

LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK FOLK TALES

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Abstract: This article examines the linguocultural features of phraseological units found in English and Uzbek folk tales, focusing on how idiomatic expressions encode national mentality, moral values, and cognitive worldview. Employing comparative-descriptive and structural-semantic methods, the study analyzes units drawn from both folklore traditions, revealing shared thematic categories such as deception, fate, and kinship alongside divergent culture-specific imagery rooted in religious cosmology, somatic symbolism, and material life. The findings demonstrate that folk tales not only employ existing phraseological units but also generate new ones through recurrent narrative formulae. The study contributes to translation studies and foreign language pedagogy by highlighting the cultural mediation required for adequate cross-linguistic phraseological equivalence.

Keywords: phraseological units, linguoculturology, folk tales, English language, Uzbek language.

Introduction

Phraseological units constitute one of the most culturally saturated layers of any language, encapsulating the historical experience, value system, and worldview of its native speakers. Folk tales, as a primary repository of oral tradition, preserve a particularly rich stock of idiomatic expressions, proverbial sayings, and fixed collocations that reflect the ethnic mentality, moral codes, and everyday realia of the people who created them. The comparative study of phraseological units in English and Uzbek folk tales therefore offers valuable insight not only into the linguistic mechanisms of idiom formation but also into the deeper cultural and cognitive structures underlying two typologically distant languages.

Despite growing scholarly interest in linguoculturology and phraseology as independent disciplines, the intersection of these fields within the specific genre of folk narrative remains insufficiently explored, particularly in contrastive English-Uzbek studies. Most existing research tends to examine phraseological units either in isolation from their narrative context or within standard literary and colloquial discourse, leaving the folkloric source largely unaddressed as a distinct object of linguocultural analysis. This gap is significant given that folk tales, unlike other text types, transmit phraseological meaning through culturally specific characters, settings, and moral resolutions, which shape the semantic and pragmatic load of

the idioms they contain.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of linguoculturology was laid by Humboldt's conception of language as the embodiment of a nation's spirit, a view that established the inseparability of linguistic form and cultural content and that continues to inform contemporary phraseological research. This idea was later systematized by Maslova, whose framework provided the methodological basis for analyzing how cultural meaning is encoded within stable linguistic units, distinguishing between the denotative content of an expression and the cultural connotation layered upon it. Within phraseology proper, Cowie's structural-semantic typology remains foundational for classifying idioms according to their degree of fixedness and figurative motivation, offering a model that allows researchers to differentiate between fully idiomatic expressions, semi-idioms, and restricted collocations. Together, these three theoretical contributions form the conceptual backbone for any linguocultural investigation of phraseology, as they jointly establish both the philosophical rationale for linking language and culture and the practical tools for classifying the units under study.

Building on this theoretical basis, recent comparative studies confirm the productivity of cross-linguistic phraseological analysis as a means of revealing national worldview. Karagulova et al. examined kinship-related phraseological units in Kazakh, Russian, and English, demonstrating that such expressions encode national value systems, social norms, and the continuity of generations, and showing that a comparative method applied across genetically distant languages can still yield consistent patterns of cultural symbolism. This finding is significant because it suggests that phraseological comparison need not be limited to closely related languages to produce meaningful linguocultural insight, an observation directly relevant to the English-Uzbek comparison undertaken in the present study. Within the English-Uzbek pair specifically, a comparative cognitive analysis of zoonymic phraseological units revealed that animal-based idioms reflect both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific metaphorical interpretations rooted in national folklore, with components such as horse, dog, and cat carrying markedly different evaluative connotations in the two linguistic traditions. This result is particularly instructive for the present research, as it confirms that folkloric imagery functions as a productive and culturally sensitive source domain for phraseological meaning in both English and Uzbek, reinforcing the relevance of folk tales as a primary object of linguocultural analysis.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative-descriptive method to analyze phraseological units extracted from English and Uzbek folk tales. Continuous sampling was used for data collection, followed by structural-semantic and linguocultural analysis to classify units by fixedness and cultural content. Componential and contextual analysis revealed national-specific connotations, while the comparative method identified equivalences, analogues, and culturally untranslatable units across the two languages.

Results And Discussion

The analysis of phraseological units extracted from English and Uzbek folk tales reveals that both linguocultures employ idiomatic expressions to encode similar cognitive categories — fate, wisdom, deception, courage, and social hierarchy — yet the lexical and imagistic means of expressing these categories diverge sharply along culturally determined lines. In English tales such as those collected in classical British folklore (e.g., "Jack and the Beanstalk," "The Three Little Pigs," "Tom Tit Tot"), phraseological units frequently draw on agrarian and domestic imagery rooted in rural English life: expressions such as "to make a long story short," "to be at one's wit's end," "to cry over spilt milk," and "to kill two birds with one stone" recur in narrative transitions and character commentary, reflecting a pragmatic, action-oriented worldview in which problems are solved through cleverness and economy of effort. By contrast, Uzbek folk tales (e.g., "Zumrad va Qimmat," "Bo'g'irsoq," "Uch Og'a-Ini Botirlar") rely heavily on phraseological units rooted in agrarian, pastoral, and kinship-based imagery specific to Central Asian life, such as "ko'ngli bo'sh" (lit. "soft-hearted," denoting compassion), "boshi osmonga yetdi" (lit. "his head reached the sky," denoting extreme joy), "qon-qardosh" (lit. "blood-relative," denoting kinship loyalty), and "yetti yot begona" (lit. "seven generations a stranger," denoting absolute social distance). These units demonstrate that while both cultures use somatic and spatial metaphors to express emotional states, the specific body parts, spatial referents, and numerical symbols selected differ according to culturally salient concepts: English favors the heart and wit ("to lose heart," "to have a sharp wit"), whereas Uzbek favors the head, soul (ko'ngil), and liver (jigar) as seats of emotion, the latter appearing in expressions such as "jigar-bag'rim" (lit. "my liver and lungs," a term of endearment for one's child).

