

COGNITIVE METAPHORICAL MODELS OF THE CONCEPT "HUMAN" IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK PHYTONYMIC PROVERBS

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Abstract: The article offers a linguocognitive analysis of English and Uzbek proverbs containing plant names (phytonyms) in which the plant serves as a source domain for conceptualising the human being. Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory, the Great Chain of Being metaphor and frame analysis, the study reconstructs the plant frame (seed, root, stem, branch, leaf, flower, fruit, thorn, soil, height, decay) and traces how its slots are mapped onto a person's origin, upbringing, moral qualities, social status, attachment to homeland and life span. Six cognitive models are identified: ORIGIN IS ROOT AND CHILDREN ARE FRUIT, UPBRINGING IS SHAPING A YOUNG PLANT, MORAL QUALITY IS THE QUALITY OF A PLANT, SOCIAL STATUS IS HEIGHT, HOMELAND IS SOIL, and HUMAN LIFE IS THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PLANT. The comparison shows that the core models are shared by the two unrelated languages, which confirms their experiential basis, while differences appear in the choice of phytonym, the evaluative orientation and the modality of the proverb. These differences are explained by the natural environment, the agricultural economy and the religious and ethical traditions of the two peoples.

Keywords: phytonym, proverb, conceptual metaphor, cognitive model, frame, HUMAN IS A PLANT, linguocognitive analysis, English, Uzbek

Proverbs are among the most compact carriers of a people's knowledge about the world. Being complete sentences with a generalised meaning, they do not simply name objects but package whole situations and recommend a line of behaviour, which is why W. Mieder describes them as concise statements of wisdom, truth and morals handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 2004). From the standpoint of cognitive linguistics, a proverb is a verbalised cognitive model: a concrete, easily imaginable scene is used to make sense of an abstract domain of human life (Honeck, 1997). The plant world has been one of the richest suppliers of such scenes. Z. Kövecses includes plants among the most productive source domains of metaphor in general, because growth, blossoming, fruiting and withering are directly observable and are closely linked with human survival (Kövecses, 2010).

Phytonymic paremias have been studied from several angles. O. K. Dekhkanova examined Uzbek, Tajik and English proverbs and phrasemes with phytonyms in the synchronic-typological aspect, focusing on their syntactic models and on the

hyperonymic, hyponymic and partonymic status of the plant names (Dekhkanova, 2022). Nan Yanhua compared Russian, Chinese and Korean phytonymic proverbs through the notions of nominative density, lacunarity and cultural attitudes (Nan Yanhua, 2022). Z. F. Alikhasanova analysed floronyms in Russian, Uzbek and Azerbaijani paremias from a linguopragmatic perspective (Alikhasanova, 2025), while G. R. Muqimova and Z. R. Salimova described phytomorphic metaphors and comparisons in Uzbek and Turkish (Muqimova, 2023; Salimova, 2023). However, the English and Uzbek phytonymic proverbs have not yet been compared as a system of cognitive models in which the plant stands for the human being. This gap defines the relevance of the present article.

The choice of proverbs rather than idioms as the object of analysis is deliberate. An idiom such as *the apple of one's eye* or *to nip in the bud* is a nominative unit that names a single object or action, whereas a proverb is a communicative unit that states a generalisation about a recurrent life situation and implicitly evaluates it. Consequently, the metaphor in a proverb is not limited to one transferred word: the whole scene described in the proverb, with its participants, causes and results, is projected onto the human world. This property makes proverbs a convenient material for reconstructing cognitive models, since each unit preserves the complete structure of the mapping, including its evaluative conclusion. At the same time, proverbs are strongly conventionalised and belong to the collective memory of a speech community, so the models they contain may be regarded not as individual poetic metaphors but as stable elements of the national linguistic worldview.

