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METAPHORICAL PHENOMENON IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH THE WATER COMPONENT IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive comparative linguacultural analysis of the metaphorical phenomenon in phraseological units containing water components in English and Uzbek. Drawing upon Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2011), the study examines how water-based idioms and proverbs in both languages reflect universal cognitive patterns while simultaneously encoding culturally specific values, beliefs, and worldviews.

Key words: prowerbs, ideoms, semantic fields, cognitive semantics,methods.

Introduction. Language serves as a repository of cultural memory, encapsulating the collective wisdom, values, and worldview of a speech community. Among the most vivid and enduring linguistic expressions of cultural cognition are phraseological units—idioms, proverbs, and sayings that convey meaning through figurative rather than literal language. Within this domain, metaphors based on natural elements hold a privileged position, as they draw upon universal human experiences while simultaneously reflecting culturally specific interpretations of the natural world.

Water, as one of the most fundamental elements of human existence, occupies a central place in the metaphorical systems of languages worldwide. It is simultaneously a source of life, a force of destruction, a symbol of purity, and an emblem of change. The comparative study of water-based phraseological units in English and Uzbek offers a particularly rich terrain for investigating how shared physical experiences with water are refracted through distinct cultural, historical, and ecological lenses.

The significance of this comparative approach extends beyond purely linguistic inquiry. In an era of increasing intercultural contact and globalization, understanding the metaphorical structures that shape thought and communication across languages is essential for effective translation, language pedagogy, and cross-cultural understanding. Misinterpretations of metaphor can create barriers in diplomacy, education, and everyday communication, making the systematic analysis of metaphorical phenomena a practical as well as theoretical necessity.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The foundational framework for this analysis is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, pioneered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their seminal work "Metaphors We Live By" (1980). This theory posits that metaphor is not merely a decorative linguistic device but a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. According to this view, abstract concepts are systematically understood and structured through concrete, embodied experiences. Metaphorical expressions in language are surface manifestations of deeper conceptual mappings from a source domain (e.g., WATER) to a target domain (e.g., EMOTION, LIFE, MORALITY).

Conceptual metaphors can be categorized into three main types. Structural metaphors allow one concept to be understood in terms of another (e.g., "TIME IS MONEY"). Orientational metaphors organize concepts along spatial dimensions (e.g., "HAPPY IS UP," "SAD IS DOWN"). Ontological metaphors project entity or substance status onto abstract experiences (e.g., "THE MIND IS A CONTAINER"). The water metaphors examined in this study often involve mappings from the

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physical properties of water—its flow, depth, stillness, turbidity, and life-sustaining qualities—onto abstract domains such as emotional states, human character, social relationships, and temporal experience.

Cultural Linguistics and Linguacultural Analysis. While Conceptual Metaphor Theory illuminates universal cognitive patterns, Cultural Linguistics provides the complementary framework for understanding how cultural models shape metaphorical conceptualization. As developed by Sharifian (2011), Cultural Linguistics examines how cultural conceptualizations—including schemas, categories, and metaphors—emerge from and are instantiated in language use. This approach recognizes that while human embodiment provides a common ground for metaphor, cultural-specific experiences—including religious traditions, ecological conditions, historical events, and social values—profoundly influence how metaphors are elaborated and interpreted.

In the Uzbek context, Islamic traditions, the experience of life in a semi-arid region, and the historical importance of agriculture and irrigation have shaped distinctive water conceptualizations. For English speakers, maritime history, industrial development, and Western philosophical traditions have contributed to a different set of water metaphors and their associated values. The comparative linguacultural approach adopted in this study systematically examines how these cultural contexts produce both commonalities and divergences in water-based phraseological units.

Phraseological Units: Idioms and Proverbs. Phraseological units, including idioms and proverbs, represent a particularly significant domain for metaphor analysis. As stable, conventionalized expressions, they preserve historical metaphorical mappings and transmit cultural values across generations. Proverbs, in particular, function as condensed repositories of folk wisdom, encoding practical knowledge, moral principles, and cultural attitudes in memorable form.

