

Cognitive Linguistics of the “Life/Ómir – Death/Ólim” Conceptual Dyad in English and Karakalpak Worldviews

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to a comprehensive cognitive-discursive and contrastive analysis of the conceptual dyad “Life/Ómir-Death/Ólim” as a fundamental ontological category in English and Karakalpak linguistic worldviews. On the basis of the cognitive approach, we investigate how these existential phenomena interact not merely as antonymous units of the lexical system, but as deeply intertwined mental structures conditioned by national-cultural archetypes, historical experience, and religious paradigms. The study identifies four basic cognitive codes through which the correlation of the dyad is verbalized: spatial-dynamic, natural-elemental (light/fire), somatic-biomorphic, and anthropomorphic codes. A comparative analysis reveals isomorphic (universal) features – stemming from general psychophysiological laws of human perception – and allomorphic (nationally specific) characteristics. In English linguistic consciousness, the correlation leans toward linear, individualized, somatic, and secularized models, whereas in Karakalpak linguistic consciousness, the dyad is characterized by a cyclic-transit, collective-clan, and spiritual-theocentric nature shaped by Islamic eschatology and nomadic cultural heritage.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics, conceptual dyad, contrastive analysis, cognitive code, linguistic worldview.

INTRODUCTION

At the current stage of linguistic science, the investigation of the cognitive foundations of language semantics inevitably directs researchers toward analyzing the fundamental categories of human existence [5]. Among the vast array of mental representations, binary existential categories hold a central position. In particular, the study of the conceptual dyad “Life/*Ómir* – Death/*Ólim*” is of paramount importance for understanding the ontological, ethical, and cultural foundations of ethnic consciousness. V. N. Telia highlighted that in cognitive linguistics, conceptual dyads are not viewed simply as isolated, polarized antonyms within a lexical-semantic grid [18]. As observed by N. D. Arutyunov to grasp the nature, value, and ontological essence of the concept “Life/*Ómir*” in a given culture, it is essential to uncover its cognitive and physical boundaries, which are defined, contoured, and constrained by the concept “Death/*Ólim*” [1]. The interaction between these two poles constitutes a continuous cognitive continuum in which one concept is cognitively modeled through the prism of the other.

The conceptualization of life and death has been the subject of extensive interdisciplinary research in global and Turkic linguistics. Foundational works on Conceptual Metaphor Theory by G. Lakoff and A. M. Johnson, established that abstract existential domains are structured via concrete source domains drawn from physical and spatial experience [12]. A. Wierzbicka demonstrated how spatial parameters serve as cognitive anchors for temporal and existential categories across different language families [19], while Z. Kövecses emphasized that while basic conceptual metaphors share a universal bodily grounding, their specific linguistic manifestations are heavily modulated by cultural variation, social values, and historical memory [11].

In Karakalpak philology, foundational contributions by N. A. Baskakov laid the phonetic, morphological, and lexicographical framework for studying the Karakalpak language [3]. Subsequent studies by prominent Karakalpak scholars significantly expanded the theoretical understanding of national folklore, paremiology, and literary heritage. Q. Ayimbetov systematically documented

and analyzed Karakalpak paremiology, demonstrating how folk wisdom and oral traditions encode the nomadic worldview, ancestral values, and ontological perceptions of mortality [2]. N. Dawkarayev and K. Mambetov provided extensive historical-literary and ethnopoetic analyses of Karakalpak classical poetry (Berdaq, Ájiniyaz) and heroic epics (such as QırqQız), highlighting how existential motives of fate, life's transience, and spiritual continuity are interwoven with nomadic philosophy and Islamic values [7: 14]. Modern Karakalpak cognitive linguists (e.g., in the research on phraseology and conceptual structures by K. Pakhratdinov, A. Esenov) have further emphasized that Karakalpak phraseologisms carry deep ethno-cultural codes reflecting a collective, clan-oriented, and transit-based understanding of human existence. Despite these valuable contributions, there remains a distinct research gap: a systematic, contrastive cognitive investigation examining the correlation of the “Life/*Ómir* – Death/*Ólim*” dyad between English and Karakalpak languages through structured cognitive codes (spatial-dynamic, natural-elemental, somatic-biomorphic, anthropomorphic) has not yet been conducted. English represents a Western, highly secularized, individualized, and historically agrarian-industrial culture, whereas Karakalpak reflects a Central Asian, collective, nomadic-pastoral, and Islamic-influenced culture.