The aim of the study is to reconstruct the cognitive metaphorical models underlying English and Uzbek proverbs in which a phytonym conceptualises a person, and to establish the universal and nationally specific features of these models. The material consists of phytonymic proverbs selected by continuous sampling from G. L. Apperson's historical dictionary of English proverbs (Apperson, 1929), the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (Speake, 2015) and H. G. Bohn's collection (Bohn, 1855) for English, and from the academic collection "O'zbek xalq maqollari" (Mirzayev, Musoqulov & Sarimsoqov, 2005) for Uzbek. Only those units were retained in which the phytonymic component is part of the figurative basis of the proverb and refers, in the proverb's overall meaning, to a human being or a human community.

The analysis relies on conceptual metaphor theory, according to which metaphor is a mapping of structure from a concrete source domain onto an abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). For proverbs, the approach of G. Lakoff and M. Turner is especially productive. They show that proverbs are understood through the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor, which extracts a generic schema from a specific scene, and through the Great Chain of Being, which allows attributes of lower forms of being, such as plants, to be projected onto humans (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Each proverb

was therefore analysed in four steps: (1) identifying the phytonym and the slot of the plant frame it activates (root, fruit, height, soil and so on); (2) extracting the generic schema; (3) formulating the mapping onto the target domain HUMAN; (4) determining the evaluation and the modality of the proverb. The English and Uzbek units were then compared as isomorphic (same image, same meaning), partially isomorphic (same schema, different phytonym or evaluation) or lacunar (no counterpart in the other language). The notion of cultural attitude, understood after V. N. Teliya as a mental pattern that prescribes behaviour (Teliya, 1996), was used to interpret the differences.

The source domain PLANT was represented as a frame, i.e. a structured body of everyday knowledge about plants shared by speakers of both languages. Its main slots are: the origin of the plant (seed, root, stock); its growth (young shoot, twig, stem, crooked or straight trunk); its parts (branch, leaf, flower, thorn, fruit, kernel); its properties (height, strength or flexibility, sweetness or bitterness, soundness or rot); its location (soil, garden, field, the shade of other plants); and its life cycle (sowing, ripening, harvest, withering). Apart from the biological knowledge, the frame includes the practical knowledge of the farmer and gardener: plants are sown, grafted, pruned, transplanted, weeded and harvested. Proverbs select one or several of these slots and use them as the basis of a mapping. Such a representation makes the comparison of the two languages more precise, because it allows us to see whether a difference lies in the slot that is activated, in the phytonym that fills it or in the evaluation assigned to it.

The first model, ORIGIN IS ROOT AND CHILDREN ARE FRUIT, is the most frequent in both languages. The English *The apple never falls far from the tree* and the Uzbek *Olmaning tagiga olma tushadi* (lit. 'an apple falls under the apple tree') are fully isomorphic: the tree is mapped onto the parent, the fruit onto the child, and the short distance of the fall onto the inheritance of character. The same schema is activated by *Plant the crab tree where you will, it will never bear pippins* and by the Uzbek *Arpa ekkkan arpa olar, bug'doy ekkkan bug'doy olar* ('he who sows barley reaps barley, he who sows wheat reaps wheat'). The English proverb emphasises that a bad stock cannot be improved by a change of place, while the Uzbek one generalises the idea to any cause and its natural result. It is characteristic that English prefers fruit trees of the European garden (apple, crab tree), whereas Uzbek readily turns to cereals, the basis of the settled agricultural economy of Central Asia.

The Uzbek language extends this model to a third generation. In *Danagidan mag'zi shirin* ('the kernel is sweeter than the stone') the stone of the fruit is mapped onto the son or daughter and the kernel inside it onto the grandchild, so that the proverb explains why grandparents often love their grandchildren more than their own children (Dekhkanova, 2022). No such mapping was found in the English material, which makes this unit a lacuna reflecting the high value of the extended family in Uzbek culture. English, on the other hand, possesses the proverb *Every bean has its black*, in

which the dark spot on the bean stands for the inevitable imperfection of every family or person. The model thus shows that both peoples conceptualise kinship as organic continuity, but the depth of the genealogical chain encoded in proverbs differs.