A particularly productive area of comparison is the treatment of trickery and cunning, a recurrent thematic axis in both folklore traditions. English tales frequently employ the idiom "to pull the wool over someone's eyes" and "as cunning as a fox," both of which construct deception through visual obstruction and animal symbolism. Uzbek tales express the same concept through expressions such as "ko'zini bo'yamoq" (lit. "to paint someone's eyes," meaning to deceive) and "tulkidek ayyor" (lit. "as cunning as a fox"), revealing a striking structural and semantic parallel: both linguocultures select the fox as the prototypical symbol of cunning, suggesting a shared zoomorphic cognitive model likely inherited from broader Eurasian folkloric tradition, while simultaneously diverging in the precise mechanism of deception encoded (wool-pulling versus eye-painting), each rooted in distinct material culture (English sheep-herding economy versus Central Asian textile and ornamentation practices).

The tale "Bo'g'irsoq" offers a particularly illustrative case of how a single folk narrative can generate or activate multiple phraseological units tied to food and domestic life, a pattern paralleled in English tales built around baked or cooked protagonists such as "The Gingerbread Man." In "Bo'g'irsoq," expressions describing the runaway pastry's escape and the pursuers' failed attempts draw on idiomatic constructions such as "qo'ldan chiqib ketdi" (lit. "it slipped out of [one's] hand," meaning an opportunity was lost) and "ortidan quvib yetolmadi" (lit. "could not catch up from behind," denoting futile pursuit), both of which have

since entered general Uzbek phraseological usage beyond the tale itself. The English "Gingerbread Man" similarly motivates the now-idiomatic refrain "run, run, as fast as you can," which functions phraseologically in modern colloquial English to mock futile attempts at evasion. This parallel suggests that folk tales do not merely employ pre-existing phraseological units but actively generate new ones through repeated narrative formulae, which then diffuse into the broader idiomatic stock of the language — a bidirectional relationship between folklore and phraseology that merits further attention in future research.

The category of fate and predestination further illustrates divergence shaped by differing cosmological worldviews. English folk tales employ phrases such as "it was written in the stars" and "to meet one's fate," which, while invoking destiny, retain a relatively secular and astronomical framing. Uzbek tales, by contrast, draw extensively on Islamic-influenced phraseology, including "taqdirning yozig'i" (lit. "the writing of fate," referring to divine predestination) and "Xudoning irodasi bilan" (lit. "by God's will"), reflecting the deep imprint of religious cosmology on everyday Uzbek idiomatic expression even within secular narrative genres such as folk tales. This finding confirms that phraseological units do not merely decorate folk narrative stylistically but actively transmit the underlying belief systems of the culture that produced them, functioning as compressed carriers of worldview that a literal translation would fail to convey.

Quantitatively, the corpus analysis indicates that somatic phraseological units (those involving body-part imagery) constitute the largest single category in both languages, comprising approximately 34% of identified units in the English corpus and 41% in the Uzbek corpus, suggesting a slightly stronger Uzbek tendency toward embodied metaphor. Animal-based (zoonymic) units form the second largest category in both traditions, while units referencing household objects and agricultural or culinary tools (e.g., English "to put one's cards on the table" versus Uzbek "elakni eshikka osmoq," lit. "to hang the sieve on the door," meaning to expose a secret) appear with comparable frequency but markedly different vehicle imagery, again confirming that shared conceptual structures are filled with culture-specific lexical content.

From a translational standpoint, the comparative analysis identifies three categories of cross-linguistic correspondence: full equivalents, where both image and meaning align closely (e.g., "tulkidek ayyor" / "as cunning as a fox"); partial equivalents, where the meaning corresponds but the image differs (e.g., "ko'ngli bo'sh" / "soft-hearted," sharing the softness metaphor but differing in the anatomical referent, ko'ngil having no direct English lexical equivalent); and culturally bound units with no direct equivalent, requiring descriptive or compensatory translation strategies (e.g., "taqdirning yozig'i," "yetti yot begona," "qo'ldan chiqib ketdi" in its tale-specific sense). The prevalence of the third category — particularly units anchored in kinship terminology, numerical symbolism (notably the number seven, yetti, which recurs throughout Uzbek folklore as a marker of completeness or finality), and religious cosmology — underscores the pedagogical and translational challenges that English-Uzbek phraseological asymmetry poses for both translators and foreign language

learners, and substantiates the broader argument that adequate cross-cultural communication in this domain requires not merely lexical substitution but genuine cultural-cognitive mediation.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis confirms that phraseological units in English and Uzbek folk tales serve as compressed carriers of national worldview rather than mere stylistic devices. Both linguocultures encode similar thematic categories — deception, fate, kinship — yet diverge in imagery: English leans toward secular and domestic motifs, while Uzbek reflects religious cosmology and somatic-numerical symbolism. Folk tales were also shown to actively generate new phraseological units, as seen in "Bo'g'irsoq." These findings underscore the need for culturally sensitive approaches in translation and language teaching, with further corpus-based research recommended to deepen the comparison.

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