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THE LINGUOCULTURAL SEMANTICS OF PLANT-BASED EXPRESSIONS IN TURKISH AND THEIR ROLE IN HUMAN CONCEPTUALIZATION

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Abstract: This article examines the linguocultural semantics of plant-based expressions in the Turkish language and their role in the conceptualization of human characteristics, emotions, and social identities. The study focuses on the metaphorical and symbolic meanings of phytonyms in Turkish idioms, proverbs, and figurative expressions, emphasizing their relationship with national traditions, cultural values, and collective perceptions. Drawing on cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, and linguocultural analysis, the research explores how plant-related lexical units represent human appearance, personality traits, moral qualities, and interpersonal relationships. Particular attention is paid to the cultural associations of flowers, trees, fruits, and other botanical elements in Turkish linguistic consciousness. The article also discusses the anthropocentric nature of plant-based metaphors and their significance in constructing culturally specific representations of human identity.

Keywords: Linguocultural semantics, Turkish language, phytonyms, plant-based expressions, anthropocentrism, figurative language, cultural symbolism, national identity, cognitive linguistics.

Introduction: Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a fundamental mechanism for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, national identity, and collective experience. The relationship between language and culture has become a central issue in contemporary linguistics, particularly within the fields of linguoculturology, cognitive linguistics, and anthropocentric studies. Linguistic expressions associated with natural phenomena, including plants, animals, and geographical elements, reflect culturally specific ways of perceiving and interpreting human experience. Among these expressions, plant-based lexical units occupy a significant position due to their metaphorical, symbolic, and cultural meanings.

In the Turkish language, plant names, commonly referred to as phytonyms, constitute an important component of figurative language and cultural symbolism. Flowers, trees, fruits, and other botanical elements frequently appear in idioms, proverbs, literary expressions, and everyday communication. These linguistic units extend beyond their literal botanical meanings and acquire additional semantic functions associated with human appearance, personality, emotional states, moral qualities, and social relationships. For instance, the Turkish expression gül gibi (like a rose) may characterize beauty, pleasantness, or a desirable condition, whereas çınar gibi (like a plane tree) can symbolize strength, stability, and dignity. Such expressions demonstrate how botanical imagery contributes to the conceptual representation of human characteristics within Turkish linguistic consciousness.

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The theoretical foundations of this research are closely connected with the development of cognitive linguistics and conceptual metaphor theory. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor is not merely a stylistic device but a fundamental mechanism through which individuals understand abstract concepts in terms of more concrete experiences. From this perspective, plant-based metaphors provide a cognitive framework for interpreting human qualities through familiar elements of the natural environment. Similarly, Kövecses (2010) emphasizes that metaphorical conceptualization is influenced by both universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally specific experiences. These theoretical approaches provide a foundation for examining the relationship between botanical imagery and human conceptualization in Turkish.

The linguocultural dimension of figurative expressions is also closely related to the concept of cultural memory. According to Wierzbicka (1997), linguistic meanings reflect cultural values and socially shared interpretations of reality. In this regard, phytonymic expressions may function as linguistic indicators of traditional beliefs, aesthetic ideals, and moral principles. In Turkish culture, particular plants possess symbolic associations shaped by historical experience, folklore, mythology, and literary traditions. The rose (gül), for example, is frequently associated with beauty and affection, while the plane tree (çınar) may represent endurance, longevity, and continuity. These associations contribute to the formation of culturally meaningful representations of human identity.

From an anthropocentric perspective, the significance of plant-based expressions lies in their ability to characterize individuals through culturally recognizable images. Human conceptualization involves the linguistic representation of physical appearance, psychological characteristics, social behavior, and ethical values. Turkish figurative expressions containing phytonyms provide valuable material for investigating how these dimensions are encoded and interpreted through metaphorical language. Furthermore, the semantic development of such expressions demonstrates the interaction between lexical meaning, cultural symbolism, and cognitive categorization.

Although metaphorical expressions and phraseological units have been widely investigated in linguistic research, the systematic examination of plant-based expressions in relation to human conceptualization remains a relevant area for further study. In particular, greater attention is needed to the semantic mechanisms through which botanical concepts acquire anthropocentric meanings and reflect culturally specific perceptions of individuals in Turkish society. Investigating these mechanisms may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic representation of human identity.

