

SEMANTIC PROPERTIES OF SOMATIC PHRASEOLOGISMS AND THEIR CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract: This article explores the semantic properties and cultural foundations of somatic phraseologisms—idiomatic expressions rooted in body-part references—through a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek. Drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cultural Semiotics, the study examines how universal human experiences of embodiment are filtered through culturally distinct frameworks. By analyzing data from phraseological dictionaries, language corpora, and ethnolinguistic interviews, the research identifies both shared cognitive patterns and divergent cultural values embedded in somatic idioms. Key findings reveal that while English and Uzbek idioms employ similar body parts to express universal concepts like emotion and agency, their metaphorical mappings diverge under the influence of historical, religious, and social contexts.

Keywords: somatic phraseologisms, cultural linguistics, metaphor, cross-linguistic analysis, embodiment, English-Uzbek comparison.

Language is not only a system of communication but also a reflection of a society's collective worldview, cultural values, and psychological perceptions. Among the many expressive tools embedded in language, phraseologisms with somatic components—expressions that involve parts of the human body such as the head, heart, hand, and eye—hold a special place. These idiomatic expressions are deeply metaphorical, serving as linguistic shortcuts to convey complex emotional states, moral judgments, cognitive processes, and social attitudes.

In both Uzbek and English, somatic phraseologisms are widely used in everyday speech and literary discourse. Despite the typological differences between the two languages—Uzbek being a Turkic and agglutinative language, and English belonging to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family—both make extensive use of body-part metaphors to encode human experiences. However, the semantic meaning and cultural connotations of these idioms often diverge, shaped by unique religious traditions, historical developments, and societal norms.

For instance, while the heart is a near-universal symbol of emotion, expressions like “yuragi og‘rimoq” in Uzbek and “heartache” in English may carry overlapping yet subtly different emotional undertones. Likewise, the phrase “to lose one’s head” in English and “boshini gangimoq” in Uzbek both denote panic or confusion, demonstrating shared cognitive metaphors. Other somatic idioms may not have direct equivalents, making translation and interpretation a culturally sensitive task.

This study aims to examine the semantic properties of selected somatic phraseologisms in both Uzbek and English and to uncover the cultural foundations that influence their usage and interpretation. By conducting a comparative semantic analysis, the paper seeks to identify universal and culture-specific traits in the conceptualization of the human body within idiomatic language. This approach not only enriches our understanding of phraseological systems but also contributes to intercultural communication, translation studies, and language pedagogy.

Somatic phraseologisms—idiomatic expressions involving parts of the human body—have long fascinated researchers across disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive science. Their enduring appeal lies in the way they reveal how deeply language is tied to both the

human body and the cultural systems in which that body is understood.

One of the foundational contributions to this field was made by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), whose work *Metaphors We Live By* introduced the concept of embodied cognition, arguing that abstract thought is largely shaped by our physical and sensory experiences. According to their theory, the human body provides a universal template for metaphorical mapping: organs like the heart, head, or hands become cognitive anchors through which people make sense of emotion, logic, and behavior. These bodily-based metaphors are not random; they are systematic and pervasive across languages.

Building on this conceptual foundation, Kövecses (2005) explored how bodily metaphors interact with cultural models in various linguistic communities. While metaphorical expressions such as **“heart = emotion”** or **“head = intellect”** are widespread, Kövecses demonstrated that cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping the nuances of these metaphors. That is, while two languages may use the same somatic organ to express a concept, the emotional tone, frequency of use, and connotative meanings may differ substantially. This insight led to the rise of cultural linguistics, a field that combines cognitive linguistics with anthropological and sociological perspectives to explain language variation.

In the context of Turkic languages, and Uzbek in particular, scholars have identified several culture-specific somatic metaphors that do not align directly with Western idiomatic systems. For example, Abdullaev (2012) and Yuldasheva (2018) have explored the symbolic and emotional roles of terms like *jigar* (liver) and *ko‘ngil* (a concept roughly equivalent to **“soul”** or **“inner heart”**) in Uzbek phraseology. Unlike Western languages where the heart is almost exclusively associated with love and emotion, in Uzbek, **jigarim (“my liver”)** is a common term of endearment, indicating a culturally unique metaphorical association between the liver and deep emotional bonds. Similarly, *ko‘ngil* encompasses a broader range of meanings—emotional sensitivity, internal peace, satisfaction—which reflect Islamic philosophical influences and the oral traditions of Turkic nomadic heritage.