Following the classification of phraseological units in Uzbek linguistics established by scholars such as Sh. Rahmatullayev, phraseological units are characterized by their semantic integrity, structural stability, and figurative meaning. They may be formed through metaphorical transfer (e.g., "still waters run deep"), metonymic shift, or the conventionalization of vivid imagery from everyday life, religious practice, or natural observation. The water component in such units may appear directly through lexemes such as "water," "river," "sea," or "rain," or indirectly through associated concepts like "flow," "depth," or "flood."

Water Metaphors in English Phraseological Units.

Emotional and Psychological Conceptualizations. In English, water frequently serves as a source domain for conceptualizing emotional states and psychological conditions. Perhaps the most widely recognized example is "still waters run deep," which conceptualizes the calm exterior as potentially concealing profound emotional or intellectual depth. This metaphor draws upon the observable phenomenon of deep water appearing still on the surface, mapping physical stillness onto emotional composure and physical depth onto psychological complexity. The proverb "a calm sea does not make a skilled sailor" extends this conceptualization, suggesting that challenging emotional experiences (turbulent waters) are necessary for personal growth and resilience.

Emotional intensity and difficulty are frequently conceptualized through water metaphors involving danger and submersion. "To be in hot water" or "in deep water" indicates being in trouble or difficulty, mapping the discomfort of hot water and the danger of deep water onto challenging life situations. Similarly, "treading water" metaphorically conveys the sense of struggling to maintain one's position without making progress, drawing upon the physical effort required to stay afloat. The expression "the floodgates have opened" or "caught in the flood" describes overwhelming emotions or situations that exceed one's capacity to manage them, mapping the destructive power of floodwaters onto emotional or situational overwhelm.

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Water metaphors also conceptualize emotional expression and its suppression. "Pouring cold water on" an idea or plan metaphorically extinguishes enthusiasm, mapping the physical effect of cold water on fire onto the damping of emotional or intellectual excitement. The phrase "water under the bridge" employs flowing water to represent past events that cannot be changed or retrieved, conceptualizing time as a flowing stream and past events as objects carried away by the current.

Relationships and Social Dynamics. Water metaphors in English extensively conceptualize human relationships and social bonds. The proverb "blood is thicker than water" uses water as a metaphor for non-familial relationships, suggesting that family ties (blood) are stronger than any other form of social connection. This metaphorical mapping draws upon the viscosity and essential quality of blood versus the more common and less binding nature of water, though the comparative values embedded in this proverb reflect specific cultural attitudes toward kinship.

Social harmony and conflict are also conceptualized through water imagery. "To make waves" means to cause trouble or disturbance in a social setting, mapping physical waves onto social disruption. "Don't muddy the water to catch fish" cautions against using dishonest means to achieve success, conceptualizing moral clarity as clear water and deception as muddy water. This proverb encodes both practical wisdom about fishing in clear versus turbid water and moral teaching about ethical conduct.

In English, "to test the water" metaphorically refers to cautiously exploring a situation before committing to a course of action, mapping the physical act of checking water temperature onto the assessment of social or practical conditions. This conceptualization aligns with broader English metaphors of water as an environment to be navigated carefully, reflecting maritime cultural influences and the need for caution in unfamiliar social waters.

Character and Moral Qualities. English water metaphors often project moral and characterological values onto individuals and their actions. The phrase "down to earth," while primarily an earth metaphor, shares conceptual space with water metaphors emphasizing substance and authenticity over superficiality. Individuals described as "solid" or "grounded" draw upon the stability and reliability of earth and settled water in contrast to the volatility of flood or storm.

