uzbek: "keng ko'ngilli" (broad-hearted, generous), "tor fikrli" (narrow-thinking), "chuqur aql" (deep mind)

Metonymic Patterns

Metonymy operates prominently in both languages, with body parts standing for psychological or moral qualities:

Heart-based expressions:

- English: "kind-hearted," "hard-hearted," "heart of gold"
- Uzbek: "oltin yurak" (golden heart), "tosh yurak" (stone heart), "yumshoq yurakli" (soft-hearted)

Face-based expressions:

- English: "two-faced," "save face," "face the music"
- Uzbek: "ikki yuzlama" (two-faced), "yuz oqi" (honor, literally face whiteness)



Lexico-Semantic Classifications

Semantic Fields of Character Traits

Character trait phraseology in both languages can be organized into several major semantic fields:

1. Moral-Ethical Qualities Honesty and dishonesty form a central axis:

- English: "straight as an arrow," "crooked as a dog's hind leg"
- Uzbek: "to'g'ri yo'l" (straight path, honest), "egri yo'l" (crooked path, dishonest)

2. Intellectual Capabilities

- English: "sharp as a tack," "bright spark," "not the sharpest tool in the shed"
- Uzbek: "o'tkir aql" (sharp mind), "yorqin aql" (bright mind), "aqli kam" (limited mind)

3. Emotional Dispositions

- English: "cool as a cucumber," "wear one's heart on one's sleeve"
- Uzbek: "beozor" (carefree), "qayg'uli" (sorrowful), "xotirjam" (peaceful)

4. Social Behaviors

- English: "life of the party," "wallflower," "social butterfly"
- Uzbek: "ochiq yurak" (open heart, sociable), "yopiq odam" (closed person, introverted)

Degrees of Idiomaticity

Phraseological units exist on a continuum of semantic transparency:

Fully Idiomatic (Opaque):

- English: "pull someone's leg" (to joke/tease)
- Uzbek: "boshi qotmoq" (literally: head boils, meaning: to be confused)

Semi-Idiomatic:

- English: "green with envy" (jealous)

- Uzbek: "ko'zi to'rt bo'lmoq" (eyes become four, meaning: to be extremely greedy)

Transparent/Motivated:

- English: "open-minded"
- Uzbek: "keng qalbli" (broad-hearted, generous)

Cultural-Specific Conceptualizations

Culture-Bound Concepts in English

English phraseology reflects Anglo-Saxon cultural values and historical experiences:

- "stiff upper lip" (emotional restraint, British cultural ideal)
- "self-made man" (individualism, American dream ideology)
- "keep up with the Joneses" (social comparison, consumer culture)

Culture-Bound Concepts in Uzbek

Uzbek phraseology embodies Central Asian values, Islamic influence, and communal social structures:

- "mehribon" (compassionate, derived from Arabic 'mehr' - love)
- "saxiy" (generous, highly valued in Uzbek culture)
- "katta odamlilik" (being a big person, showing maturity and respect)

Universal vs. Culture-Specific Patterns

Despite cultural differences, certain cognitive patterns appear universal:

- Positive traits associated with light, height, openness
- Negative traits associated with darkness, lowness, closure



- Animal metaphors for specific character traits (though specific animals may vary)

However, the relative importance of certain traits varies significantly. Uzbek culture places particular emphasis on:

- Hospitality and generosity
- Respect for elders
- Community harmony

English-speaking cultures, particularly American, emphasize:

- Individual achievement
- Self-reliance
- Direct communication

Structural Patterns

Syntactic Structures

English patterns:

1. Adjective + Noun: "cold shoulder," "silver tongue"

2. Adjective + as + Noun: "proud as a peacock"

3. Verb + Noun: "lose one's temper," "keep one's cool"

Uzbek patterns:

1. Noun + Adjective: "yurak issiq" (heart warm)

2. Noun + like/as + Noun: "tulkidek" (fox-like)

3. Verb-based compounds: "ko'zi ochilmoq" (eyes open, become aware)

Componential Analysis

Many phraseological units share common lexical components:

English somatic components: heart, head, face, hand, eye Uzbek somatic components: yurak (heart), bosh (head), yuz (face), ko'z (eye), qo'l (hand)

The frequency and distribution of these components reveal cognitive priorities in conceptualizing character.

Psycholinguistic Dimensions

Processing and Comprehension

Research in psycholinguistics suggests that phraseological units are stored and processed as holistic units rather than compositionally. This has implications for:

- Language acquisition and learning
- Cross-cultural communication
- Translation challenges

Emotional and Evaluative Loading

Character trait phraseology carries strong evaluative connotations:

- Positive valence: "heart of gold," "oltin qalbli"
- Negative valence: "snake in the grass," "zaharli til" (poisonous tongue)
- Neutral/ambiguous: "poker face," "jimjit odam" (quiet person)

Contrastive Analysis: Points of Convergence and Divergence

Convergent Patterns

1. Conceptual metaphors: Both languages use temperature, animals, and spatial relations

2. Somatic basis: Body parts serve as primary sources for character conceptualization

3. Binary oppositions: Traits often organized in antonymous pairs

4. Evaluative function: Phraseology serves to praise or criticize

Divergent Patterns

1. Source domain preferences: English may favor technological metaphors ("well-oiled machine"), while



Uzbek draws more heavily on agricultural imagery

2. Grammatical structures: Differences in typical syntactic patterns reflect broader typological differences

3. Cultural emphasis: Different traits receive more elaborate phraseological expression in each language

4. Religious influence: Islamic concepts more prominent in Uzbek phraseology

Implications for Language Teaching and Translation

Pedagogical Applications

Understanding the cognitive and semantic features of character trait phraseology has important implications for language teaching:

- Explicit instruction in metaphorical mappings
- Cultural context provision
- Contrastive awareness raising
- Pragmatic competence development

Translation Challenges

Translating character trait phraseology requires:

- Recognition of underlying conceptual metaphors
- Awareness of cultural connotations
- Decisions about domestication vs. foreignization
- Sensitivity to register and style

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek phraseological units describing human character traits reveals a complex interplay between universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific conceptualizations. While both languages employ similar fundamental cognitive tools—metaphor, metonymy, and conceptual mapping—the specific realizations reflect distinct cultural values, historical experiences, and worldviews.

This study demonstrates that phraseology serves not merely as decorative language but as a fundamental cognitive and cultural resource through which speakers understand and communicate about human nature. The lexico-semantic and cognitive features of these expressions provide valuable insights into the psychology of language, cultural values, and the universal and particular aspects of human conceptualization.

Future research might profitably explore additional language pairs, examine diachronic changes in character trait phraseology, or investigate the acquisition and processing of these units by second language learners. Such studies would further illuminate the fascinating intersection of language, cognition, and culture embodied in phraseological expressions.