In contrast, somatic idioms in English have been studied through frameworks that emphasize individualism, religious heritage, and psychological introspection. Wierzbicka (1992), in her work on cultural scripts and semantic primitives, observed that English phraseology often centers on the individual’s internal states, personal boundaries, and private emotions—features that align with Western notions of selfhood. The metaphor **“follow your heart”**, for instance, highlights personal autonomy, a value more dominant in English-speaking societies than in many collectivist cultures. Furthermore, Gibbs (1994) discussed how English somatic idioms are shaped by Judeo-Christian symbolism, where body parts are often imbued with spiritual or moral significance, such as clean hands representing innocence or hard-heartedness denoting cruelty or lack of compassion.

Despite these substantial insights, comparative studies between Uzbek and English somatic phraseologisms remain limited. While individual analyses within each language have provided rich descriptions of cultural values and metaphorical structures, a systematic cross-linguistic comparison is still lacking. This presents an important gap in the literature, as it leaves unanswered questions about how universal bodily experiences interact with distinct cultural, religious, and historical frameworks to shape idiomatic language.

The current study seeks to address this gap by analyzing somatic phraseologisms in Uzbek and English through a semantic and cultural lens. It explores how body-based metaphors function similarly or differently in the two languages, with particular attention to how cultural context influences the interpretation, emotional tone, and usage of somatic idioms. In doing so, it contributes to the broader field of contrastive phraseology and offers new insights into the interplay between embodiment and culture in language.

The comparative analysis of somatic phraseologisms in English and Uzbek reveals both semantic universals and culturally specific conceptualizations rooted in historical, religious, and societal contexts. While many idioms reflect shared human experiences, others are shaped by unique cultural frameworks, resulting in divergent metaphorical meanings.

Despite the typological and cultural differences between English and Uzbek, several somatic idioms demonstrate universal conceptual metaphors grounded in bodily experience. One such example involves the hands, which in both languages metaphorically represent agency, ability, and assistance.

In English, the idiom “to lend a hand” refers to the act of helping someone, reflecting the metaphor HELPING IS GIVING A HAND. Similarly, the Uzbek expression “qo‘lidan kelmoq” (literally, “it comes from one’s hands”) conveys the idea of being capable or skilled, rooted in the metaphor ABILITY IS LOCATED IN THE HANDS.

These expressions illustrate that both languages draw on the physical function of hands to construct abstract meanings related to competence and support. This suggests a shared cognitive grounding, where the body serves as a universal source domain for conceptual metaphor.

While some somatic idioms reveal universal patterns, others are deeply culture-bound, reflecting each language’s unique historical development, belief systems, and emotional symbolism.

In Uzbek, the liver (jigar) occupies a central role in idiomatic expressions, often symbolizing deep affection, closeness, and emotional attachment. For example, the phrase “jigari bilan yemoq” (literally, “to eat with one’s liver”) expresses profound emotional intimacy, often between loved ones or close friends. This metaphor is linked to ancient Turkic cultural beliefs, in which the liver was considered the seat of life, soul, and emotion, rather than the heart.

In contrast, English idioms predominantly rely on the heart as the primary symbol of emotion. The expression “a heart of stone” describes a person who is emotionally cold or unfeeling. This reflects a Western cultural model shaped by Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian dualism, in which emotion (heart) and logic (mind) are seen as distinct or opposing forces.

These examples underscore how each culture assigns symbolic value to different organs based on its worldview, religion, and collective memory. The liver’s centrality in Uzbek idioms highlights collectivist and spiritual traditions, while the heart’s prominence in English reveals individualistic and psychological paradigms.

Through this analysis, it becomes evident that somatic phraseologisms operate on two levels: (1) they reflect shared human embodiment, and (2) they encode culturally specific meanings that shape interpretation and emotional resonance. Understanding both dimensions is essential for accurate translation, effective intercultural communication, and deeper linguistic insight.