The second model, UPBRINGING IS SHAPING A YOUNG PLANT, maps the young and flexible stem onto a child and the gardener's work onto education. In *As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined* and in *Soon crooks the tree that good gambrel would be*, the plasticity of the twig corresponds to the receptivity of childhood and the final form of the tree to the formed personality. The Uzbek *Egri bitgan daraxt to 'g 'ri o 'smas* ('a tree that has grown crooked will not grow straight') is partially isomorphic: it shares the image of the crooked tree but profiles a different phase of the scenario. The English proverbs foreground the agent who bends the twig and thus recommend timely intervention, whereas the Uzbek proverb foregrounds the irreversible result and serves as a warning or even as a resigned evaluation of a person who cannot be corrected. The same irreversibility is expressed by the English *A crooked tree will never straighten its branches*, but in the English material it is the pedagogical, agent-oriented variant that dominates.

The third model, MORAL QUALITY IS THE QUALITY OF A PLANT, is realised through several slots of the frame. The fruit slot is mapped onto deeds: *A tree is known by its fruit*, which goes back to the Gospel of Matthew, and the Uzbek *Daraxt mevasidan, odam so 'zidan* ('a tree is known by its fruit, a man by his word') both treat the visible product as the criterion of inner worth. Here, however, an important cognitive difference appears. In the English proverb *Deeds are fruits, words are but leaves* speech is mapped onto the leaves, the showy but useless part of the plant, and in *Beauty may have fair leaves, yet bitter fruit* the leaves again denote a deceptive appearance. In the Uzbek proverb the word itself is the "fruit" by which a person is judged. English paremiology thus sets words against deeds, while Uzbek paremiology treats the word as a deed, which agrees with the high status of the spoken word, promise and eloquence in Uzbek culture.

The opposition between appearance and essence is elaborated further in English through the apple: *Good-looking apples are sometimes sour* and *A prize apple can have a worm inside* map the attractive surface of the fruit onto a pleasant outward manner and its taste or core onto the true character, warning the hearer against trusting appearances. The Uzbek proverb *Daraxtning husni - bargi bilan mevasi* ('the beauty of a tree lies in its leaves and its fruit') is instructive in this respect. Here the leaves are not opposed to the fruit but stand beside it as a legitimate part of the tree's worth, so that outward appearance and inner productivity are presented as complementary rather than conflicting. This confirms the tendency noted above: the English models are more inclined to separate and contrast the visible and the essential in a person, while the Uzbek models tend to integrate them into a single positive image.

The slot of decay is mapped onto moral corruption and its contagion. *One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel* and *The rotten apple injures its neighbours* conceptualise a vicious person as a source of infection for the group. The Uzbek *Muloyim daraxtni qurt yeydi* ('the worm eats the soft tree') activates the same slot but shifts the focus from the harmful individual to the vulnerable one: weakness and excessive softness invite harm. The English proverbs protect the collective from the individual, whereas the Uzbek proverb advises the individual to be firm. Weeds form a related negative category. *Ill weeds grow apace* and *A man of words and not of deeds is like a garden full of weeds* map worthless plants onto worthless people, and the Uzbek *Gul bo'lib tug'ilib, sassiq alaf bo'lib yashama* ('having been born a flower, do not live as a stinking weed') opposes the flower and the weed as the ideal and the degraded state of the same person. This agrees with the observation that in Turkic paremias flowers and fruit trees usually carry positive evaluation of a person, while grass, weeds and stumps carry negative evaluation (Salimova, 2023).

