

Semantic-Structural Analysis of Phraseological Units Expressing Negative Psychological States in English and Uzbek

Saidova Zulfizar Xudoyberdievna

PhD, Associate professor of BukhSU

Qiyomova Shokhida Shomurod kizi

Researcher, 1st year master student of BukhSU

Abstract. *This study uses a comparative qualitative approach to explore how English and Uzbek speakers express and conceptualize complex emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety. Semantic analysis groups idioms by emotional domain and examines the metaphors (e.g., body parts, nature, containment) behind them. Structural analysis classifies idioms by grammatical type verbal, nominal, or sentential. By analyzing similarities and differences, the study explores both cognitive patterns and culture-related ways of expressing emotion. The findings from the research contribute to comparative phraseology, cross-cultural semantics, and affective linguistics, showing how language shapes emotional perception.*

Key words: *idioms, negative emotions, English, Uzbek, semantics, structure, cultural comparison.*

Introduction

Phraseological units play a significant role in the connection of language, culture, and cognition. Among them, idioms which express negative emotional states fear, anger, sorrow, anxiety offer valuable insight into cultural attitudes and collective skills.

In English and Uzbek, such expressions are not only linguistic units but also cultural symbols of reflection of symbolism and imagery, while their structure tells how emotions become fixed in language. Although phraseology and cognitive semantics have attracted much attention, comparative studies of English and Uzbek idioms tied to negative emotions remain limited. This article fills that gap between a semantic and structural analysis of idioms from both languages by focusing on word choice and syntax. The research reveals how linguistic and cultural factors shape emotion representation. Its results can be used in contrastive linguistics, translation, and language teaching.

Literature review

Research on phraseological units includes linguistics, cognitive science, and cultural studies. A. V. Kunin's investigation in this sphere defined phraseology as an independent linguistic field, emphasizing idiom stability and meaning unity¹. R. Gläser contributed to this by studying English idioms, noting how fixed expressions balance form and flexibility².

¹ Kunin, A. V. *Kurs frazeologii sovremennoogo angliyskogo yazyka*. Vysshaya Shkola, 1996.

² Gläser, Rosemarie. "The Stylistic Potential of Phraseological Units in the Light of Genre Analysis." *Phraseology. Theory, Analysis, and Applications*, edited by A. P. Cowie, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 125–143.

In Uzbek linguistics, Sh. Rahmatullaev also did a research on detailed classifications of idioms, especially those related to emotions and psychology³.

Cognitive semantics added new sphere by linking idioms to conceptual metaphors. G. Lakoff and M. Johnson showed that emotions are understood through metaphors like sadness as motion or anger as heat⁴. Z. Kövecses later revealed that while many metaphorical patterns can be universal, cultural factors shape emotional meaning⁵.

Studies comparing English and Turkic idioms (e.g., A. Pamir) show that metaphorical descriptions depends on culture. Scholars such as A. Dobrovolskij and E. Piirainen revealed how idioms expressing fear or anger reflect both universal and culture-related patterns⁶.

In spite of growing interest, comparative work on English and Uzbek emotional idioms is still actual. Existing studies treat them separately or focus on general idioms.

Methodology

This study applies a qualitative comparative approach to identify semantic and structural features of idioms expressing negative emotions in English and Uzbek. English idioms were taken from “The Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms and The Cambridge Idioms Dictionary”. Uzbek examples came from “Rahmatullaev’s Explanatory Dictionary of Uzbek Phraseological Units” and modern Uzbek corpora. Only idioms clearly related to emotions like fear, anger, sorrow, despair, or anxiety were selected e.g., lose one’s temper, feel blue, ko‘ngli cho‘kmoq, jahl chiqmoq.

Each idiom was analyzed for emotional meaning, metaphorical source, and connotation using frameworks by Lakoff, Johnson, and Kövecses. Idioms were classified according to their types (verbal, nominal, sentential) and level of fixedness following Kunin and Gläser’s principles. Findings were compared between both languages, by considering linguistic, cognitive, and cultural influences.

Analysis

The analysis of English and Uzbek idioms expresses both shared and culture-specific ways of expressing negative emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, and anxiety. Each language uses metaphor, structure, and imagery to shape emotional experience.

Sadness. The English idiom “a heavy heart” portrays sadness as a physical weight (metaphor: Sadness is weight). Structurally, it’s an adjective–noun combination. The Uzbek “yuragi ezilmoq” (“the heart is crushed”) conveys a similar idea but intensifies it with physical imagery pain centered in the heart. This reflects a stronger cultural association between emotional suffering and the body in Uzbek. The English idiom “down in the dumps” conceptualizes sadness spatially, drawing on the metaphor “Sadness is low position”. Structurally, it is a prepositional phrase. In Uzbek, “ko‘ngli cho‘kmoq” (“the heart sinks”) reflects a closely related spatial metaphor but locates the emotional movement explicitly in the heart. Another English expression, “to feel blue”, associates sadness with color symbolism rather than bodily sensation. In contrast, the Uzbek idiom “dili xira bo‘lmoq” (“the soul becomes dim”) blends emotional and perceptual imagery, suggesting reduced inner light.

Anxiety. The English phrase “nerves are on edge” describes anxiety as inner tension. Structurally, it’s a noun phrase with a prepositional ending. The Uzbek idiom “asabiga tegmoq” (“to touch the nerves”) shows a similar metaphor but emphasizes the meaning rather than internal stress. Thus, English frames anxiety as internal sensitivity, while Uzbek presents it as something caused from outside. The English idiom “butterflies in the stomach” presents anxiety as restless internal movement, relying on the metaphor “Anxiety is motion inside the body”. Structurally, it is a plural noun phrase with a prepositional complement. The Uzbek “yuragi bezovta bo‘lmoq” (“the heart becomes restless”) conveys the same unease but removes playful imagery, opting instead for a direct

³ Rahmatullaev, Shavkat. O‘zbek frazeologiyasining izohli lug‘ati. Universitet, 1990.