The moral dimension of water emerges prominently in expressions like "clean as water" or "pure as water," which conceptualize water's clarity and transparency as metaphors for moral purity and honesty. Conversely, "muddy the waters" indicates making a situation unclear or confusing, mapping the turbidity of muddy water onto intellectual or moral confusion. The proverb "you can't step into the same river twice," attributed to Heraclitus, uses the flowing river to conceptualize the constant change of life and human experience, encoding both observation about nature and philosophical insight about the impossibility of repeating experiences.

Time and Change. The flowing quality of water provides a powerful metaphor for time and change in English. "Time flows" and "time flies" draw upon the perceived movement of water to conceptualize the passage of time. "Water under the bridge" explicitly maps the irreversible flow of water onto the irreversibility of past events. This metaphor not only conveys the idea that the past cannot be changed but also often implies that one should move on from past events, releasing emotional attachment to what has already passed.

The proverb "all rivers run to the sea" conceptualizes the inevitable movement of diverse phenomena toward a common destination or conclusion. This metaphorical mapping can apply to human destiny, the convergence of multiple paths in life, or the ultimate resolution of diverse events in a single outcome. The flow of water thus becomes a source domain for understanding temporal directionality and the pattern of beginnings, middles, and ends.

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Danger and Warning. The destructive potential of water is a significant theme in English water metaphors. "To be in deep water" or "to be out of one's depth" conceptualizes dangerous or overwhelming situations through the literal danger of being unable to swim in deep water. "Don't go near the water" can function literally or as a warning against entering dangerous situations. The expression "beware of still water" extends the conceptualization of danger to situations that appear calm but may conceal risks.

While English shares the "still waters run deep" proverb as a positive conceptualization of hidden depth, the counter-expression "beware of still water" encodes caution against apparent calmness, suggesting that what appears peaceful may actually be dangerous. This dual conceptualization reflects the ambivalent relationship between humans and water, which can be both nurturing and threatening.

Water Metaphors in Uzbek Phraseological Units.

Water as Life and Sacred Resource. In Uzbek culture, water occupies a position of exceptional symbolic importance, deeply influenced by the semi-arid geography of Central Asia and the Islamic religious tradition. The proverb "Suv hayot manbai" ("Water is the source of life") explicitly articulates water's fundamental role in sustaining existence. This conceptualization extends beyond the ecological to the spiritual, reflecting the understanding that water is a gift from the divine and essential to both physical and spiritual purification.

The Uzbek proverb "Suv yo'q joyda hayot yo'q" ("Where there is no water, there is no life") similarly emphasizes water's indispensability, encoding the practical experience of life in a region where water scarcity is a constant concern. The expression "Suvning qadri qurg'oqchilikda bilinadi" ("The value of water is known in drought") articulates a cultural wisdom about appreciating resources when they are scarce, a lesson particularly resonant in water-limited environments. These proverbs reveal a cultural orientation that values water as a precious resource to be conserved and respected, in contrast to water-abundant cultures where water may be taken for granted.

The Islamic practice of wudu (ritual ablution with water before prayer) reinforces water's sacred status and its association with purification. This religious context shapes the metaphorical extension of water purity to spiritual and moral purity. The expression "Suv – hayot manbai" thereby functions not merely as ecological observation but as a recognition of water's divine provision and spiritual significance.

Hospitality, Gratitude, and Reciprocity. The proverb "Suvni ichgan joyingga tupurma" ("Don't spit in the place where you drank water") exemplifies the complex moral dimensions of water metaphors in Uzbek culture. This proverb emphasizes gratitude and respect for those who have provided sustenance or hospitality, drawing upon the Islamic teaching of gratitude toward benefactors. The metaphorical mapping extends from the literal act of receiving water (and thus life) from a source to the moral obligation not to show ingratitude or harm toward that source. The proverb warns against betraying those who have helped one, encoding a cultural value of loyalty and gratitude that is particularly strong in collectivist societies.

The Uzbek proverb "Yerga suyan, elga ishon" ("Rely on the land, trust your people") similarly links natural resources (land and water) with social trust. The conceptualization here combines water (implicit in "yerga suyan," which references cultivation of land requiring water) with human relationships, suggesting that one's ultimate reliance should be on the community and the land that sustains it. This metaphor reflects the agricultural basis of Uzbek society and the interdependence of people and environment.