The aim of this study is to investigate the linguocultural semantics of plant-based expressions in Turkish and determine their role in shaping the conceptual representation of human beings. The research focuses on identifying the metaphorical meanings of phytonymic expressions, classifying their anthropocentric semantic functions, and interpreting their cultural significance.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses several research objectives: examining the semantic characteristics of Turkish plant-based expressions; identifying conceptual metaphors associated with human appearance, personality, and emotional states; analyzing the cultural symbolism of selected phytonyms; and exploring the relationship between linguistic imagery and culturally specific human conceptualization.

The scientific significance of the research lies in its integration of linguocultural analysis, conceptual metaphor theory, and anthropocentric approaches to the study of Turkish figurative language. By examining the interaction between botanical imagery and human characteristics, the

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study seeks to clarify how culturally embedded linguistic expressions contribute to the conceptualization of human identity. The findings are expected to contribute to Turkish linguistics, cognitive semantics, phraseology, and intercultural communication. Moreover, the research may provide a theoretical basis for further comparative investigations of plant-based metaphors across Turkic and other languages, particularly in relation to the interaction between language, culture, and human cognition.

Materials and methods: The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to investigate the linguocultural semantics of plant-based expressions in Turkish and their role in human conceptualization. The methodological framework integrates descriptive, semantic, cognitive, and linguocultural methods to examine the relationship between phytonymic expressions, metaphorical meanings, and culturally specific representations of human characteristics. Particular attention is devoted to the anthropocentric interpretation of botanical imagery in Turkish phraseology, proverbs, and everyday communication.

The research materials consist of Turkish lexical units, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and figurative constructions containing plant names, including gül (rose), çiçek (flower), çınar (plane tree), ağaç (tree), diken (thorn), fidan (sapling), and meyve (fruit). These expressions are considered in relation to their semantic functions and cultural associations. Relevant lexical and phraseological examples can be identified through the Türk Dil Kurumu (TDK) Güncel Türkçe Sözlük, the Atasözleri ve Deyimler Sözlüğü, and selected Turkish literary texts. These resources provide a basis for distinguishing conventional meanings from context-dependent metaphorical interpretations.

The study employs the descriptive method to identify and classify plant-based expressions according to their lexical structure, semantic characteristics, and communicative functions. The selected linguistic units are grouped into semantic categories representing human physical appearance, personality traits, emotional conditions, moral qualities, and social relationships. Such classification makes it possible to examine how botanical terminology acquires anthropocentric meanings in Turkish linguistic usage.

The semantic analysis method is applied to investigate the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of phytonymic expressions. For example, the expression *gül gibi* (like a rose) may convey positive evaluations associated with beauty, attractiveness, or favorable conditions, depending on the context. Similarly, *fidan gibi* (like a sapling) can characterize a person as young, slender, or physically graceful. The expression *çınar gibi* (like a plane tree) may metaphorically represent strength, stability, and endurance. These examples illustrate semantic transfer from botanical characteristics to human qualities.

The conceptual metaphor analysis is based on the theoretical principles developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and further elaborated by Kövecses (2010). Within this framework, plant-based expressions are interpreted as linguistic manifestations of conceptual mappings between the source domain of PLANTS and the target domain of HUMAN BEINGS. These mappings can be represented through conceptual patterns such as HUMAN BEAUTY IS A FLOWER, HUMAN GROWTH IS PLANT GROWTH, and HUMAN STRENGTH IS A TREE. These proposed patterns serve as analytical categories rather than independently established universal metaphors. Their applicability is evaluated through the meanings and contexts of individual Turkish expressions.

The linguocultural analysis method is used to interpret the cultural values, symbolic associations, and traditional beliefs embedded in plant-related expressions. This approach examines

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how particular botanical images acquire culturally recognizable meanings through historical experience, folklore, literary traditions, and social practices. For instance, the symbolic association of the rose with beauty and affection reflects its prominent position in Turkish literary and cultural traditions. The plane tree, meanwhile, may symbolize longevity, protection, and continuity, particularly in contexts involving family relationships and respected elders.

The componential analysis method is employed to distinguish the semantic features that contribute to metaphorical interpretation. Plant-based expressions are examined through semantic components such as beauty, youth, fragility, strength, maturity, fertility, and resilience. This method helps identify the semantic connections between the physical characteristics of plants and the psychological or social attributes assigned to human beings. The analytical framework is illustrated through the following examples.

