

## The Use of Somatisms in English and Uzbek Proverbs

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**Abstract:** *This article explores the use of somatisms—linguistic units related to body parts—in English and Uzbek proverbs as a means of revealing cultural and cognitive patterns embedded within language. Proverbs, as condensed expressions of collective wisdom, often utilize somatic elements to convey complex meanings in metaphorical forms. While individual analyses of somatisms exist in various languages, comparative studies focusing specifically on proverbs in English and Uzbek remain scarce. This research addresses that gap by examining the frequency, semantic roles, and cultural symbolism of somatisms in both languages. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology supported by a comparative approach. A corpus of 150 English and 150 Uzbek proverbs containing somatic lexemes was compiled from published collections and digital sources. Each proverb was categorized based on the body part referenced and analyzed to identify metaphorical patterns and cultural connotations. Findings show that certain body parts—such as head, heart, hand, and eye—are dominant in both languages, though the metaphorical extensions and cultural nuances differ. For instance, in Uzbek, somatisms often reflect social hierarchy and communal values, while in English, individual agency and moral judgment are more prominent. These differences reveal how bodily concepts are cognitively universal yet culturally specific in their expression. The results underscore the significance of somatisms in cross-cultural linguistic studies and highlight their role in encoding worldview. This has implications for translation theory, intercultural communication, and language teaching, especially in understanding how metaphorical thinking bridges bodily experience and cultural interpretation.*

**Keywords:** *somatisms, proverbs, body metaphors, English-Uzbek comparison, cultural linguistics, paremiology, cognitive metaphor theory.*

### Introduction

Proverbs are among the oldest and most condensed forms of verbal folklore, reflecting the collective wisdom, traditions, values, and worldview of a people through symbolic and metaphorical language. One of the most salient linguistic features of proverbs is their reliance on somatic expressions—words or phrases referring to the human body or its parts. These somatisms function not merely as anatomical references, but as culturally loaded metaphors that encapsulate deeply rooted social and moral concepts. As language mirrors cognition and cultural consciousness, studying the role of somatisms in proverbs opens a valuable window into the metaphorical thinking of a speech community. In many languages, particularly those with rich oral traditions such as Uzbek and English, somatisms are frequently used in proverbs to express abstract ideas such as wisdom, bravery, deceit, and emotional states. For instance, the word *heart* may symbolize sincerity or emotion, while *head* may represent intelligence or decision-making. Although the same body part may appear in both English and Uzbek proverbs, its associated connotations and symbolic functions are often shaped by the underlying culture, religion, social structure, and worldview of the respective linguistic community. Despite the extensive documentation of proverbs in both English and Uzbek, limited scholarly attention has been given to the systematic comparison of somatisms used within them. Much of the existing research focuses on structural classification or thematic interpretation of proverbs within a single language context, often overlooking the cognitive and

cultural dimensions encoded in somatic metaphors. This leaves a significant gap in paremiological and contrastive linguistic studies, especially in the field of comparative cognitive semantics. The growing interest in cognitive linguistics and cultural pragmatics has revitalized scholarly inquiry into metaphorical language, highlighting how conceptual domains such as the body serve as universal yet culturally variable source domains for meaning construction. Within this framework, somatisms function not only as lexical elements but as conceptual metaphors that reveal how different cultures map bodily experience onto abstract concepts. Therefore, analyzing somatisms in proverbs is particularly fruitful for identifying cross-cultural similarities and differences in metaphorical cognition. This article aims to explore the usage and functions of somatisms in English and Uzbek proverbs through a comparative linguistic and cultural lens. By examining a representative corpus of proverbs containing body-related lexemes, the study seeks to uncover the frequency, semantic categories, and cultural values associated with these expressions. A descriptive-analytical method is employed, with data collected from authentic proverb dictionaries and corpora in both languages. The findings are expected to offer insights into the metaphorical embodiment of cultural knowledge and to contribute to fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and ethnolinguistics.