The fourth model, SOCIAL STATUS IS HEIGHT, combines the plant frame with the orientational metaphor HIGH STATUS IS UP. English is particularly rich here: *A great tree hath a great fall*, *The highest branch is not the safest roost* and *Beware of an oak, it draws the stroke* all map the height of a tree onto rank and power, and the danger of wind, lightning or falling onto the risks of a high position. The Uzbek *Daraxt tagida daraxt ko'karmas* ('no tree grows green under a tree') and the English *Great trees keep down little ones* are fully isomorphic: the shade of the big tree stands for the suppressing influence of a powerful person on those below. Both languages view greatness with caution, but English focuses on the vulnerability of the great, while the Uzbek unit focuses on the fate of the small.

The same model reveals one of the clearest axiological contrasts in the material. The English *Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm* maps the rigid oak onto a proud, inflexible person and the reed onto a flexible one, and it evaluates flexibility positively as the condition of survival. The Uzbek *Qayin daraxtning egilgani - singani, er yigit uyalgani - o'lgani* ('for a birch, to bend is to break; for a brave man, to be shamed is to die') uses the same image of a tree that cannot bend, but here the inability to bend is mapped onto honour and dignity and is evaluated positively (Alikhasanova, 2025). The same source-domain property thus receives opposite evaluations: pragmatic adaptability in English and uncompromising honour in Uzbek.

The fifth model, HOMELAND IS SOIL, maps the place where a plant is rooted onto a person's native land and social environment. The Uzbek *Daraxt bir joyda ko'karadi* ('a tree grows green in one place') is an affirmative statement which in the Uzbek linguistic consciousness is associated with patriotism, loyalty to one's birthplace and the value of stability. The English material activates the same slot through prohibitions and warnings: *Plants too often removed will not thrive*, *A tree*

often transplanted is never loaded with fruit, Remove an old tree, and it will wither to death. The cognitive content is shared, but the modality differs: the Uzbek proverb asserts a norm, whereas the English proverbs describe the negative consequences of violating it. English also conceptualises the social environment as soil in *Noble plants suit not a stubborn soil*, in which the quality of the soil stands for the conditions that allow talent to develop.

The sixth model, HUMAN LIFE IS THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PLANT, maps sowing, growth, blossoming, fruiting and withering onto the stages of human life and onto the relation between actions and their consequences. The universal proverb *You reap what you sow* and its Uzbek equivalent *Nima eksang, shuni o'rasan* are isomorphic. The temporal side of the scenario is represented in English by *Great oaks from little acorns grow* and *An oak is not felled at one chop*, and in Uzbek by *Sabr qilsang, g'o'radan halvo bitar* ('if you are patient, halva will come from unripe grapes'). The last proverb is nationally specific: the ripening of grapes is combined with the image of halva, a traditional sweet, which reflects the importance of viticulture and of the culinary code in Uzbek culture. The social side of growth appears in *Uzum uzumni ko'rib ola bo'ladi* ('a grape colours by looking at another grape'), which maps ripening onto the influence of companions and has no phytonymic counterpart in English, where the same idea is expressed without plants (*A man is known by the company he keeps*).

Within the same model, English also maps sowing onto ethical behaviour in general. In *Kindnesses, like grain, increase by sowing* and *Good seed makes a good crop* the seed stands for a good deed and the harvest for the return it brings, so that the agricultural cycle becomes a model of moral reciprocity. The comparison with grain is significant: grain multiplies when it is sown rather than kept, and the proverb transfers this paradox to kindness, which grows when it is given away. The opposite side of the scenario is expressed by *Sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind*, where the harvest is disproportionately larger than the evil that was sown. In the Uzbek material the relation between action and consequence is usually presented as a strict correspondence of the kind 'barley for barley, wheat for wheat', which places the emphasis on the justice of the result rather than on its growth.