Emotional and Psychological States. Like English, Uzbek uses water metaphors to conceptualize emotional states, though the specific mappings reflect cultural particularities. The proverb "Sokin suvning tubi chuqur" ("Still water runs deep") appears in Uzbek with essentially the

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same metaphorical meaning as its English counterpart—calmness may conceal depth. This shared metaphor likely reflects universal observations about the relationship between surface appearance and hidden depth, though it may carry cultural connotations of the value of humility and modesty in Uzbek society.

The conceptualization of emotional difficulty in Uzbek draws upon water imagery in ways that reflect environmental experience. The expression "Suvni arang topgan qush" ("A bird that barely finds water") metaphorically represents struggle and scarcity, drawing on the experience of searching for water in a dry environment. This metaphor, less common in English, reflects the specific ecological reality of life in water-scarce Central Asia. It conceptualizes life difficulties as water scarcity, mapping the struggle to find water onto the struggle to survive or thrive in challenging circumstances.

The Uzbek proverb "Suvga tushgan baliq, o'zini bemalol his qiladi" ("A fish in water feels at ease") conceptualizes comfort and naturalness as being in one's element. This metaphor draws upon the observation that a fish is perfectly adapted to water, mapping this onto human experiences of being in environments or situations where one feels naturally comfortable and capable. The expression has both literal applications (feeling comfortable in a familiar environment) and metaphorical extensions (being in one's area of expertise or among one's own people).

Change and Inevitability. The proverb "Suv oqar, tosh qolar" ("Water flows, stones remain") captures the interplay of change and stability in human experience. Water represents that which is changeable, transitory, and flowing, while stones represent that which is permanent, stable, and enduring. This metaphor encodes a worldview that recognizes the inevitability of change while acknowledging that some things endure. The proverb offers both consolation (some things remain despite change) and wisdom (one should accept the transient nature of many things).

"Daryo oqib o'z o'zanini topadi" ("The river flows and finds its own course") similarly conceptualizes natural and inevitable development. This proverb suggests that things will find their proper way or that each person or situation will ultimately reach its appropriate conclusion. The metaphor draws upon the observation that water follows the path of least resistance and that rivers, over time, carve their own channels, mapping this onto the idea of natural and unavoidable development in human affairs.

"Ariq qayerdan chiqsa, o'sha yerdan suv oladi" ("From wherever the canal comes, take water from that place") encodes practical wisdom about knowing and using the source of things. The metaphor extends from the practical knowledge of irrigation to a general principle about identifying and using the proper source of benefits or resources. This proverb reflects the deep agricultural knowledge of Uzbek society and the importance of water management for survival.

Divine Humility and Human Limitation. Uzbek water metaphors frequently convey religious and philosophical perspectives on human limitation and divine power. While less directly water-based than the sky metaphors explored in comparative research, water imagery in Uzbek phraseology participates in a broader conceptual system that emphasizes human dependence on divine provision. The importance of water as a gift from the divine reinforces a worldview of humility and gratitude.

The proverb "Suvni ichgan joyingga tupurma" not only encodes social values of gratitude but also has religious dimensions, as showing disrespect toward benefactors is condemned in Islamic teaching. The metaphorical extension of this principle to divine provision suggests that humans should show gratitude to God for the gift of water and life. This religious grounding distinguishes Uzbek water metaphors from their English counterparts, which more often reflect secular, individualistic, and psychological values.

Social Relations and Community. Uzbek water metaphors emphasize community, cooperation, and social responsibility more strongly than their English counterparts. The centrality of water as a

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shared resource in agricultural societies necessitates cooperation in its management, and this practical reality is encoded in water metaphors. Expressions about sharing water, respecting water sources, and maintaining irrigation channels all carry metaphorical significance about proper social behavior and community values.