⁴ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. Metaphors We Live By. University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁵ Kövecses, Zoltán. Metaphor and Emotion. Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

⁶ Dobrovolskij, Dmitrij, and Elisabeth Piirainen. Idioms. Cognitive Structure and Cross-Cultural Variability. John Benjamins, 2005.

description of emotional disturbance. Similarly, English “to be on pins and needles” highlights sharp physical discomfort to represent anxious anticipation. Uzbek uses “ko‘ngli tinchimaslik” (“the heart cannot find peace”), which frames anxiety as the absence of inner calm rather than bodily irritation

Fear. Fear in both languages often involves bodily imagery. “My blood ran cold” (English) and “qoni qochmoq” (“the blood leaves,” Uzbek) both describe physiological reactions. Yet, Uzbek intensifies the concept blood doesn’t just cool but departs completely, reflecting a more dramatic physicalization of fear. English “to be frozen with fear” extends the metaphor “Fear is cold”, emphasizing immobility. The Uzbek idiom “qo‘rqqanidan qotib qolmoq” (“to stiffen from fear”) parallels this idea but focuses on rigidity rather than temperature. Another English phrase, “heart in one’s mouth”, conveys sudden fear through spatial displacement of an organ. Uzbek “yuragi og‘ziga kelmoq” mirrors this image almost exactly, suggesting a shared cognitive model.

Emotional breakdown. English uses “break down” to show loss of control, based on the metaphor “Mind is a machine”. Uzbek uses “asabi buzilmoq” (“the nerves break”), drawing on a biological metaphor “Nerves are fragile objects”. Both describe collapse, but English relies on mechanical imagery, while Uzbek sees it as a bodily failure. The English idiom “to fall apart” portrays emotional collapse as structural disintegration, relying on the metaphor “Person is a constructed object”. Uzbek offers “o‘zini yo‘qotmoq” (“to lose oneself”), which emphasizes loss of identity rather than mechanical failure. Another English expression, “at the end of one’s rope”, frames breakdown as exhaustion in struggle. Uzbek “sabr kosasi to‘lmoq” (“the bowl of patience is full”) uses a container metaphor, suggesting emotional overload.

Anger. Both languages use fire imagery. “To burn with anger” (English) and “ichidan yonmoq” (“to burn inside,” Uzbek) reflect the metaphor “Anger is fire”. English allows both inner and outer burning, while Uzbek emphasizes internal heat, aligning with its tendency to localize emotions within the body, especially the heart. English “to see red” links anger to visual distortion and color symbolism. Uzbek “jahli chiqmoq” (“the anger comes out”) conceptualizes anger as something contained within that suddenly escapes. Additionally, “to explode with anger” in English uses violent mechanical imagery. Uzbek parallels this with “ichidagi g‘azab portlamoq” (“the anger inside explodes”), but again emphasizes the internal origin of emotion.

Loss of hope. The English idiom “give up” expresses hopelessness through struggle (metaphor: Hope is a struggle). The Uzbek “ko‘ngli sovidi” (“the heart cooled”) equates loss of hope with cooling emotion “Heart is a source of warmth”. English highlights effort; Uzbek emphasizes fading inner warmth. The English phrase “to lose heart” directly names emotional defeat, maintaining the metaphor “Hope is strength”. Uzbek “ko‘ngli sinmoq” (“the heart breaks”) intensifies the loss by portraying permanent damage rather than temporary weakness. Another English idiom, “to hit a dead end”, frames hopelessness spatially. Uzbek “yo‘li berk bo‘lmoq” (“the road becomes blocked”) aligns closely with this metaphor, indicating a shared conceptualization of hope as movement.

Jealousy. “Green with envy” (English) ties jealousy to the color green, a symbolic representation. The Uzbek “yuragi achimoq” (“the heart aches”) describes jealousy through physical pain. English relies on external symbolism; Uzbek on internal bodily sensation a recurring cultural pattern. English “to eat one’s heart out” portrays jealousy as self-destructive emotional consumption. Uzbek “ich-etini yemoq” (“to eat one’s insides”) offers a strikingly physical parallel, intensifying bodily suffering. Another English idiom, “to be sick with envy”, frames jealousy as illness. Uzbek “hasaddan yuragi siqilmoq” (“the heart tightens from envy”) avoids disease imagery and instead emphasizes constriction.

Both languages share theoretical metaphors connected with bodily experience but differ in emotional focus. English often externalizes emotion through color, weight, or mechanical imagery. Uzbek internalizes emotion, grounding it in the body and especially the heart.

These contrasts highlight how culture shapes emotional cognition and show that while emotional experiences are universal, their linguistic expression is deeply culture-bound.

Conclusion

This study examined how English and Uzbek idioms express negative emotions through metaphor, structure, and cultural imagery. The results show that both languages rely on human experiences bodily sensations, temperature, weight, and motion to theorize emotions. However, each language explains these experiences differently.

English idioms often use external metaphors such as color or mechanical failure, reflecting a more object-oriented view. Uzbek idioms, on the other hand, focus on the inner body especially the heart as the main source of emotional life. This way of emphasis on somatic imagery highlights a cultural view of emotions.

By comparing these linguistic patterns, the research reveals both universal and culture-specific elements in how emotions are encoded. The results contribute to contrastive linguistics, cognitive semantics, and translation studies, offering valuable insights into how language shapes emotional perception and communication across cultures.

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