The primary objective of this study is to uncover, describe, and compare the cognitive mechanisms and codes through which the conceptual dyad “Life/*Ómir* – Death/*Ólim*” is correlated and verbalized in English and Karakalpak linguistic consciousness. The study seeks to address three core research questions:

1. What cognitive codes structure the interaction of “Life” and “Death” in both languages?
2. What isomorphic (universal) cognitive structures are shared due to common human physical and perceptual experience?
3. What allomorphic (nationally specific) differences emerge in the verbalization of the dyad as a result of distinct historical, religious, and socio-cultural developments in English and Karakalpak traditions?

METHODS

The empirical material for this research was collected through a targeted, multi-source selection method from lexicographical, phraseological, paremiological, and literary works in English and Karakalpak languages. The corpus includes linguistic units such as phraseologisms, idioms, proverbs, metaphorical collocations, and poetic stanzas containing explicit or implicit references to the concepts of life and death.

The primary data sources comprise:

1. **Lexicographical & phraseological sources:** *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *Cambridge Dictionary of Idioms*, *Phraseological Dictionary of the Karakalpak Language*, and collections of Karakalpak folklore and proverbs gathered by Ayimbetov and cataloged by Baskakov.
2. **Literary & poetic texts:**
 - **English Literature:** Poetic works by George Gordon Byron (*Don Juan*), John Keats (*La Belle Dame sans Merci*), John Donne (*Holy Sonnets*), and William Shakespeare.
 - **Karakalpak Literature:** Classic poetic stanzas by Berdaq and Ajiniyaz Qosıbayulı, as well as epic fragments from the Karakalpak heroic epic *QırqQız* (Berdaq version).

The methodological framework integrates cognitive-discursive, contrastive, and textual analysis methods:

- **Conceptual analysis:** Employed to reconstruct the core, peripheral, and metaphorical slots of “Life/*Ómir*” and “Death/*Ólim*” within their mental frames.
- **Cognitive code profiling:** Utilized to classify linguistic data into four primary sensory-cultural codes (spatial-dynamic, natural-elemental, somatic-biomorphic, anthropomorphic) following Telia’s taxonomy.
- **Conceptual metaphor mapping:** Based on Lakoff & Johnson’s framework to map source domains (e.g., journey,

fire, plant, reaper, transit) onto target domains (life, mortality, soul).

- **Contrastive analysis:** Applied to identify isomorphic (universal psychophysiological) and allomorphic (ethno-culturally specific) traits across Germanic and Turkic linguistic worldviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic cognitive analysis of the collected empirical material indicates that the conceptual correlation within the “Life/*Ómir* – Death/*Ólim*” dyad operates through four fundamental cognitive codes: spatial-dynamic, natural-elemental (light/fire), somatic-biomorphic, and anthropomorphic.

In both English and Karakalpak linguistic cultures, the primary cognitive mechanism connecting “Life” and “Death” is the metaphor of spatial movement along a path [12]. Under this model, “Life” is conceptualized as the dynamic movement of a body through physical space, while “Death” represents a spatial boundary, a terminal point, or a transition to a different qualitative dimension [9].

In English, spatial correlation is continuously constructed around the conceptual metaphor “Life is a journey.” Here, death is verbalized as the ending point of movement, an obstacle, or a liminal (borderline) zone. A prominent example of spatial boundary fixing is the idiom “at the jaws of death,” where death is depicted as an aggressive, enclosed, and destructive physical space swallowing the linear path of the subject. Similarly, idioms like “on the brink of the grave” or “at death's door” emphasize the terminal stage of linear movement and an irreversible boundary line.