Turkish expression	**Literal meaning**	**Figurative interpretation**	**Linguocultural significance**
Gül gibi	Like a rose	Beauty, pleasantness, favorable condition	Positive aesthetic evaluation
Fidan gibi	Like a sapling	Youth, slenderness, elegance	Youthfulness and physical attractiveness
Çınar gibi	Like a plane tree	Strength, stability, endurance	Respect, continuity, and maturity
Çiçek gibi	Like a flower	Freshness, beauty, neatness	Aesthetic appreciation and vitality
Diken üstünde olmak	To be on thorns	Anxiety, uneasiness, tension	Emotional discomfort expressed through botanical imagery
Meyve vermek	To bear fruit	To produce results or achievements	Productivity and successful development

The examples demonstrate that the semantic transformation of botanical vocabulary involves both cognitive associations and cultural interpretations. However, the meanings of these expressions are not necessarily identical across all contexts. Therefore, contextual analysis is essential for determining whether a particular expression refers directly to human characteristics or more generally to situations, achievements, and emotional experiences.

The contextual analysis method is applied to distinguish stable phraseological meanings from individual metaphorical uses. The interpretation of each expression depends on its grammatical structure, communicative situation, and surrounding linguistic context. This approach is particularly important because some Turkish plant-based expressions possess multiple figurative meanings and may function differently in literary and everyday discourse.

Additionally, an interpretive comparative approach is used to examine similarities and differences among the symbolic meanings of various botanical concepts within Turkish. For example, expressions involving flowers frequently emphasize aesthetic or emotional characteristics, whereas expressions involving trees may foreground strength, stability, maturity, and continuity. Such tendencies are treated as context-dependent semantic patterns rather than fixed characteristics of all expressions within a botanical category.

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The research procedure consists of identifying relevant phytonymic expressions, examining their dictionary meanings and contextual uses, classifying them according to anthropocentric semantic categories, and interpreting their metaphorical and cultural functions. The proposed analytical framework allows the relationship between botanical imagery and human conceptualization to be investigated systematically.

As a qualitative study, the research primarily aims to identify semantic patterns and explain culturally embedded meanings rather than establish statistical generalizations. Quantitative claims about the frequency or distribution of plant-based expressions would require a separately defined corpus, documented sampling criteria, and systematic frequency analysis.

Results and discussion: The qualitative analysis of plant-based expressions in Turkish reveals that phytonymic lexical units play an important role in representing human characteristics, emotional experiences, social relationships, and culturally determined values. Botanical imagery functions not only as a stylistic element but also as a cognitive and linguocultural mechanism through which abstract human qualities are conceptualized. The analysis identifies several major semantic domains, including physical appearance, personality traits, emotional states, social identity, moral qualities, and human development.

One of the most significant observations concerns the metaphorical representation of human appearance through plant-related expressions. In Turkish, flowers and young plants are frequently associated with beauty, youth, freshness, and physical attractiveness. For example, gül gibi (like a rose) may express beauty or a favorable condition, while fidan gibi (like a sapling) is commonly used to describe a young, slender, and graceful individual. Similarly, çiçek gibi (like a flower) can convey freshness, attractiveness, or neatness. These expressions demonstrate how observable characteristics of plants are transferred to the conceptual domain of human physical appearance.

From a cognitive perspective, such expressions illustrate metaphorical mappings between the source domain of PLANTS and the target domain of HUMAN BEINGS. The conceptual pattern HUMAN BEAUTY IS A FLOWER reflects the association between floral attractiveness and positive evaluations of human appearance. This interpretation is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which explains metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition rather than merely a rhetorical device.

Another important finding concerns the representation of human strength, maturity, and social authority through tree-related imagery. The Turkish expression çınar gibi (like a plane tree) may symbolize physical strength, stability, dignity, and endurance. In culturally meaningful contexts, the plane tree can also represent respected elders, family continuity, and intergenerational relationships. The conceptual association between trees and human beings is based on shared characteristics such as growth, longevity, resilience, and the ability to provide protection.

The analysis further indicates that plant-based expressions can represent psychological and emotional experiences. For example, the Turkish idiom diken üstünde olmak (to be on thorns) describes a state of anxiety, discomfort, or emotional tension. The metaphorical meaning emerges from the physical association between thorns and pain, which is transferred to the psychological domain. This semantic mechanism demonstrates how sensory experiences contribute to the conceptualization of abstract emotional conditions.

