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THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR "TREE — HUMAN" IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LINGUOCULTURES: A COGNITIVE-SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The article is devoted to a comparative analysis of the conceptual metaphor "TREE — HUMAN" in English and Uzbek linguocultures. The research is based on the theory of conceptual metaphors by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson and methods of linguocultural analysis. The aim of the work is to identify universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally specific features of the metaphorical representation of a human through the image of a tree in the two linguocultures. The research material includes idioms, proverbs, paroemias, poetic and narrative texts of the English and Uzbek languages. The results show that, despite the common anthropomorphic basis of the metaphor, its semantic accents differ significantly: in English linguoculture, the concepts of individual strength, social status and personal growth dominate, while in Uzbek culture, the ideas of continuity, collective memory, moral stability and intergenerational connection prevail. The article contributes to the development of intercultural metaphorology and cognitive linguoculturology.

Keywords

conceptual metaphor, "tree — human" metaphor, linguoculture, cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, comparative analysis, English language, Uzbek language.

1. Introduction

According to the modern cognitive paradigm, metaphor is a fundamental mechanism of human thinking that structures the perception of abstract concepts through images of sensory experience (Lakoff, Johnson, 1980). Among natural metaphors, the model "TREE — HUMAN" holds a special place, as it is based on visual, structural and functional similarity between the two forms of life. This metaphor is universal, but its specific linguistic realisations and cultural semantics are deeply rooted in the historical experience, environmental conditions, and value systems of an ethnic group.

In English and Uzbek linguocultures, the image of a tree is actively used to conceptualise the physical and spiritual existence of a human, their origin, social connections and life path. However, cultural dominants set different vectors of interpretation: if in the English tradition the emphasis is shifted towards individual development and social achievement, in the Uzbek tradition it is shifted towards ancestral memory, moral duty and collective identity.

The aim of the research is to conduct a comparative cognitive-semiotic analysis of the metaphor "TREE — HUMAN" in English and Uzbek linguistic consciousness, revealing invariant and specific features of its realisation.

Research objectives:

1. Determine the cognitive basis and structure of the metaphor "TREE — HUMAN".

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2. Analyse its linguistic expressions in English and Uzbek linguocultures.
3. Identify culturally determined differences in the semantics and pragmatics of the metaphor.
4. Explain the identified differences through the prism of cultural values and historical context.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

The methodological basis is the **theory of conceptual metaphors** (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), according to which a metaphor is a cross-domain mapping from a source domain (e.g., TREE) to a target domain (e.g., HUMAN). In our case, this mapping structures the abstract aspects of human life through the concrete, bodily properties of a tree.

An important addition is the **linguoculturological approach** (Maslova, 2001; Teliya, 1996), which considers a metaphor as a "cultural code" transmitting the values and worldview of an ethnic group. In Uzbek scholarship, Sh. Safarov (2015) has made a significant contribution to the study of culture-specific metaphors, emphasising their connection to the national worldview.

Despite a significant number of works devoted to natural metaphors in individual linguocultures, comparative studies of the metaphor "TREE — HUMAN" in English and Uzbek languages are practically absent. This work is intended to fill this gap.

3. Methodology and Research Material

The research is based on the **comparative-contrastive method** using the following analytical procedures:

1. Conceptual-metaphorical analysis to reconstruct the system of correspondences between domains.
2. Semantic-cognitive analysis to identify frames and slots of the metaphor.
3. Linguoculturological interpretation to explain cultural specificity.

The data corpus includes:

- English and Uzbek proverbs, sayings and idioms (e.g., "a family tree", "apple doesn't fall far from the tree"; "daraxt ildiz bilan", "tog'asi tut, bobosi tut").
- Literary texts of classical and contemporary literature in which this metaphorical image unfolds.
- Usual expressions from journalism and everyday discourse.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. The Universal Cognitive Scheme of the Metaphor "TREE — HUMAN"

The basis of the metaphor is the **anthropomorphic perception of a tree**, common to both cultures, which generates a stable system of conceptual correspondences:

Source Domain: TREE	**Target Domain: HUMAN / LINEAGE / SOCIETY**
Roots (roots)	Origin, ancestors, ancestral foundation, traditions
Trunk (trunk)	Individual personality, character, life support
Branches (branches)	Descendants, relatives, social connections, areas of activity
Bark (bark)	Appearance, protection, social mask
Foliage (foliage)	Thoughts, emotions, external manifestations, temporary achievements
Fruit (fruit)	Children, results of labour, creative heritage
Growth, age	Life path, experience, wisdom

This scheme implements the universal conceptual metaphor **HUMAN LIFE / LINEAGE IS A TREE**.