In English discourse, this spatial model is exemplified in Lord Byron's *Don Juan*:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be! The eternal surge
 Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar...

[6]

Here, life is metaphorically projected onto a star hovering at the boundary of spaces (“upon the horizon's verge”). The preposition “between” and the noun “verge” reinforce a cognitive model where the boundary is a narrow, unstable liminal zone-matching the idiomatic phrase “to hover between life and death.”

In Karakalpak, the spatial-dynamic code exhibits a distinctive dualistic ethno-cultural nature rooted in nomadic heritage and Islamic philosophy [2; 3]. The mental boundary between existence and non-existence is articulated through the dichotomy of *buldúnya* (this transitory world/*pániydúnya*) and *oldúnya* (the eternal world/*baqıylıqdúnya*). Crossing the boundary is not understood as a complete termination of a line, but as a spatial transit or displacement-verbalized in the fundamental phrase *dúnyadanótiw* (to pass from the world). This transit frame is further reinforced by expressions such as *artınacaqaraw* (a feeling of trust before leaving) and *pániydenbaqıyğakóshiwi* (migrating from the perishable to the eternal), where *kóshiwi* (to migrate/relocate) reflects the dynamic nomadic tradition of movement rather than static termination. This is vividly expressed in the poetry of Berdaq:

*Buldúnyadanbárióter,
Kimlerkelip, kimlerketer,
Ólimbirkúnbárinejeter,
Pániydúnyamákanbolmas...* [4]

Cognitive analysis of this fragment highlights key slots of the spatial frame: *keliw* (coming into the world – Life slot) and *ketiw/ótiw* (leaving/passing – Death slot). The conceptual boundary is defined by *pániydúnya* (a temporary dwelling), establishing that death in Karakalpak is a final stage of a spatial relay.

Allomorphic contrast

In English, death is predominantly a linear point of no return (“the point of no return”) where individual agency ceases [21]. In Karakalpak, spatial correlation is cyclic-transitional: death is an ontological transition (*baqıylıqdúnyağaótiw*) from a temporary

world to an eternal spiritual realm, conditioned by centuries of nomadic life and Islamic eschatology [2].

Natural-elemental code

Light, fire, and extinction oppositions: The natural-elemental code structures life as light/heat and death as darkness/extinction. In Karakalpak culture, the hearth and fire metaphor holds deep paremiological and ethnological significance, connecting individual life with tribal space through the frame *ómirshuraǵı* (the lamp of life). The termination of life or lineage is verbalized as *shuraǵıóshiw* (the extinguishing of one's lamp), *otısóniw* (extinction of fire/end of lineage), or *oshaǵıqalıw*.

In Ájiniyaz's classic poetry, this light/darkness opposition reflects the transience of time:

*Ómirmánzilinétigipqaraıy,
Janıpturǵanshıraqbirkúnósher-di...
Dúnyadanótkendieslepqaraıy,
Kózdenaqanjaslartolpkólberdi...*

[16]

The lexeme *shuraq* (lamp/light) is cognitively linked to the yurt (*qaraıy*), the symbol of family and clan space [14]. Extinguishing an individual's *shuraq* signifies a loss of collective vital potential for the entire clan [15].

In English, light also symbolizes life (“the light of life,” Shakespeare's “out, out, brief candle!”), but the pragmatic focus is egocentric and individualized. The candle represents individual ego, intellect, or passion rather than a clan hearth. Thus, while both cultures share the metaphor “Life is light/Heat,” Karakalpak emphasizes a collective-social nature, whereas English focuses on the individual subject.

Somatic and biomorphic codes

Bodily and floral representations: Somatic (bodily) and biomorphic (floral) codes ground existential concepts in bodily physiology and natural growth cycles. Life is associated with fluid circulation (blood), flexibility, and moisture; death with dryness, rigidity, and somatic decay.