The proverb "Suvsizlikdan qurigan bog' va daraxt yashamaydi" ("A garden and tree cannot live without water") explicitly connects water with growth and sustenance. While this proverb functions literally as ecological observation, it carries metaphorical significance about the importance of sustaining relationships and communities. Just as a garden needs water to thrive, a community needs care, cooperation, and resources to flourish. This metaphor reflects the agricultural basis of Uzbek society and the cultural value placed on community support.

Comparative Analysis: Common Patterns and Cultural Divergences.

Universal Metaphorical Mappings. The comparative analysis reveals several water metaphors that are shared across English and Uzbek, suggesting universal cognitive patterns grounded in shared human embodiment and environmental experience. The mapping STILLNESS HIDES DEPTH, instantiated in "still waters run deep" and its Uzbek equivalent "Sokin suvning tubi chuqur," appears in both languages with essentially identical conceptual structure and meaning. This shared metaphor likely reflects the universal observation that what appears calm on the surface may have hidden depth, a pattern that has been elaborated independently in multiple languages.

Similarly, the conceptual mapping WATER FLOW REPRESENTS TIME PASSING appears in both languages. In English, "water under the bridge" and in Uzbek, "Oqqan suvga qaytma" ("Don't return to water that has flowed") both use flowing water to represent the irreversibility of the past. This shared metaphor likely reflects the universal observation of water's unidirectional flow and its analogy to the experienced flow of time. The Heraclitean insight captured in "you can't step into the same river twice" also has parallels in Uzbek proverbs about the transience of water and experience.

The conceptual mapping WATER IS LIFE is another shared metaphor, though it is elaborated differently in the two languages. Both English ("water is life") and Uzbek ("Suv hayot manbai") explicitly articulate the life-sustaining function of water. However, the cultural elaboration of this metaphor reveals significant differences, with Uzbek emphasizing the sacred and communal dimensions of water as life source and English emphasizing more practical and individualistic aspects.

Cultural Divergences in Metaphorical Elaboration. The most striking differences between English and Uzbek water metaphors relate to the cultural contexts that shape their elaboration. Three major dimensions of divergence emerge from the comparative analysis: ecological, religious, and social-structural.

Ecological differences are particularly prominent. Uzbek water metaphors frequently reflect life in a water-scarce environment, where water must be conserved, shared, and carefully managed. Proverbs like "Suvning qadri qurg'oqchilikda bilinadi" ("The value of water is known in drought") and "Suvni arang topgan qush" ("A bird that barely finds water") encode the experience of water scarcity. These metaphors are less prominent in English, reflecting the generally more water-abundant environment of the British Isles and the maritime orientation of English culture. English water metaphors more frequently draw upon seafaring imagery ("in deep water," "treading water," "all rivers run to the sea"), reflecting a maritime cultural heritage.

Social-structural differences reflect the collectivist orientation of Uzbek culture versus the individualistic orientation of English-speaking societies. Uzbek water metaphors emphasize community, cooperation, gratitude, and social responsibility. Proverbs like "Suvni ichgan joyingga tupurma" encode the value of gratitude toward benefactors and the community. The proverb "Suvga tushgan baliq, o'zini bemalol his qiladi" emphasizes being in harmony with one's social environment,

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reflecting the cultural value of fitting into the community. English water metaphors more often emphasize individual experience, personal challenge, and psychological insight, reflecting Western cultural individualism.

Semantic Fields and Conceptual Domains. The comparative analysis reveals different patterns of semantic organization across the two languages. In English, water metaphors are extensively elaborated across multiple conceptual domains including emotion (still waters run deep), character (deep as water), danger (in deep water), social relations (blood is thicker than water), and time (water under the bridge). Each domain is served by a range of expressions that draw upon different properties of water—its depth, flow, clarity, temperature, and behavior.