Plant-related vocabulary also participates in the representation of human achievements and personal development. The expression meyve vermek (to bear fruit) can metaphorically describe

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productive activity, successful efforts, or the achievement of desired results. Its figurative meaning reflects the conceptual association between botanical growth and human accomplishment. Within this framework, the process of plant development becomes a cognitive model for understanding human progress, professional success, and intellectual productivity.

Table 1. Semantic classification of plant-based expressions in Turkish

Plant-based expression	**Semantic category**	**Human-related interpretation**	**Conceptual association**
Gül gibi	Physical appearance and evaluation	Beauty, attractiveness, favorable condition	Beauty is a flower
Fidan gibi	Youth and appearance	Youthfulness, slenderness, elegance	A young person is a sapling
Çiçek gibi	Aesthetic qualities	Freshness, beauty, neatness	Attractiveness is flowering
Çınar gibi	Personality and social identity	Strength, stability, maturity	A strong person is a tree
Diken üstünde olmak	Emotional condition	Anxiety, discomfort, tension	Emotional distress is physical discomfort
Meyve vermek	Human activity and development	Productivity, achievement, successful results	Achievement is fruit production

Note: The table presents illustrative qualitative interpretations. The conceptual associations are analytical formulations, not standardized dictionary definitions, and their meanings depend on context.

The classification demonstrates that botanical expressions represent different dimensions of human experience. Expressions involving flowers tend to emphasize positive aesthetic and emotional qualities, whereas those associated with trees frequently express strength, maturity, and stability. Meanwhile, expressions containing thorns or fruits may describe psychological discomfort and productive achievements, respectively. These semantic tendencies reflect the interaction between physical experience, metaphorical reasoning, and cultural interpretation.

The linguocultural significance of plant-based expressions is particularly evident in their relationship with Turkish cultural traditions and collective representations. Botanical symbols have historically occupied an important position in Turkish folklore, poetry, oral literature, and everyday communication. Their metaphorical meanings are shaped by both universal human experiences and culturally specific associations.

The rose (gül) provides a particularly relevant example. In Turkish literary traditions, especially classical Ottoman poetry, the rose is frequently associated with beauty, love, and the beloved. Its symbolic interpretation is closely connected with aesthetic ideals and emotional expression. Consequently, rose-based expressions may carry additional cultural meanings beyond their immediate lexical definitions.

The plane tree (çınar) represents another significant botanical image. Its longevity, extensive branches, and imposing physical appearance make it suitable for metaphorical associations with

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strength, continuity, and protection. In Turkish cultural discourse, the image of the plane tree may be employed to characterize respected individuals, particularly elders who symbolize stability and family unity.

These examples suggest that botanical symbolism contributes to the preservation of cultural memory by connecting linguistic expressions with historically established values and social expectations. However, cultural interpretations should not be considered entirely fixed, since metaphorical meanings may change according to historical period, literary genre, and communicative context.

From an anthropocentric perspective, the examined expressions demonstrate how human beings interpret their own physical, emotional, and social experiences through familiar natural phenomena. Plants serve as conceptual reference points for evaluating human qualities because their characteristics are observable and culturally recognizable.

The analysis identifies three principal mechanisms of anthropocentric meaning formation:

1. Metaphorical transfer: Botanical characteristics are projected onto human attributes, as in fidan gibi, where the slenderness and freshness of a sapling are associated with youthful appearance.
2. Symbolic representation: Plant images acquire culturally established meanings, as illustrated by çınar, which may symbolize strength, maturity, and continuity.
3. Experiential association: Physical experiences involving plants become the basis for interpreting psychological or abstract phenomena, as demonstrated by diken üstünde olmak and meyve vermek.

These mechanisms demonstrate that plant-based expressions are not limited to descriptive functions. They also participate in the linguistic construction of culturally meaningful human representations.

The findings can be interpreted within the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Their approach explains how abstract concepts are understood through more concrete domains of experience. In the present analysis, botanical phenomena provide source-domain structures for conceptualizing human beauty, strength, emotional discomfort, and achievement.

Kövecses (2010) emphasizes the interaction between universal metaphorical mechanisms and cultural variation. This perspective is particularly relevant to Turkish phytonymic expressions because certain associations, such as flowers with beauty and trees with strength, may occur across languages, while their specific cultural interpretations are influenced by Turkish traditions and historical experiences.