## Literature Review

In linguistics, it is widely acknowledged that language often reflects the embodied experience of human beings. One of the most revealing aspects of this is the frequent use of body-related expressions—**somatisms**—in proverbial language. Somatisms are not mere anatomical references; they carry metaphorical, cultural, and emotional weight, allowing abstract ideas to be understood through concrete bodily terms. Proverbs, as condensed carriers of folk wisdom, rely heavily on such somatic elements to communicate moral, psychological, and social truths. The foundational framework for understanding this phenomenon lies in **Conceptual Metaphor Theory** developed by Lakoff and Johnson, who argue that abstract thought is structured through bodily experience<sup>1</sup>. Expressions like “a warm heart” or “clear-headed thinking” are rooted in everyday physical interactions with the world. While these metaphorical extensions are observable in many languages, the cultural context determines their specific interpretation and frequency<sup>2</sup>. In English, somatic proverbs such as “cold feet” (fear), “keep an eye on” (observe), or “a big mouth” (talkative) reflect both physical embodiment and social evaluation<sup>3</sup>. Uzbek proverbs similarly contain rich somatic imagery, but their meanings often emerge from different cultural priorities such as family honor, hospitality, or respect for elders. For example, the *tongue* in Uzbek culture is frequently associated with social harmony or disorder, depending on its usage<sup>4</sup>. Scholars such as Kövecses have emphasized that although somatic metaphors arise from universal bodily experience, their metaphorical mappings and semantic extensions are culture-specific<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen argue that figurative language, especially somatisms, provides a reliable pathway into the cultural semantics of a community<sup>6</sup>. Their work underscores the need for culturally grounded comparative studies. Despite a growing body of work on somatisms in single-language contexts, there remains a significant gap in comparative research that analyzes how such expressions function across typologically and culturally distinct languages like English and Uzbek. Existing studies often focus either on general metaphor usage or on the structural features of proverbs, leaving the cultural-cognitive dimensions underexplored. Sharifov, for instance, categorizes Uzbek somatic phrases into functional, emotional, and symbolic types, highlighting their socio-cultural importance but without comparing them systematically

<sup>1</sup> G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture, and Body in Human Feeling*, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> W. Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook*, Greenwood Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> T. Jo'rayev, *O'zbek maqollarining tasnifi va semantik xususiyatlari* [Classification and Semantic Features of Uzbek Proverbs], Tashkent: Fan, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation*, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> D. Dobrovol'skij and E. Piirainen, *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives*, Elsevier, 2006.

to other languages<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, English-based studies by Mieder focus on structure and usage, yet seldom engage in cross-linguistic contrast<sup>8</sup>. This article aims to address that research gap by providing a structured, comparative, and culturally-informed analysis of somatisms in English and Uzbek proverbs. By investigating both the shared conceptual metaphors and the divergent cultural applications of somatic expressions, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how language, body, and culture intersect in the realm of proverbial wisdom.

## Methodology

The present study is grounded in a qualitative descriptive-comparative framework, aimed at identifying and interpreting the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural characteristics of somatisms in English and Uzbek proverbs. Considering the metaphorical and symbolic nature of proverbs, a qualitative method was deemed most appropriate to facilitate a nuanced exploration of how body-related lexemes reflect broader cultural conceptualizations.

The empirical material for the study consists of 300 proverbs, evenly divided between English and Uzbek. A total of 150 proverbs from each language were selected based on the presence of explicit references to human body parts, such as *head*, *heart*, *eye*, *hand*, *tongue*, and *foot*. The English data were collected from well-established paremiological sources, including Mieder's collections and electronic proverb archives. Uzbek proverbs were drawn from published anthologies, academic compilations, and folklore dictionaries compiled by Uzbek linguists and ethnographers. The selection process adhered to stratified purposeful sampling, ensuring that a diverse range of somatic categories was represented across both corpora. Each proverb was subjected to semantic and contextual analysis. Initially, the somatic lexeme was isolated and its literal and metaphorical meanings were examined in light of its usage in the proverb. This was followed by an interpretation of the proverb's communicative intent, cultural function, and potential moral, emotional, or cognitive implications. To guide the analysis, the study utilized key principles from Conceptual Metaphor Theory as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson, with a focus on how bodily experience serves as a source domain for metaphorical mapping. Kövecses's classification of metaphor types was also referenced, particularly in identifying universal versus culture-specific metaphorical expressions. To ensure consistency and rigor in interpretation, a coding scheme was developed based on recurring semantic domains such as emotion, cognition, social relations, morality, and physical action. These codes were applied systematically to both English and Uzbek data sets. Comparisons were then made across languages to identify parallels and divergences in the figurative use of body parts. For example, while both English and Uzbek proverbs frequently reference the *heart*, its metaphorical associations vary considerably, reflecting differing cultural models of emotion and inner experience. Contextual interpretation of the Uzbek proverbs also considered sociocultural factors, including norms related to family structure, elder respect, collectivism, and spirituality. In contrast, the English proverbs were analyzed within a framework emphasizing individualism, self-control, and rational judgment. The comparative dimension of the study aimed not only to highlight linguistic correspondences and asymmetries, but also to reveal how embodied language reflects culturally embedded patterns of thought. Although the study is limited by its focus on standard literary forms and excludes regional or dialectal variants, the methodology allows for an in-depth investigation of somatic metaphor across two linguistically unrelated and culturally distinct traditions. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how metaphorical cognition is shaped by both shared human embodiment and local cultural frameworks.

