



METAPHORICAL AND CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF INTELLIGENCE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK PHRASEOLOGY

Gulchexra Tursunova Norboboyevna

Senior Teacher. Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Tashkent, Uzbekistan. guli2578@mail.ru

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17473111>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 24th October 2025

Accepted: 28th October 2025

Online: 29th October 2025

KEYWORDS

Metaphor, phraseology, intelligence, cognition, culture, conceptual, comparative analysis.

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes metaphorical and conceptual models of intelligence in English and Uzbek phraseology. It identifies dominant metaphors such as sharpness, light, motion, balance, and emptiness based on idioms from both languages. The study reveals that while English idioms emphasize rational speed and creativity, Uzbek idioms connect intellect with moral harmony and spiritual illumination. These differences reflect universal cognitive mechanisms shaped by distinct cultural values.

Introduction

Metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of human cognition that allows abstract phenomena to be understood through concrete experience. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors “structure not only language but also thought itself” (5). The concept of intelligence—an abstract mental capacity—is particularly rich in metaphorical representation. Phraseological units (PUs), as stable figurative expressions, vividly demonstrate how different cultures conceptualize the mind, intellect, and understanding.

English and Uzbek idioms contain a wide range of expressions describing human intelligence, wit, and foolishness. These idioms reveal conceptual models rooted in cultural experience and embodied cognition. While English tends to portray intelligence as *brightness, sharpness, or movement*, Uzbek connects intellect with *moral light, balance, and depth*. Studying these metaphorical models highlights how culture shapes cognitive categories and linguistic imagery.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the metaphorical and conceptual models that underlie the representation of intelligence in English and Uzbek phraseology. The study aims to identify dominant conceptual metaphors, reveal their cognitive motivation, and compare cultural differences in idiomatic imagery. The hypothesis is that both languages share universal metaphorical bases—such as *INTELLIGENCE IS LIGHT* and *INTELLIGENCE IS SHARPNESS*—but differ in evaluative, emotional, and moral framing, reflecting distinct cultural worldviews.

Methods

The research employs a comparative cognitive-linguistic methodology. The data sources are *Inglizcha-O'zbekcha Idiomalar Lug'ati* by A. L. Yusupov (2014) and *English-*



Russian Phraseological Dictionary by A. V. Kunin (1984). From these dictionaries, idioms related to mental capacity, intellectual ability, and reasoning were selected for analysis.

Each idiom was categorized according to its underlying conceptual metaphor following the model proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). The main analytical procedures included:

1. Identifying the source domain (physical, visual, material, etc.) used to describe intellect.
2. Interpreting the metaphorical mapping between source and target domains.
3. Comparing English and Uzbek idioms to determine culture-specific realizations of shared metaphors.

Tables within the *Results* section present English idioms alongside their Uzbek equivalents and explanations, preserving Yusupov's original Uzbek definitions. The comparative analysis emphasizes conceptual similarities and cultural distinctions.

Results

The study revealed five dominant metaphorical and conceptual models of intelligence in English and Uzbek phraseology:

1. Intelligence as Sharpness and Cutting
2. Intelligence as Light and Vision
3. Intelligence as Movement and Speed
4. Intelligence as Balance and Harmony
5. Lack of Intelligence as Emptiness or Animality

Each model reflects both universal cognitive principles and culture-specific nuances.

1. Intelligence as Sharpness and Cutting

This metaphor conceptualizes intellect as the ability to “cut through” problems or perceive quickly. The physical experience of sharpness is mapped onto mental precision.

English Idiom	Source	Uzbek Equivalent & Explanation	Conceptual Meaning
As sharp as a tack	Yusupov 16	<i>o'ta aqli, zukko, o'tkir</i>	Intelligence as sharp perception and quick reaction.
Keen mind	Kunin K section	<i>zehni o'tkir, hushyor</i>	Mental acuteness equals physical keenness.
Bright spark	Kunin B section	<i>ziyrak, chaqqon odam</i>	Combines metaphors of sharpness and light.
Zehni o'tkir	Yusupov	<i>tez fahmlovchi, zukko</i>	Universal image of cutting intellect.
Aqli o'tkir yigit	Yusupov	<i>donolik va aql egasi bo'lgan erkak</i>	Reflects social respect for rational male intellect.

Table 1. Intelligence as sharpness in English and Uzbek idioms

Both languages equate “sharp” with quick understanding. Yet in English, sharpness often suggests competitiveness or individual skill, whereas in Uzbek, it symbolizes inner



wisdom and clarity. The Uzbek adjective *o'tkir* not only means “keen” but also implies moral strength, showing the unity of intellect and virtue.

