

Principles Forming the Cognitive Mechanism of Figurative Expressions in the Uzbek Language

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ABSTRACT

In modern linguistics, language is investigated through the human factor, speech acts, and communicative situations. A figurative expression represents a secondary naming unit, reflecting a cognitive process resulting from the processing of knowledge about the world within human perception. All linguistic units emerging in language are intrinsically connected to human perception, the prism of imagination, and memory. Rather than expressing meaning directly, a figurative expression acts as an indirect speech unit that engages the listener's attention, prompts logical thinking, and encourages reasoning based on personal experience. An individual's attitude toward any object, reality, or phenomenon varies under the influence of existing knowledge, interest, age, environment, potential, and mood, all of which manifest in language.

For instance, while a stone statue may be viewed as a simple historical object by some, it is perceived as a work of art by others, a meaningless monument by someone else, or a valuable artifact revealing craftsmanship to a sculptor. Thus, as humans live in reality, their perceptions remain unique and non-identical. This phenomenon is especially prominent in figurative expressions. When examined through the lens of cognitive linguistics, figurative expressions are studied not merely for their linguistic manifestation, but for how they are generated in the mind and the communicative purpose they serve. Figurative expressions can be analyzed both within and

outside the language system. They are not limited to the speech of a single professional group; rather, a single concept can be referred to via various secondary naming units across different domains. For example, a "king of the kitchen" is a knife to a chef, while a "cold weapon" is a tool to an assassin. Although both secondary names refer to the same physical object, the cognitive approach varies according to profession.

Nothing in our surrounding reality exists in isolation; elements are invariably connected as an integrated whole across time and space. Concepts and perceptions are organized within the human mind's knowledge system accordingly. For instance, the concept of an "apple" cannot be understood in isolation from orchards, leaves, stems, blossoms, buds, saplings, other fruit varieties, and personal life experiences associated with the fruit. Figurative expressions in language emerge precisely as the cumulative result of such knowledge and experience.

Keywords: Cognitive mechanism, secondary naming, memory, thinking, imagination, conceptuality, principle, figurative expression.

INTRODUCTION

In cognitive linguistics, figurative expressions are interpreted not merely as peripheral shades of word meaning, but as products of human thought, world-view, and physical embodiment. Linguist George Lakoff demonstrated through various examples that the majority of metaphors in human speech arise by mapping abstract concepts onto physical activities. A parallel phenomenon occurs in figurative expressions. A figurative expression represents the culmination of human experiences, generated via an integrative database within our knowledge structures. This knowledge is apprehended through physical bodily sensations and subsequently transferred into language.

A fundamental breakthrough introduced by G. Lakoff to linguistics is the concept of embodied cognition, which underlies all types of comparison. Linguistic concepts take shape and manifest in language precisely because human beings possess

physical bodies. For instance, while "cold weather" or "cold water" refers to physical temperature or beverages, a "cold remark" (*sovuq gap*) transfers an abstract psychological state – where coldness is metaphorically experienced through the human body – into language based on empirical interaction.

Another prominent linguist, Geoffrey Leech, introduced pivotal ideas leading to the establishment of “cognitive stylistics.” He formulated the theory of “foregrounding” and its underlying cognitive mechanism. Foregrounding systematized how linguistic units attract attention through unconventional usage within a text. Although figurative expressions originate on the basis of comparison in cognitive linguistics, they are governed by the principles of precision and relevance. Linguistic phenomena linked to human perception manifest in speech; prior to articulation, the conceptual database within human imagination interacts dynamically with real-world experience, culminating in cognitive conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In world linguistics, secondary naming units differing from ordinary words were first discussed by Aristotle and Quintilian (Ilina 1954: 24). Later, in the 1950s, figurative expressions were partially examined in the scientific works of I. I. Ilina, V.P. Utkina, Charles Bally, V. G. Kostomarov, V. N. Telia, Yu. N. Karaulov, A. B. Novikov, O. S. Issers, A. N. Baranov, and M. N. Kozhin. Figurative units tied to folk language, journalistic discourse, and literary texts served as primary research objects.

Although G. Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* does not explicitly categorize "figurative expressions" under that exact terminology, it thoroughly investigates the cognitive principles of metaphor and their grounding in physical activity. In Uzbek linguistics, R. Kungurov defined figurative expression generally as: "A stylistic method of expressing an entity figuratively rather than by its proper name" (Kungurov 1977: 43).