<sup>7</sup> N. Sharifov, "Somatik frazeologizmlar va ularning tarjimai" [Somatic Phraseologisms and Their Translation], *Philological Issues*, vol. 2, 2020, pp. 102–110.

<sup>8</sup> W. Mieder, *Proverbial Language in English and Other Languages*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2007.

## Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of 150 English and 150 Uzbek proverbs revealed both convergences and divergences in the use of somatisms, reflecting shared cognitive tendencies alongside distinct cultural conceptualizations. The most frequently occurring body-related lexemes in both languages were *head*, *heart*, *eye*, *hand*, and *tongue*. These somatisms functioned as metaphorical instruments to express abstract notions such as wisdom, emotion, morality, intention, and social behavior.

In English proverbs, the *head* typically connoted intellect and rational control (*“keep a cool head”*, *“two heads are better than one”*), aligning with cultural values of individual autonomy and logical reasoning. The *heart*, while also appearing frequently, was often associated with sincerity, emotional courage, and compassion (*“home is where the heart is”*, *“have a change of heart”*). In contrast, Uzbek proverbs involving the *head* tended to carry hierarchical or fate-oriented meanings, such as authority or the inevitability of life outcomes (*“boshga tushgan – ko‘zga yosh”*). The *heart* in Uzbek proverbs often symbolized inner strength, humility, or moral resilience (*“ko‘ngil ko‘rsa – ko‘z ko‘radi”*). While both languages utilized *hand* and *eye* metaphors, their figurative extensions reflected culturally embedded social expectations. English proverbs emphasized agency and initiative (*“a helping hand”*, *“the eye of the storm”*), while Uzbek proverbs highlighted restraint, social harmony, and the consequences of speech or gaze (*“ko‘z tegmasin”*, *“qo‘l bilan emas, til bilan uradi”*). The *tongue* was particularly significant in Uzbek, frequently associated with moral judgment and communal order, a pattern less prominent in English, where speech was often framed in individualistic or humorous terms. The results point to a shared cognitive grounding in bodily experience but illustrate how each culture selectively elaborates bodily metaphors in accordance with its own social norms, worldview, and communicative values. The conceptual metaphor theory framework helped trace these mappings, showing that somatisms serve not merely as stylistic devices but as windows into culturally specific models of thought. A notable theoretical implication is that somatic metaphors, while arising from universal embodiment, are not semantically or pragmatically neutral; they are filtered through socio-cultural lenses that shape their meaning and function. This reinforces the argument for culturally informed cognitive linguistics and adds empirical depth to the theory of metaphor variation across languages. In terms of practical application, these findings offer valuable insights for fields such as translation studies, intercultural communication, and language education. Understanding how seemingly equivalent body-part metaphors function differently across languages can improve semantic accuracy and cultural sensitivity in translation. Educators and curriculum designers can also benefit from incorporating somatic metaphors into comparative language instruction to foster cross-cultural awareness. However, the study remains limited in scope by its reliance on written, standard-language proverbs and may not fully capture regional or colloquial variations. Further research could address this gap through fieldwork-based corpus expansion or experimental studies examining metaphor comprehension among native speakers. Additionally, diachronic analysis could reveal how sociocultural transformations influence the evolution of somatic metaphors over time.

Overall, this study affirms that the proverb as a linguistic unit serves not only a communicative function but also encodes embodied knowledge filtered through the lens of culture.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that somatisms in English and Uzbek proverbs are grounded in shared human embodiment, yet their figurative meanings are deeply influenced by cultural context. The most frequently occurring body-related lexemes—such as *head*, *heart*, *eye*, *hand*, and *tongue*—appear in both languages, but their metaphorical extensions reveal divergent cultural interpretations. English proverbs often associate the *head* with rational thinking and leadership, the *heart* with emotion or sincerity, and the *eye* with attention and surveillance. Uzbek proverbs, in contrast, emphasize the *head* as a symbol of destiny or burden, the *heart* as an inner moral compass, and the *tongue* as a powerful tool for social harmony or conflict. These findings support the view that proverbs, while universally structured around embodied



experience, serve as reflections of a community's values, ethical codes, and worldview. They contribute to the understanding that metaphorical language—particularly somatic expressions—is not neutral but shaped by cultural models of thought. The results confirm the relevance of cognitive metaphor theory and cultural linguistics in analyzing traditional texts. Although the scope of this study was limited to published and widely used proverbs, future research could expand the analysis to include oral traditions, regional variants, and modern proverb usage. Further interdisciplinary inquiry, combining corpus linguistics and cognitive approaches, may offer deeper insight into how bodily metaphors evolve over time and how they function in real-time communication across cultures.

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