2. Intelligence as Light and Vision

The metaphor *INTELLIGENCE IS LIGHT* derives from visual perception: to understand is to “see.” This model connects mental clarity with illumination, revealing truth and wisdom.

English Idiom	Source	Uzbek Equivalent & Explanation	Conceptual Meaning
See the light	Yusupov 20	<i>tushuna boshlamoq, anglamoq, yetib bormoq</i>	Understanding is illumination.
Bright mind	Kunin B section	<i>yorqin aql egasi</i>	Brilliance of intellect visualized as brightness.
Light bulb moment	Kunin	<i>birdan tushungan fikr, yoritilgan g'oya</i>	Instant illumination of thought.
Aql nuri bilan yo'l topmoq	Yusupov	<i>aql yo'l ko'rsatadi, hayot yo'lini yoritadi</i>	Intellect as guiding light, moralized in Uzbek culture.
Aql charog'oni	Yusupov	<i>aqlni nur bilan ifodalovchi obraz</i>	Sacred metaphor: knowledge as divine light.

Table 2. Intelligence as light in English and Uzbek idioms

Both English and Uzbek conceptualize knowledge as light, but the cultural implications differ. English idioms often represent creativity and sudden insight, reflecting pragmatic problem-solving. Uzbek idioms, however, connect light with moral purity and faith, aligning intelligence with ethical behavior and spiritual awareness.

3. Intelligence as Movement and Speed

This metaphor maps mental activity onto physical motion or quickness. A “fast thinker” or “quick-witted” person is metaphorically mobile, capable of rapid cognitive movement.

Table 3. Intelligence as motion or speed

English Idiom	Source	Uzbek Equivalent & Explanation	Conceptual Meaning
Quick on the uptake	Kunin Q section	<i>tez anglaydigan, fahmlovchi</i>	Thinking as fast movement.
Fast thinker	Kunin F section	<i>chaqqon fikrlovchi</i>	Cognitive agility.
Smart cookie	Kunin	<i>zirak, aqli joyida inson</i>	Mental flexibility in practical contexts.
Chaqqon aql	Yusupov	<i>tez fikrlovchi, ziyrak</i>	Emphasizes reaction speed rather than depth.

English idioms in this group reflect industrial-age values of speed and efficiency. In contrast, Uzbek idioms, though acknowledging quickness, tend to prefer balanced wisdom over impulsive thought. Excessive mental haste may even be viewed negatively, suggesting lack of deliberation.



4. Intelligence as Balance and Harmony

Distinctive to Uzbek culture is the metaphor *INTELLIGENCE IS BALANCE*. Intellect is conceptualized not merely as logical power but as equilibrium between mind, heart, and morality.

Table 4. Metaphor of balance and harmony

Idiom	Language	Source	Uzbek Explanation	Conceptual Meaning
Aql bilan yurakni uyg'un tutmoq	Uzbek	Yusupov	<i>aql va his-tuyg'ularni uyg'unlikda saqlash</i>	Wisdom requires harmony of reason and emotion.
Boshing bilan o'yla	Uzbek	Yusupov	<i>o'ylab ish qil, shoshma</i>	Rational deliberation as control.
To keep a cool head	English	Kunin K section	<i>sokin, o'zini yo'qotmaydigan odam</i>	Rational balance under stress.
Clear head	English	Kunin C section	<i>aniq fikrli, xotirjam aql egasi</i>	Calm and balanced reasoning.

Here, both languages converge conceptually: a clear or cool head symbolizes emotional regulation as a component of intelligence. However, Uzbek idioms explicitly integrate the heart (*yurak*), highlighting Eastern holistic thinking. English idioms remain more psychologically neutral, focusing on rational self-control.

5. Lack of Intelligence as Emptiness or Animality

Idioms describing foolishness reveal opposite conceptual mappings. Mental deficiency is expressed through metaphors of *emptiness*, *heaviness*, or *animal instinct*.

Table 5. Metaphors of foolishness and mental emptiness

English Idiom	Source	Uzbek Equivalent & Explanation	Conceptual Meaning
Empty head	Kunin E section	<i>bo'shbosh, miyasi yo'q odam</i>	Mind as empty container.
Feather-brained / bird-brained	Yusupov 23	<i>miyasi kichkina, yengil fikrli</i>	Lightness equals lack of depth.
Thick-headed	Kunin T section	<i>qattiq boshli, aqlsiz</i>	Heaviness equals dullness.
Aqlsiz echki	Uzbek	Yusupov	<i>ahmoq, o'ylamay ish qiladigan odam</i>
Miyasi suv bo'lgan	Uzbek	Yusupov	<i>ahmoq, beaql kishi</i>

These idioms rely on embodied experiences: empty space, heavy mass, or animal behavior symbolize absence of rational control. English uses humor and irony, while Uzbek idioms often include moral judgment, reflecting the link between intellect and ethical behavior.