Scholars such as E. Begmatov, I. Yuldoshev, R. Rasulov, H. Shamsiddinov, D. Aytboyev, and I. Umirov provided scientific

foundations for studying figurative expressions. I. Umirov analyzed figurative expressions through the terms “periphrasis” and “paraphrase,” approaching them partially from a cognitive perspective in a monographic study. Umirov emphasized that figurative expressions involve the re-conceptualization of the world, logical reasoning, and puzzle-like encoding. He noted that while figurative expressions frequently belong to the noun category and resemble idioms formally, idioms function as language units, whereas figurative expressions operate as speech units. Examples cited include: “wound of society” for criminals; “crown of all crafts” for science/skill; “temple of knowledge” for school; “toilers of science” for scientists; “crown of creation” for humans; “blue fire” for gas; “tears of the sky” for rain; and “silver fiber” for cocoons (Umirov 1996: 1350. H. Shamsiddinov observed that functional-semantic synonyms range from individual words to simple and compound sentences, exhibiting free, periphrastic, or phraseological structures (Shamsiddinov 1995: 67].

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the cognitive mechanisms generating figurative expressions in the Uzbek language and the governing principles behind them. The research object comprises existing figurative expressions in Uzbek, public media, and communicative discourse. Secondary naming is analyzed as a product of human cognitive word-processing mechanisms. From a cognitive standpoint, figurative expressions emerge based on the principles of “accuracy” and “relevance,” which serve as foundational pillars of the cognitive mechanism.

The **principle of relevance** dictates that accumulated data within human knowledge is compared and generalized, yielding a novel hybrid construct. This process operates via internal and external associative links. A single figurative expression packs multiple layers of information, from which a single salient lexical item is selected to bear the informational load. For example, within the abstract concept of “knowledge” (*bilim*), several cognitive elements are embedded: life experiences acquired by

an individual, specialized fields mastered through study, problem-solving strategies, accumulated historical data, and theoretical-practical applications. Conversely, *maskan* (temple/abode) denotes a concrete spatial concept of dwelling. The distinction between a figurative expression and a simple simile lies in its directional movement: rather than proceeding from the unknown to the known, it moves from the concrete to the abstract, revitalizing bodily sensations stored in memory to generate a novel hybrid concept.

Figurative expressions entrenched as language units exist in a static state – ready-made linguistic molds and norms available to speakers and listeners. For instance, "white gold" (cotton) is universally understood; due to frequent use, it functions as prefabricated linguistic material requiring no active cognitive reconstruction by the listener. Conversely, novel expressions remain dynamic. Through human interaction with reality, new experiences continuously populate memory, reshaping conceptual output.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Principles generating figurative expressions

Figurative expressions concretize abstract, complex, and emotionally perceived phenomena. For instance, "conscience" represents an internal emotional and psychological state. Denoting it purely through literal terminology yields an abstract concept. Although everyone understands conscience as an internal state, secondary naming mechanisms are deployed not merely for aesthetic ornamentation, but to sharpen and clarify the abstract concept. As noted in the press: "May the fortress of the heart remain vigilant" (*Hordiq* 2026: 32), where "fortress of the heart" metaphorically denotes conscience.

G. Lakoff and M. Johnson categorize metaphors into ontological, orientational, and structural types. Ontological metaphors project physical human activity onto abstract domains to clarify purpose (e.g., inflation rates rose, prices climbed). Humans experience reality physically and map physiological

actions onto abstract processes to direct thought precisely. Similarly, orientational metaphors utilize spatial coordinates (up, down, front, back, inside) to conceptualize abstract emotional states (e.g., “his pain is bottled inside, his anger is on the tip of his nose”).

Thus, figurative expressions operate on the **principle of accuracy**, capturing abstract realities via concrete entities. Secondary naming applied to proper names conveys biographical or historical essence, ensuring effortless comprehension between interlocutors (e.g., the First Teacher – Aristotle; Sultan of Gazals – Alisher Navoi; Singer of Love – Mashrab; Great Physician – Avicenna; Second Teacher – Al-Farabi).

Furthermore, cultural framing influences cognitive conceptualization. While universal archetypes exist (e.g., unidentified flying objects, iron lady), cultural environments shape categorization. For example, the concept of a “holy book” evokes distinct mental representations across religious traditions (Quran for Muslims, Torah for Jews and Christians), demonstrating how mentality influences linguistic manifestation.