The findings of the comparative analysis bring to light two significant dimensions in the use of somatic phraseologisms in English and Uzbek: semantic universality and cultural divergence. Together, these dimensions illustrate how language, while grounded in the shared human experience of embodiment, is simultaneously shaped by diverse cultural narratives and historical trajectories.

One of the most prominent insights from the analysis is the existence of universal metaphorical patterns grounded in bodily experience. For instance, in both English and Uzbek, hands serve as metaphors for agency, skill, and action:

“**To lend a hand**” (English) and “**qo‘lidan kelmoq**” (Uzbek) both reflect the metaphor DOING IS USING THE HANDS, emphasizing the role of the hand as a symbol of capability and support. Such parallels suggest that the human body functions as a universal cognitive source domain, shaping how abstract ideas like help, strength, and responsibility are linguistically encoded across cultures. These similarities align with the principles of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which asserts that metaphor is rooted in shared physical and sensory experience. Alongside these universalities, the analysis reveals significant culture-specific divergences that reflect the unique social, religious, and philosophical foundations of each language community.

In Uzbek, somatic idioms often embody collective values and reflect influences from Turkic animism and Islamic moral philosophy. For example:

The phrase “ko‘ngli to‘ldi” (literally, “the soul/heart is filled”) expresses communal joy or emotional satisfaction, usually in relation to group harmony, generosity, or shared success.

Similarly, the centrality of jigar (liver) in idioms of affection points to ancient beliefs that associated internal organs with the essence of life and emotional depth.

In contrast, English somatic idioms tend to emphasize individual agency, self-determination, and sensory precision, hallmarks of Western Enlightenment thinking and Judeo-Christian individualism. For example:

The idiom “**pull yourself up by your bootstraps**” promotes self-reliance and personal effort, reflecting a cultural orientation toward individual achievement.

Expressions like “**see eye to eye**” or “**turn a blind eye**” highlight the importance of personal perception and judgment, aligning with a worldview that prioritizes individual understanding and decision-making.

These linguistic differences are not arbitrary but rooted in distinct historical paths and cultural worldviews. Uzbek, with its nomadic heritage, emphasis on oral tradition, and Islamic ethical codes, tends to encode values such as interdependence, respect for elders, and emotional balance in its idioms. Conversely, English phraseology has been shaped by rationalist philosophy, scientific individualism, and a long-standing literary tradition emphasizing the self as a locus of meaning and action.

Somatic idioms serve as a lens through which we can observe how universal cognitive structures interact with culture-specific semiotic systems. While both English and Uzbek draw upon the body to represent human experience, the interpretive frameworks—whether collectivist or individualist, spiritual or rational—differ significantly. Understanding these dynamics is essential for effective translation, cultural competence, and cross-linguistic research.

The comparative study of somatic phraseologisms in Uzbek and English has demonstrated that while these idiomatic expressions are rooted in the shared human experience of embodiment, their semantic meanings and cultural interpretations diverge significantly due to differences in historical background, worldview, and societal values.

Both languages use body-related metaphors—such as hands, head, and heart—to express fundamental human concepts like emotion, ability, and perception. These similarities point to universal cognitive mechanisms, supporting the idea that the human body serves as a common conceptual source in metaphor formation.

However, the study also reveals clear cultural particularities. Uzbek phraseologisms tend to reflect collectivist, spiritual, and ethical dimensions, influenced by Turkic traditions and Islamic philosophy. In contrast, English idioms often emphasize individualism, rationalism, and personal agency, shaped by Western philosophical and historical developments.

These findings highlight the importance of a cross-linguistic and culturally informed approach to phraseological analysis. Understanding both the shared and culture-specific aspects of somatic idioms is essential not only for accurate translation and language teaching, but also for promoting deeper intercultural understanding. Ultimately, somatic phraseologisms are more than linguistic expressions—they are cultural mirrors that reflect how different communities conceptualize the human body, self, and society. Their study opens pathways for further research into the intersection of language, cognition, and culture across diverse linguistic landscapes.

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