Discussion



The comparative analysis demonstrates that English and Uzbek phraseology share universal metaphorical foundations for conceptualizing intelligence, yet the emotional and moral nuances diverge significantly.

1. **Universality of Conceptual Metaphors.** Both languages employ sensory-based schemas—vision, touch, motion—to conceptualize cognition. Models like *SHARPNESS* and *LIGHT* are grounded in universal embodied experience. As Kövecses notes, “Metaphors of perception and movement structure the conceptualization of thinking across cultures” (141).

2. **Cultural Specificity.** In English, intelligence is associated with efficiency, speed, and creativity—qualities tied to Western rationalism and individual achievement. Idioms such as “quick on the uptake” or “bright spark” emphasize pragmatic problem-solving. Uzbek phraseology integrates intellect with ethics and collective wisdom: “aql bilan yurakni uyg'un tutmoq” or “aql nuri bilan yo'l topmoq” combine cognitive and spiritual domains. This difference corresponds to contrasting cultural orientations: individualism versus collectivism, rationality versus morality.

3. **Evaluation and Moral Dimension.** While English idioms tend to be descriptive or humorous, Uzbek idioms frequently carry evaluative and moral undertones. Lack of intellect is condemned not only as incompetence but as irresponsibility or moral failure. The expression *aqlsiz echki* portrays foolishness as socially and ethically undesirable, whereas English *bird-brained* functions as a light insult.

4. **Gender Neutrality and Cultural Shift.** Unlike the earlier article's focus on gendered idioms, this study notes that most metaphorical models of intelligence are now gender-neutral in contemporary English and Uzbek usage. Expressions like “smart cookie” or “aql nuri” apply to both men and women. However, historical usage still reflected gender bias, as seen in idioms like “dumb blonde.” The shift toward neutrality reflects broader societal change and modernization.

5. **Cognitive Motivation.** From a cognitive standpoint, metaphors of intelligence emerge from bodily and perceptual experience. Sharpness relates to touch, light to vision, speed to motion, and emptiness to spatial containment. The convergence of these metaphors in unrelated languages confirms Lakoff and Johnson's theory that human cognition is metaphorically structured by shared sensory grounding (Lakoff and Johnson 112).

6. **Cultural Implications for Translation and Education.** Translating idioms across English and Uzbek requires awareness of conceptual metaphors and cultural meanings. Literal translation may distort pragmatic sense. For instance, *light bulb moment* cannot be rendered as *chiroq lahzasi* but should be adapted to *birdan tushungan fikr*. In teaching, awareness of metaphorical models can help learners grasp idioms conceptually, not mechanically.

Overall, metaphorical analysis shows that both linguistic systems interpret intelligence through embodied experience but contextualize it within differing cultural and moral frameworks. English metaphorically celebrates intellect as active energy, while Uzbek sanctifies it as moral illumination.

Conclusion



The study of metaphorical and conceptual models of intelligence in English and Uzbek phraseology demonstrates that idioms encapsulate complex cognitive and cultural meanings. Despite universal metaphors such as *INTELLIGENCE IS LIGHT* and *INTELLIGENCE IS SHARPNESS*, each culture interprets them through its own moral and philosophical lens.

English phraseology emphasizes speed, clarity, and creativity—attributes of individual rationalism. Uzbek phraseology highlights moral harmony, balance, and spiritual enlightenment—reflecting the collective, ethical orientation of Eastern thought. The conceptual opposition between *quick mind* and *wise heart* captures the difference between Western analytic and Eastern holistic cognition.

These findings confirm that phraseological metaphors serve as linguistic evidence of cognitive universals shaped by culture. Understanding them deepens intercultural competence and enriches linguistic education. Future research may explore corpus-based frequency or the evolution of new metaphors of intellect in digital discourse.

References:

1. Cameron, Deborah. *Gender and Language: Theory and Practice*. Routledge, 2003.
2. Dobrovol'skij, Dmitrij, and Elisabeth Piirainen. *Figurative Language: Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Perspectives*. Elsevier, 2005.
3. Kövecses, Zoltán. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
4. Kunin, A. V. *English–Russian Phraseological Dictionary*. Moscow: Russkiy Yazyk, 1984.
5. Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.
6. Lakoff, George. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.
7. Yusupov, A. L. *Inglizcha–O'zbekcha Idiomalar Lug'ati*. Tashkent: O'zbekiston Davlat Jahon Tillari Universiteti, 2014.
8. Wierzbicka, Anna. *Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words*. Oxford University Press, 1997.