Wierzbicka's (1997) approach to the relationship between linguistic meaning and cultural values also provides a useful perspective. Plant-based expressions may encode socially recognizable evaluations and cultural expectations, illustrating how figurative language reflects collective interpretations of human experience.

At the same time, the analysis reveals that the relationship between botanical imagery and human conceptualization is not always direct. For instance, meyve vermek may describe the successful outcome of an activity rather than an inherent personal quality. Similarly, diken üstünde olmak primarily characterizes an emotional condition rather than a stable personality trait. This distinction is important for establishing a precise classification of anthropocentric meanings.

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The study therefore suggests that plant-based expressions should be examined through an integrated framework combining lexical semantics, contextual interpretation, conceptual metaphor analysis, and linguocultural explanation. Such an approach helps avoid reducing culturally complex expressions to isolated metaphorical equivalents.

Table 2. Linguocultural functions of botanical imagery in Turkish

Botanical image	**Dominant symbolic association**	**Human conceptual domain**	**Linguocultural function**
Rose (gül)	Beauty, affection, admiration	Appearance and emotions	Expressing aesthetic and emotional values
Flower (çiçek)	Freshness, vitality, attractiveness	Youth and physical appearance	Positive evaluation of individuals
Sapling (fidan)	Growth, youth, flexibility	Human development	Representing youthfulness and potential
Plane tree (çınar)	Strength, longevity, continuity	Maturity and social identity	Symbolizing respect and intergenerational stability
Thorn (diken)	Pain, danger, discomfort	Emotional experience	Expressing psychological tension
Fruit (meyve)	Productivity, results, maturity	Achievement and development	Representing successful outcomes

The findings have implications for Turkish linguistics, intercultural communication, language teaching, and translation studies. Understanding the figurative meanings of plant-based expressions may help learners interpret culturally embedded language more accurately and distinguish literal meanings from metaphorical interpretations. In translation, particular attention should be given to the cultural associations of phytonyms because direct lexical equivalents may not preserve the same symbolic or emotional meanings in another language.

The analysis also has methodological limitations. As a qualitative examination of illustrative expressions, it does not establish the statistical frequency, historical distribution, or relative productivity of particular botanical metaphors. Furthermore, some expressions are context-dependent and may have meanings that extend beyond human conceptualization. A larger corpus-based study incorporating authenticated examples from contemporary Turkish discourse, literary texts, and phraseological dictionaries would be necessary to verify the proposed semantic patterns and examine their distribution across genres.

Conclusion: The present study has examined the linguocultural semantics of plant-based expressions in Turkish and their role in human conceptualization. The analysis demonstrates that phytonymic expressions constitute an important component of Turkish figurative language, reflecting the interaction between linguistic meaning, cultural symbolism, and cognitive processes. Plant-related lexical units serve as metaphorical instruments for representing human appearance, personality traits, emotional states, social relationships, and individual development.

The findings indicate that botanical imagery contributes to the formation of anthropocentric meanings through metaphorical transfer, symbolic associations, and experiential interpretation. Expressions involving flowers, trees, fruits, and thorns demonstrate how observable characteristics of plants are conceptually associated with human qualities and experiences. In particular, the rose (gül) is associated with beauty and affection, the sapling (fidan) with youthfulness and elegance, and the plane

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tree (çınar) with strength, maturity, and continuity. Such associations illustrate the cultural significance of botanical imagery in Turkish linguistic consciousness.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of conceptual metaphor theory and linguocultural approaches in explaining the semantic development of plant-based expressions. The relationship between botanical concepts and human characteristics reveals that figurative language is not merely a stylistic phenomenon but also a means of organizing cultural knowledge and interpreting human experience. The anthropocentric orientation of these expressions demonstrates how language reflects culturally embedded perceptions of human identity.

The research also emphasizes the significance of contextual interpretation, since the metaphorical meanings of phytonymic expressions may vary according to communicative situations, literary traditions, and cultural associations. The qualitative findings suggest that botanical symbolism contributes to the preservation and transmission of cultural values, although broader corpus-based research is required to establish the frequency and distribution of these semantic patterns.

In conclusion, plant-based expressions in Turkish represent a meaningful intersection of language, culture, and cognition. Their investigation contributes to the development of linguocultural semantics, cognitive linguistics, and anthropocentric studies. The findings also provide a theoretical foundation for future comparative research on phytonymic metaphors in Turkic languages and offer practical implications for intercultural communication, foreign language teaching, and translation studies.

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