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METAPHORICAL UNITS BASED ON NATURE IMAGERY IN ENGLISH PROVERBS

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Abstract: This article analyzes the linguistic and semantic features of metaphorical units based on nature images in English proverbs. The main objective of the study is to identify the metaphorical meanings of images related to natural elements such as the sun, moon, wind, water, trees, flowers, and animals, as well as to reveal their role in reflecting the national and cultural worldview of the English people. In proverbs, nature images serve as an important means of expressing human life, moral values, labor, time, and social relations. The study employs descriptive, semantic, and linguocultural methods of analysis. The findings indicate that nature-related metaphorical units not only enrich the aesthetic and expressive potential of language but also embody the worldview and cultural values of a nation. Furthermore, metaphors formed through nature images in English proverbs reflect the close relationship between human experience and the surrounding environment. The results of the research contribute to the development of cognitive linguistics, linguocultural studies, and paremiology.

Keywords: English proverbs, metaphorical units, nature images, conceptual metaphor, linguoculturology, semantic analysis, paremiology, cognitive linguistics, national and cultural characteristics, metaphorical meaning.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most significant social phenomena reflecting the history, culture, and worldview of a nation. Proverbs, which constitute an integral part of folklore, embody life experiences, moral norms, and national values that have evolved over centuries. In particular, metaphorical units found in English proverbs play an important role in revealing people's attitudes toward nature and their ways of perceiving the environment. Metaphors based on natural imagery serve to express human thought processes, emotional experiences, and social relationships in a figurative manner [1].

In modern linguistics, metaphor is interpreted not only as a stylistic device but also as an essential mechanism of human cognition. Therefore, the linguistic, semantic, and linguocultural study of metaphorical units formed through natural imagery in English proverbs has become one of the relevant issues in contemporary research. The purpose of this study is to identify metaphorical units related to nature in English proverbs, analyze their semantic features, and reveal their national and cultural significance. The findings of this research contribute to the enrichment of scientific studies in the fields of metaphor theory, paremiology, and cognitive linguistics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of metaphor has long been one of the major subjects of linguistic research. Initially, metaphor was interpreted within the framework of traditional rhetoric as a literary and stylistic device. However, since the second half of the twentieth century, it has increasingly been studied as an integral component of human cognition. In particular, in their influential work Metaphors We Live By (1980), G. Lakoff and M. Johnson explained metaphor as a conceptual system

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and demonstrated its role in shaping human perception and experience. The authors regard metaphor not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a cognitive mechanism [2].

In the field of paremiology, scholarly perspectives on the study of proverbs have been extensively discussed in the works of researchers such as V. Mieder, A. Dundes, and W. Haas. Their studies evaluate proverbs as expressions of folk wisdom and cultural experience. Furthermore, representatives of the linguocultural approach, including V. Maslova and Yu. Stepanov, have analyzed the interrelationship between language and culture and revealed the national and cultural meanings embedded in metaphors [3].

Although previous studies have examined metaphors and proverbs separately, the linguocultural and semantic characteristics of metaphorical units based on natural imagery in English proverbs have not been comprehensively analyzed. In this regard, the present study aims to fill this scholarly gap and provide a more systematic examination of the issue.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

During the study, metaphorical units based on nature imagery found in English proverbs were analyzed from semantic and linguocultural perspectives. The results revealed that nature-related metaphors constitute important linguistic units reflecting the historical experience, cultural values, and worldview of the English people. Images associated with natural phenomena, plants, animals, and climate are widely used to express human life and social relationships.

The analysis allowed the classification of metaphorical units based on nature imagery into several semantic groups: meteorological phenomena, water and sea imagery, plant-related metaphors, animal-related metaphors, and metaphors connected with celestial bodies.

The first group includes metaphors related to meteorological phenomena. In English proverbs, images of wind, rain, and storms often symbolize change, hardship, or instability. For example, the proverb “It never rains but it pours” signifies that one problem is often followed by another. Here, the image of rain serves as a metaphorical device expressing a sequence of adverse events [4]. Likewise, in the proverb “Every cloud has a silver lining,” the cloud symbolizes difficulties, while its silver lining represents hope and positive opportunities. This proverb emphasizes that even negative situations in life contain positive aspects.

Water and sea imagery occupy a special place in English proverbs. As Great Britain is an island nation, maritime culture has significantly influenced its language. For instance, in the proverb “Still waters run deep,” calm water symbolizes depth, suggesting that quiet individuals may possess substantial inner potential. Similarly, in “Time and tide wait for no man,” the word tide functions as a metaphor for the irreversible passage of time [5].

Plant-related metaphors are also widespread. The proverb “As you sow, so shall you reap” originates from agricultural activity and implies that a person’s actions inevitably produce corresponding consequences. Here, the acts of sowing and reaping represent a conceptual metaphor of cause and effect. Likewise, in “Mighty oaks from little acorns grow,” the oak tree symbolizes strength and greatness, while the acorn represents small beginnings that can lead to significant achievements [6].

Animal-related metaphors play a significant role in depicting human character and behavior. For example, in the proverb “The early bird catches the worm,” the bird symbolizes a hardworking and proactive individual. This metaphor highlights the importance of valuing time in achieving success. Similarly, “A leopard cannot change its spots” conveys the idea that a person's fundamental nature remains unchanged. The leopard’s spots, as natural and permanent features, are metaphorically transferred to human character [7].

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Metaphors associated with celestial bodies are also common in English proverbs. In "Make hay while the sun shines," the sun symbolizes favorable opportunities and suitable timing. This proverb emphasizes the importance of taking advantage of opportunities when they arise. Likewise, in the phrase "Many moons ago," the moon serves as a metaphorical representation of a distant period in time.