Blossoming and withering form the aesthetic part of this model. English proverbs such as *The fairest rose is at last withered*, *Beauty is but a blossom* and the biblical *All flesh is grass* map the short life of the flower onto the transience of beauty and of human life, a theme rooted in the Christian idea of vanity. *Every rose has its thorn* and the Uzbek *Gul tikansiz bo'lmaydi* ('there is no flower without thorns') are isomorphic and map the thorn onto the unavoidable pain that accompanies beauty and happiness. In Uzbek, however, the flower is primarily mapped onto a child or a beloved person and is evaluated positively, as in *Farzand - oilaning ham guli, ham bulbuli* ('a child is

both the flower and the nightingale of the family’). The Uzbek *Tikandan gul bitar, guldan tikan bitar* (‘a flower may grow from a thorn and a thorn from a flower’) returns to the generational model and states that good children may be born to bad parents and vice versa, an idea that Nan Yanhua found lacunar in the Chinese and Korean material (Nan Yanhua, 2022).

The results of the analysis are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Cognitive metaphorical models of the concept HUMAN in English and Uzbek phytonymic proverbs

Cognitive model	English examples	Uzbek examples	Type of correspondence
ORIGIN IS ROOT, CHILDREN ARE FRUIT	<i>The apple never falls far from the tree; Every bean has its black</i>	<i>Olmaning tagiga olma tushadi; Danagidan mag‘zi shirin</i>	Isomorphic; Uzbek lacuna for grandchildren
UPBRINGING IS SHAPING A YOUNG PLANT	<i>As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined</i>	<i>Egri bitgan daraxt to‘g‘ri o‘smas</i>	Partially isomorphic (agent vs. result)
MORAL QUALITY IS PLANT QUALITY	<i>A tree is known by its fruit; Deeds are fruits, words are but leaves; One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel</i>	<i>Daraxt mevasidan, odam so‘zidan; Muloyim daraxtni qurt yeydi</i>	Partially isomorphic (word as leaf vs. word as fruit)
SOCIAL STATUS IS HEIGHT	<i>Great trees keep down little ones; Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm</i>	<i>Daraxt tagida daraxt ko‘karmas; Qayin daraxtning egilgani - singani...</i>	Isomorphic image, opposite evaluation of bending
HOMELAND IS SOIL	<i>Plants too often removed will not thrive</i>	<i>Daraxt bir joyda ko‘karadi</i>	Isomorphic content, different modality
HUMAN LIFE IS A PLANT’S LIFE CYCLE	<i>You reap what you sow; The fairest rose is at last withered;</i>	<i>Nima eksang, shuni o‘lasan; Sabr qilsang, g‘o‘radan</i>	Isomorphic core; nationally specific images

Cognitive model	English examples	Uzbek examples	Type of correspondence
	<i>Every rose has its thorn</i>	<i>halvo bitar; Gul tikansiz bo'lmaydi</i>	

The comparison allows several generalisations. First, all six models are found in both languages. This confirms that the conceptualisation of a human being through a plant rests on universal bodily and agricultural experience and on the logic of the Great Chain of Being, in which the observable life of plants helps to understand the less observable processes of human character and destiny (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Second, full isomorphism occurs mainly where the proverb is based on a biological regularity that is the same everywhere (fruit falls near the tree, the harvest corresponds to the seed, the rose has thorns) or where a common source, above all the Bible, has shaped the European paremiological fund. Third, national specificity is realised on three levels. At the level of the phytonym, English favours the oak, the rose, the apple and the bean, the plants of the northern European landscape and garden, while Uzbek favours the grape, cereals, the tree in general and the flower (*gul*) in general, which reflects the oasis agriculture of Central Asia. At the level of evaluation, the same source property may be assessed in opposite ways, as the bending tree shows. At the level of modality, English more often uses warnings, prohibitions and statements of negative consequences, while Uzbek more often uses affirmative norms and value statements.