In English, somatic correlation highlights blood as the material carrier of vitality (“lifeblood”), and cessation of breathing as the terminal bodily marker (“to breathe one’s last,” “to give up the ghost”). Biomorphically, English relies on the metaphor of floral wilting, as seen in John Keats’s *La Belle Dame sans Merci*:

*The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing...
I see a lily on thy brow...
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too...* [10]

In Karakalpak, somatic correlation integrates weaving metaphors and spiritual dualism. Physical death is conceptualized as the snapping of a woven thread (*ómirjibiúziliw*), reflecting nomadic spinning traditions where life is a continuous thread spun by fate [7]. Furthermore, the somatic centerpiece is the metaphysical concept *Jan* (soul), giving rise to binary pairs: *jankiriw* (life entry) vs. *janishiğıw/janberiw* (death/soul departure).

The syncretism of somatic and floral codes in Karakalpak is powerfully represented in the epic *QırqQız*:

*...Kózlerinenqanlaraqtı,
2Jan berispey, janalisti...
Topıraqqagúldeysoldı,
Ómirjibiúzildi...* [17]

Here, somatic markers (“blood,” “soul struggle”) combine with floral markers (*gúldeysoldı* – wilted like a flower) and spatial returns (*topıraqqa* – to the earth).

Comparative analysis

English somatic models emphasize mechanical/physiological stopping (biological engine failure), while Karakalpak somatic models view the body as a temporary shell for the *Jan* (soul), inherently tied to spiritual transition and natural earth cycles.

Anthropomorphic code

Personification of life and death: Anthropomorphism attributes human agency, emotions, and intent to abstract forces [13]. In English, death is personified as an autonomous, ruthless actor - most famously as the *Grim Reaper* carrying a scythe, harvesting passive human crops. Legal and military personifications are also common (“Death claims its victim,” “Death knocks at the door”). In John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so... [8]

Donne engages in direct philosophical dialogue with Death, attributing the human flaw of pride (“be not proud”) and challenging its absolute sovereignty over life.

In Karakalpak, anthropomorphism is governed by Islamic theology and nomadic customs. Death is personified through *Ázireyil* (Azrael), who is not an autonomous killer, but an authorized celestial messenger carrying out divine decree. Paremiologically, death is conceptualized as an unexpected, uninvited guest (*Ólimaytıpkelmeydi*), breaking traditional hospitality rules. Proverbs like *Ájeljetpese, ólimjoq* (Without designated fate, there is no death) show that *Ájel* is an executor of higher law rather than a rogue antagonist.

CONCLUSION

The comparative cognitive study of the conceptual dyad “Life/*Ómir* – Death/*Ólim*” in English and Karakalpak reveals both fundamental isomorphic universals and distinct ethno-cultural allomorphic variations. Isomorphism stems from universal human psychophysiological perception, embodied experience, and basic sensory observation of nature. Both cultures construct the dyad through shared conceptual metaphors: life as dynamic movement along a path, life as light/heat, death as boundary/darkness, and bodily existence as an organic cycle subject to wilting. Allomorphism is conditioned by divergent historical paths, socio-cultural organization, and religious

paradigms. In English, the correlation leans toward a secularized, individualized, somatic, and linear chronotope, where death marks an absolute physical boundary of personal existence. In Karakalpak, shaped by centuries of nomadic life, clan cohesion, and Islamic eschatology [2; 7], the dyad operates within a cyclic-transit, collective-clan, and theocentric matrix. Death is conceptualized not as a tragic absolute end, but as a legitimate, destined spatial migration (*kóshiw/dünyadanótiw*) and spiritual return to ancestral origins (*topıraq*).

The findings contribute to contrastive cognitive linguistics, Turkic ethnolinguistics, and intercultural communication, offering a structured methodological framework for analyzing existential dyads in unstudied language pairs.

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