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4.2. Specificity of the Metaphor in English Linguoculture

In the English tradition, the metaphor "TREE — HUMAN" often serves to express **individualistic and socio-hierarchical concepts**.

1. **The oak as an archetype of strength and status:** English culture has elevated the oak to the rank of a national symbol of steadfastness and nobility. Expressions like "heart of oak" (literally, "heart of oak") signify courage and resilience, and "a mighty oak" refers to a person who has achieved a high position due to personal qualities. The metaphor operates in the plane of **individual achievements**.
2. **Metaphor of social hierarchy:** The construction "the top of the tree" clearly marks social or career success. The **family tree** is a key concept visualising kinship ties, but often with an emphasis on family history as the basis of the individual's current social standing.
3. **Idioms of heredity and fate:** The proverb "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree" emphasises **genetic or social heritage**, which can be interpreted both positively (talent) and negatively (vices). Phrases like "he is a chip off the old block" (literally, "a chip off the old block") also indicate the continuity of traits.

Cultural dominant: rationality, personal responsibility, social growth, the value of individual contribution.

4.3. Specificity of the Metaphor in Uzbek Linguoculture

In Uzbek linguoculture, the metaphor "TREE — HUMAN" is more loaded with **ethical, collectivist and sacred meanings**.

1. **The plane tree (*chinor*) and mulberry (*tut*) as symbols of wisdom and protection:** In folklore and poetry, these trees are often personified as **elders providing shelter and advice**. "Ko‘laga kirgan chinor" (the shade of a plane tree entered) is a stable image meaning being under the protection and patronage of a wise person or tradition. This is a metaphor for **moral and social guardianship**.
2. **The cult of roots and continuity:** The concept **"ildiz" (root)** is central. Expressions "ildiziga qaytmoq" (to return to one's roots), "daraxt ildiz bilan" (a tree with roots) signify not merely genealogy, but a **connection with spiritual origins, native land, and the traditions of ancestors**. The metaphor operates in the plane of **collective memory and duty**.
3. **The tree as a model of lineage and moral law:** The proverb "Tog'asi tut, bobosi tut — o‘zi qanday bo'lmasin?" ("His uncle is a mulberry tree, his grandfather is a mulberry tree — how can he himself not be one?") reflects the idea of **inexorable ancestral essence and moral predetermination**. Branches (*shox*) metaphorically represent children and grandchildren, whose life and actions are directly connected to the honour of the "trunk" — the lineage.
4. **Sacred-poetic aspect:** In classical poetry, a tree (especially the cypress, *nard*) is often compared to the figure of a beloved, and its flexibility or steadfastness — to spiritual qualities. Here the metaphor connects the natural, human and divine.

Cultural dominant: collective identity, veneration of ancestors, moral stability, harmony with nature as a source of ethical laws.

5. Conclusion

The conducted analysis confirms that the conceptual metaphor **"TREE — HUMAN"** is a universal cognitive model rooted in the common bodily experience of humans. However, its linguocultural realisations in English and Uzbek demonstrate **systematic differences**, reflecting the profound worldview of the two cultures.

In English linguoculture, the metaphor serves as a tool for conceptualising the **individual path**: the tree becomes an image of personal resilience (oak), social growth (the top of the tree) and inherited qualities (apple tree). It operates in the logic of **progress and hierarchy**.

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In Uzbek linguoculture, the same metaphor encodes primarily **ancestral and moral connection**: the tree (plane tree, mulberry) is an image of a collective organism, where the roots are the covenant of the ancestors, the trunk is the living generation, and the branches are the future, obliged to remain faithful to the whole. It operates in the logic of **cyclicality, memory and duty**.

Thus, the metaphor **"TREE — HUMAN"** acts not only as a cognitive mechanism but also as a **cultural-semiotic filter** through which key concepts of human existence — time, memory, success, duty, belonging — are passed and receive different evaluations. This research opens prospects for further comparative works in the fields of metaphorology, linguoculturology and intercultural communication.

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