The formal organisation of the proverbs also supports the cognitive models. Many units are built as a two-part parallel construction in which the plant part and the human part are explicitly juxtaposed, as in *Daraxt mevasidan, odam so'zidan* or *Qayin daraxtning egilgani - singani, er yigit uyalgani - o'lgani*. In such proverbs the mapping is made visible in the syntax itself: the first half gives the source situation and the second half names the target. English proverbs more often leave the target implicit (*The apple never falls far from the tree, Ill weeds grow apace*), so the hearer has to recover it through the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC mechanism. Dekhkanova also observes that lexical repetition of the phytonym is considerably more frequent in Uzbek and Tajik proverbs than in English ones (Dekhkanova, 2022), as in *Arpa ekkan arpa olar, bug'doy ekkan bug'doy olar*. Repetition of this kind reinforces the correspondence between the cause and the result and makes the underlying schema of equivalence especially salient in the Uzbek units.

The sources of the images differ as well. A considerable part of the English phytonymic proverbs about the human being goes back to the Bible or was reinforced by it: *A tree is known by its fruit* echoes the Gospel of Matthew, *All flesh is grass* comes from the Book of Isaiah, and *As you sow, so shall you reap* reflects the Epistle to the Galatians. These units bring into the English models the Christian themes of judgement

by deeds and of the transience of earthly life. In Uzbek, the image of the flower is shaped to a large extent by the classical poetic tradition, in which the pair *gul* and *bulbul* (the rose and the nightingale) symbolises the beloved and the lover and, in Sufi interpretation, divine beauty and the seeking soul (Muqimova, 2023). This tradition explains why the flower in Uzbek proverbs is so often associated with a beloved person or a child and evaluated positively, whereas the English rose, while also a symbol of beauty, is more often linked with transience and hidden danger.

These differences correspond to the dominant cultural attitudes of the two communities. The English proverbs foreground individual responsibility, prudence and the vulnerability of the powerful, while the Uzbek proverbs foreground kinship across generations, loyalty to the homeland, honour and the value of the spoken word. For translation and intercultural communication this means that a formally equivalent phytonymic proverb may still carry a different evaluative load, and that a translator should compare not only the image but also the cognitive model and its evaluation.

The practical consequences can be illustrated by several cases. The Uzbek *Olmaning tagiga olma tushadi* can be rendered by the English *The apple never falls far from the tree* without loss, since the image, the model and the evaluation coincide. The Uzbek *Daraxt mevasidan, odam so'zidan*, on the other hand, cannot simply be replaced by *A tree is known by its fruit*: the English proverb implies that a person is judged by deeds rather than words, while the Uzbek one presents the word as the main product of a person. A literal translation with a short comment is more adequate here. Similarly, the English *Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm* should not be used to render the Uzbek proverb about the birch that breaks rather than bends, because, despite the shared image, the two proverbs recommend opposite behaviour. Units that are lacunar in the other language, such as *Danagidan mag'zi shirin* or *Sabr qilsang, g'o'radan halvo bitar*, require either a descriptive translation or a non-phytonymic functional equivalent. Taking the cognitive model into account thus helps the translator to avoid false equivalents, which are especially dangerous among proverbs with similar images.

In conclusion, English and Uzbek phytonymic proverbs conceptualise the human being through a common set of cognitive metaphorical models based on the plant frame: ORIGIN IS ROOT AND CHILDREN ARE FRUIT, UPBRINGING IS SHAPING A YOUNG PLANT, MORAL QUALITY IS THE QUALITY OF A PLANT, SOCIAL STATUS IS HEIGHT, HOMELAND IS SOIL and HUMAN LIFE IS THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PLANT. The shared models testify to the experiential basis of phytonymic metaphor, while the choice of plants, the evaluation of identical source properties and the modality of the proverbs reveal nationally specific features of the English and Uzbek worldviews. The frame-based approach proposed in the article makes it possible to compare proverbs not only by their images but by the

structure of the knowledge they encode. Further research may extend the analysis to other target domains of phytonymic proverbs, such as time, labour and society, and apply quantitative methods to measure the density of each model in the two languages.

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