The analysis demonstrated that nature imagery in English proverbs is often grounded in conceptual metaphors. Among the most common are LIFE IS A JOURNEY, TIME IS A NATURAL PHENOMENON, and HUMAN CHARACTER IS AN ANIMAL TRAIT [8]. This finding confirms the applicability of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory to English paremiology.

From a linguocultural perspective, nature imagery in English proverbs reflects distinctive features of national culture. For instance, the abundance of sea- and water-related metaphors can be explained by Britain's geographical location and maritime traditions. Similarly, plant and agricultural imagery is closely connected with the country's historical agrarian way of life.

Metaphorical units based on nature imagery not only enhance the figurative richness of language but also serve as important means of transmitting historical memory, cultural values, and social experience from one generation to another. These metaphors reveal the close relationship between humans and nature and contribute to shaping a community's model of perceiving the world.

Thus, metaphorical units based on nature imagery in English proverbs constitute a semantically diverse and linguoculturally rich system. Their study contributes not only to the development of metaphor theory but also to the advancement of paremiology, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication studies [9].

The analysis of the collected proverbs further demonstrated that nature imagery occupies a central position in the conceptual worldview of the English people. Nature-related metaphorical units enable abstract concepts to be expressed in a concrete and comprehensible manner. This illustrates the cognitive function of metaphor, whereby individuals understand abstract phenomena through concrete experiences. For example, weather-related phenomena are frequently used to represent emotional states or life situations.

In English proverbs, the image of the wind often symbolizes change and instability. For example, the phrase "A change in the wind" is interpreted as a sign of forthcoming changes. Because the direction of the wind frequently shifts, it has become a metaphorical representation of life's changing nature. Similarly, the proverb "Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" suggests that negative actions may result in even more serious consequences. Here, the wind represents the cause, while the whirlwind symbolizes the effect.

The image of rain possesses a dual semantic function in English paremiology. On the one hand, it signifies difficulties and problems; on the other, it symbolizes renewal and blessing. For example, in "Save for a rainy day," the phrase rainy day functions as a metaphor for unforeseen hardships. This proverb promotes the values of prudence and thrift, reflecting the pragmatic worldview of the English people.

The analysis of water metaphors revealed that water serves as a universal image representing movement, time, and the flow of life in English proverbs. In "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink," water symbolizes opportunity, while drinking represents an individual's ability to make independent decisions. This proverb reflects the importance of personal freedom and the right to choose [10].

Likewise, in "Do not pour oil on troubled waters," the phrase troubled waters functions as a metaphor for a difficult situation. The expression implies that conflicts should not be aggravated

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further. The state of water—whether calm or turbulent—is metaphorically transferred to human relationships, demonstrating the conceptual nature of metaphor.

Plant-related metaphors constitute one of the oldest layers of English proverbs. The experience of agrarian society is clearly reflected in these linguistic units. For example, in "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence," green grass serves as a metaphor for idealizing other people's lives or opportunities. The proverb criticizes the tendency to undervalue what one already possesses [6].

Moreover, in the phrase "Nip it in the bud," the word bud symbolizes the initial stage of a problem. The idea of removing a bud before it blooms emphasizes the necessity of addressing issues at an early stage. This metaphor highlights the importance of preventive strategies in human activity.

Animal-related metaphors are particularly significant in portraying human character. In the proverb "Let sleeping dogs lie," the image of a dog represents a hidden problem or past conflict. The proverb suggests that dormant issues should not be unnecessarily revived.

Similarly, in "When the cat's away, the mice will play," the cat symbolizes authority and control, while the mice represent individuals seeking freedom. This metaphor explains social relationships through animal behavior [8].

The analysis also showed that animal metaphors in English proverbs possess anthropomorphic characteristics. Animals are attributed human qualities and become vehicles for describing human behavior. This phenomenon further confirms the close relationship between language and thought.

The images of the sun and the moon also carry important semantic meanings. The sun generally symbolizes success, favorable opportunities, and hope. The main idea of "Make hay while the sun shines" is that individuals should take advantage of available opportunities at the appropriate time. This proverb reflects English cultural values such as diligence and rationality [5].

The moon, by contrast, is often associated with time and periodicity. The expression "Once in a blue moon" refers to an event that occurs very rarely. Here, a rare astronomical phenomenon is metaphorically transferred to infrequent events in human life [1,2].

Overall, the conducted analyses demonstrated that metaphorical units based on nature imagery in English proverbs possess a multilayered semantic structure. They not only expand the expressive potential of language but also function as linguocultural phenomena reflecting the cultural memory, historical experience, and national mentality of the English people. The findings confirm the effectiveness of cognitive and linguocultural approaches in the study of metaphorical units and provide a scientific basis for further research in English paremiology.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that metaphorical units based on nature imagery in English proverbs serve as important means of reflecting the close relationship between language and culture. The analysis revealed that natural elements, including the sun, moon, wind, water, plants, and animals, are widely used to express human life, moral values, social relationships, and concepts of time. These metaphorical units embody the historical experience, worldview, and national-cultural characteristics of the English people.

The research further established that nature imagery in English proverbs is often formed through conceptual metaphors. In particular, abstract concepts are expressed through concrete images derived from natural phenomena. This confirms that metaphor performs not only an artistic and stylistic function but also a cognitive one. Furthermore, the metaphorical units employed in proverbs enrich the figurative and expressive potential of language while simultaneously preserving and transmitting the cultural memory of a nation.

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Thus, the study of metaphorical units based on nature imagery in English proverbs is of considerable significance for the advancement of research in linguistics, paremiology, cognitive linguistics, and linguocultural studies.

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