The Principle of Relevance

Figurative expressions involve internal and external relevance. **Internal relevance** denotes conceptual and semantic bonding, whereas **external relevance** signifies formal/visual resemblance. For example, in calling a butterfly the “living decoration of nature”, its decorative patterns represent external relevance, while its insect nature represents internal relevance. Similarly, in “white gold” (cotton), the white color corresponds to external resemblance, while its high economic value equivalent to precious metals constitutes internal relevance.

Conceptuality in figurative expressions

Figurative expressions exhibit a high degree of **conceptuality** – mental structures and reasoning models deeper and broader than literal linguistic forms. To measure conceptual variation, an empirical experiment was conducted among 50 adolescents (aged 16-17) presented with decontextualized figurative prompts. Their written responses revealed cohesive yet unique associations.

Below is the structured data chart and table representing the experimental findings translated into English:

Table 1. *Empirical findings on conceptual variations of figurative expressions (Expressed as percentages of participants' responses)*

Figurative Expression	Category 1 (10–12%)	Category 2 (13–15%)	Category 3 (15–20%)	Category 4 (25–40%)
Temple of knowledge (<i>Bilim maskani</i>)	Training center	University	School	School, University
Wound of society (<i>Jamiyatning yarasi</i>)	Criminal	Prostitute, Thief	Corruption, Unemployment	Ignorance, Laziness
Crown of all crafts (<i>Barcha hunarning toji</i>)	Intellect	Perception	Knowledge	Potential, Mind
Gymnastics of mind (<i>Aql gimnastikasi</i>)	Chess	Riddle, Puzzle	Crossword	Mental arithmetic
Source of knowledge (<i>Bilim bulog'i</i>)	Logic	Science	Book	School
Scourge of nature (<i>Tabiatning kushandasi</i>)	Wild animals	Poachers	Humanity	Immoral people
Ruler of creation (<i>Mayjudotlar sultoni</i>)	Human	God	Adam	Humanity
Supreme blessing (<i>Oliy ne'mat</i>)	Child	Consciousness	Language	Mind, Wisdom
Guardian of the heart (<i>Qalb posboni</i>)	Faith	Belief	Conscience	Trust
Fortress of intellect (<i>Aql qo'rg'oni</i>)	Thought	Cognition	Mind / Reflection	Perception
School of life (<i>Hayot maktopi</i>)	Family	Hardship	Street	Domestic life
Sacred place (<i>Tabarruk joy</i>)	Mosque	Mecca and Medina	Cemetery	Mosque, Mecca & Medina
Tranquility of heart (<i>Qalb sokinligi</i>)	Peace	Serenity	Tranquility	Honesty

Supreme judge (<i>Oliy hakam</i>)	Time	Moment	God	Conscience, Heart
Adornment of speech (<i>So'z ko'rki</i>)	Meaning	Proverb, Idiom	Exemplary word	Metaphorical word

The research results indicate that figurative expressions reflect human cognitive products, individual worldviews, accumulated knowledge reserves, and cognitive appraisal systems stored in memory. The data in memory is re-processed within figurative expressions and realized through knowledge bases. Each participant's response aligns with the given figurative prompt. A single absolute response cannot capture a figurative expression because it is a speech unit.

Certain expressions have stabilized into language units (e.g., “white gold” for cotton, “black gold” for oil/coal). Initially novel, these units became conventionalized through repeated speech acts and are now stored as prefabricated linguistic items in human memory. Today, these units are universally recognized and require no active mental reconstruction by listeners. Figurative expressions remain dynamic and evolving; as individuals acquire new world knowledge and experiences, their cognitive structures continuously reshape linguistic expressions.

CONCLUSION

As illustrated in the data above, figurative expressions are anchored in human experiential knowledge. Every participant's answer, intention, and semantic framing aligned with the essence of figurative language. For instance, the prompt "wound of society" evoked diverse interpretations: crime, unemployment, prostitution, corruption, human trafficking, ignorance, and economic crisis. Just as a physical wound causes bodily pain, these social ills impede societal development – each logically grounded and posing a real social threat.

Conceptuality provides human thought with mental frameworks far richer than surface linguistic strings. By bridging human cognition, memory, physical embodiment, and culture,

figurative expressions construct systematic mental landscapes. Consequently, they transcend ordinary words, serving as mirrors of internalized frames and cognitive structures developed throughout human life.

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