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CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF LABOUR IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A CROSS-CULTURAL COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This study investigates the conceptual metaphors underlying the verbalization of the LABOUR/MEHNAT concept in English and Uzbek phraseological units. Using the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, the article identifies dominant metaphorical mappings in both languages and analyzes their cultural motivations. The analysis reveals that English predominantly conceptualizes labour as a struggle, burden, and economic investment, while Uzbek conceptualizes it as a moral seed, spiritual parent, and collective foundation. These differences reflect broader cultural orientations toward individualism and collectivism.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, labour, mehnat, cross-cultural analysis, English, Uzbek, cognitive semantics, phraseology

Conceptual metaphor theory, as developed by Lakoff and Johnson, posits that abstract concepts are understood through mappings from concrete, embodied experiences. The concept of labour, being one of the most fundamental human activities, is richly metaphorized in every language. However, the specific metaphors chosen by a linguistic community are not arbitrary; they are motivated by cultural values, historical experiences, and environmental conditions.

This article compares the conceptual metaphors of labour in English and Uzbek idioms, arguing that metaphorical differences reflect deeper cultural divergences between Anglo-Saxon individualism and Uzbek collectivist spirituality.

The study employs qualitative analysis of idiomatic expressions collected from English and Uzbek dictionaries, corpora, and folk proverb collections. The metaphors are categorized according to source domains, and their frequency and cultural salience are evaluated.

LABOUR IS A STRUGGLE: "I'm battling through this project," "Break one's back," "Swim against the tide." These metaphors emphasize difficulty, resistance, and the need for individual perseverance.

LABOUR IS A BURDEN: "She carries a heavy workload," "The weight of responsibility," "A millstone around one's neck." These expressions conceptualize labour as something heavy and oppressive that the individual must bear.

LABOUR IS AN ECONOMIC INVESTMENT: "Invest time in," "Reap the benefits," "You get what you pay for." These metaphors reflect the commodification of labour in capitalist economies.

LABOUR IS A MACHINE: "Running like clockwork," "Well-oiled machine," "Gear up for work." These industrial metaphors reflect the mechanization of work in industrialized societies.

LABOUR IS A SEED: "Mehnat tagi rohat" (Under labour is comfort/fruit), "Mehnat — ota, rohat — bola" (Labour is the father, comfort is the child). These metaphors reflect the agrarian worldview where labour is planting that yields future harvest.

LABOUR IS A MORAL PARENT: "Mehnat insonni ulug'laydi" (Labour ennobles a person), "Mehnat — hayotning asosi" (Labour is the foundation of life). Labour is personified as a generative, nurturing force that creates moral character.

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LABOUR IS A SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION: "Halol mehnat" (honest labour), "Mehnat qilgan kam bo'lmaydi" (One who works lacks nothing [spiritually]). These metaphors frame labour as a means of achieving spiritual integrity and communal respect.

LABOUR IS COLLECTIVE FOUNDATION: "Qo'l birlasha, ish bitar" (When hands unite, work is done), "Davlat qochar, mehnat quvar" (Wealth flees, labour pursues [and catches it together]). These metaphors emphasize communal effort.

The predominance of struggle and burden metaphors in English can be traced to the historical experience of industrialization, the Protestant work ethic with its emphasis on individual suffering as a path to salvation, and the competitive capitalist economy. Labour is conceptualized as an individual challenge to be overcome.

In contrast, Uzbek labour metaphors are motivated by centuries of agricultural communal life in the oases of Central Asia, where collective irrigation and harvest required cooperation. Islamic ethics, which emphasize community welfare (umma) and the moral virtue of honest work, further reinforce the spiritual and collective framing of labour. The Soviet emphasis on labour as a social duty also contributed to the collectivist metaphorical system.

The conceptual metaphor analysis reveals that English and Uzbek cultures construct radically different cognitive models of labour. English metaphors individualize and economize labour, while Uzbek metaphors collectivize and spiritualize it. These findings have significant implications for translation studies, intercultural communication, and language pedagogy, as they demonstrate that equivalent lexical items may activate incompatible conceptual frameworks.

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