In Uzbek, water metaphors are similarly elaborated across domains but with different emphases and conceptual priorities. The domains of life and sustenance, gratitude and social reciprocity, and natural inevitability are particularly prominent. Uzbek water metaphors more systematically encode practical knowledge about water management, reflecting agricultural experience, and moral teachings about proper conduct, reflecting Islamic values. While both languages use water to conceptualize emotions, the specific emotional mappings differ. English emphasizes emotional depth and intensity (still waters run deep, in deep water), while Uzbek emphasizes comfort versus struggle (Suvga tushgan baliq, Suvni arang topgan qush).

The Role of Metaphor in Cultural Cognition. The comparative analysis demonstrates how water metaphors serve as carriers of cultural cognition, encoding values, beliefs, and worldview in conventionalized linguistic forms. In Uzbek culture, water metaphors encode ecological wisdom about resource conservation, religious values about gratitude and purification, and social values about community responsibility. The prevalence of water metaphors emphasizing gratitude toward benefactors reflects the importance of social reciprocity in collectivist Uzbek society. The sacred connotations of water reflect the integration of Islamic spirituality with everyday life.

In English culture, water metaphors encode psychological insight about hidden depth, practical wisdom about navigating challenges, and social observations about relationships. The prominence of water metaphors emphasizing individual challenge and risk reflects Western cultural preoccupations with individual achievement, personal responsibility, and self-determination. The relatively secular character of English water metaphors reflects the historical secularization of Western European societies and the cultural emphasis on psychological rather than religious explanations of human experience.

Implications for Translation and Intercultural Communication. The comparative analysis has significant implications for translation studies and intercultural communication. As Hafizov (2025) has demonstrated, translating phraseological units presents particular challenges because their meaning is not compositional and may not have direct equivalents in the target language. Water metaphors in particular may resist direct translation because their conceptual mappings are embedded in cultural schemas and value systems.

For translation between English and Uzbek, three strategies are commonly employed. Literal translation may preserve the image but not the meaning, as when "in deep water" is translated literally, potentially conveying the wrong sense. Equivalent substitution involves finding a phrase in the target language with similar meaning, even if it uses a different source domain. Descriptive translation explains the meaning when no equivalent exists. For Uzbek water metaphors like "Suvni ichgan joyingga tupurma," a descriptive translation must convey both the literal meaning and the cultural value of gratitude toward benefactors.

For language educators, understanding the metaphorical differences between English and Uzbek water metaphors is essential for effective teaching. Rather than treating phraseological units as fixed

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expressions to be memorized, educators can help students understand the conceptual mappings and cultural contexts that produce metaphorical meanings. This approach develops not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness and metaphorical thinking skills.

For intercultural communication, awareness of metaphor differences can prevent misunderstanding. An English speaker who uses "still waters run deep" in conversation with an Uzbek speaker may find that the proverb has similar meaning but different cultural resonance, with the Uzbek version carrying stronger connotations of modesty and hidden depth. Conversely, an Uzbek speaker who uses a water metaphor about community responsibility may find that the English listener does not fully grasp the cultural weight of the expression.

Conclusion. The metaphorical phenomenon in phraseological units with the water component in English and Uzbek reveals both universal patterns of human cognition and culturally specific elaborations shaped by distinct ecological, religious, and social contexts. The shared metaphors that appear in both languages—such as the mapping of still water onto hidden depth and flowing water onto passing time—reflect common human experiences and cognitive patterns that transcend linguistic boundaries. These universal metaphors attest to the embodied nature of human cognition and the fundamental importance of water in human experience across cultures.

At the same time, the culturally specific elaborations of water metaphors in each language demonstrate the profound influence of context on metaphorical thinking. In Uzbek, water metaphors encode ecological wisdom about resource conservation in a semi-arid environment, religious values about divine provision and purification in an Islamic cultural context, and social values about community responsibility and gratitude in a collectivist society. In English, water metaphors encode psychological insight about emotional depth and challenge, practical wisdom about navigating life's difficulties, and social observations about relationships in an individualistic, secular society.

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