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FRAMING GOODNESS: A COMPERATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK PROVERBS.

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Abstract

This article explores how the concept of “goodness” is framed in English and Uzbek proverbs, using Frame Semantics as the primary analytical tool. Proverbs are examined as carriers of moral knowledge, cultural identity, and cognitive structures. By comparing metaphorical, structural, and cultural framings of goodness across these two languages, the study reveals both universal patterns and culture-specific nuances in moral conceptualization. The findings suggest that while the core value of goodness is shared, the linguistic and cognitive frameworks used to express it vary significantly between cultural contexts.

Keywords

Proverbs, Semantics, Frame semantics, Goodness, Polysemy, Cognitive linguistics, Cross-cultural comparison, Contextual meaning, Frame activation, English proverbs, Uzbek proverbs, Cultural dependence, Dynamic interpretation, Conceptual frames

Introduction. Language reflects what matters to us. It encodes our values, beliefs, and assumptions—and nowhere is this clearer than in how societies talk about morality. Concepts like “goodness” are not just abstract ideals; they are lived, taught, and passed down through language, especially through proverbs. Proverbs distill complex cultural wisdom into short, memorable expressions that help reinforce social norms and ethical expectations. This study focuses on how the idea of goodness is framed in English and Uzbek proverbs. These two languages—one from the Germanic family and the other from the Turkic—offer a rich contrast in how moral values are linguistically constructed. Frame Semantics, a theory developed by Charles Fillmore (1982), provides the foundation for this analysis. The theory holds that meaning arises not from words alone but from the mental

structures they activate – “frames” that reflect culturally shaped knowledge²⁷. By analyzing how proverbs in English and Uzbek frame the idea of goodness, this paper aims to highlight both common cognitive patterns and distinct cultural orientations in moral thinking.

Main body. Frame Semantics offers a robust framework for understanding how language activates shared cultural experiences and mental models. Fillmore’s (1982) concept of frames—as structured mental representations encompassing participants, actions, settings, and relationships—is exemplified by the word “gift,” which triggers a frame that extends beyond its literal meaning to include roles such as giver and recipient as well as the act’s purpose²⁸. This concept similarly applies to proverbs, where multiple frames interact with cultural norms and collective moral values. Mirzayeva and Abdullayeva (2023) argue that Frame Semantics helps explain why similar moral ideas can be framed differently across languages²⁹. For example, the English proverb “Charity begins at home” uses the term “charity” to emphasize the act of giving and altruism, while “home” represents the intimate sphere of familial and personal relationships. In the Uzbek proverb “Yaxshilik oilangdan boshlanadi,” however, the focus shifts slightly: “yaxshilik” conveys a broader sense of moral goodness or virtue rather than just the act of giving, and “oila” (family) explicitly ties the idea of moral behavior to the family unit. This subtle difference highlights how each culture prioritizes distinct aspects of moral responsibility—English culture foregrounds altruistic action within the domestic realm, whereas Uzbek culture frames morality in terms of overall character and the foundational role of family. Reinforcing these ideas, Rakhmatova (2016) emphasizes that language is not merely a tool for communication but a reflection of cultural identity and moral worldviews, with proverbs carrying embedded assumptions and values that activate cognitive frames based on context³⁰. Thus, a proverb becomes a multifaceted linguistic artifact that not only conveys information but also triggers culturally situated assumptions about behavior, values, and social responsibilities.

Proverbs function as tools for transmitting ethical knowledge; they are compact, memorable, and often metaphorical expressions that encapsulate moral

²⁷ Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame semantics. In *Linguistics in the morning calm* (pp. 111–137). Seoul: Hanshin Publishing.

²⁸ Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame semantics. In *Linguistics in the morning calm* (pp. 223–230). Seoul: Hanshin Publishing.

²⁹ Mirzayeva, G., & Abdullayeva, D. (2023). Frame semantics in Uzbek and English proverbs: A comparative approach. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 11(1), 24–30.

³⁰ Rakhmatova, M. (2016). DISCUSSION ON VALUES, CULTURE, AND LANGUAGES. In *International Scientific and Practical Conference World science* (Vol. 2, No. 11, pp. 40-42). ROST. <https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=27198684>

and cultural values³¹, as noted by Umarova and Yigitaliyeva (2023). In Uzbek culture, for instance, goodness is frequently intertwined with faith, family, and community, a relationship vividly captured in the proverb “Yaxshilik qil, suvga ot, baliq bilar, baliq bilmasa, Xoliq bilar” (“Do good, throw it into the water, the fish will know; if the fish doesn’t know, the Creator will know”). This proverb operates on multiple levels by suggesting that ethical behavior has an immediate, observable impact on everyday life—symbolized by the fish’s recognition—and simultaneously places ultimate accountability in the realm of divine oversight through the Creator. In contrast, many English proverbs, such as “What goes around comes around,” frame goodness by emphasizing personal responsibility and the inevitability of reciprocal outcomes; here, actions set in motion natural cycles of cause and effect, underscoring the principle that one’s behavior will eventually influence one’s own fate. Gadoyeva and Yodgorova (2023) further explain that the somatization observed in language—linking bodily experiences with abstract ethical concepts—enhances the evocative power of proverbs, making moral ideas more immediate and relatable³². In addition, Gadoyeva (2023) discusses innovative word formation in English as a mechanism that enables the concise yet nuanced expression of ethical themes such as social reciprocity and karmic balance³³. Together, these linguistic strategies highlight how proverbs, whether through the direct religious framing found in Uzbek expressions or the emphasis on personal agency evident in English idioms, actively shape culturally specific narratives of morality and illuminate the intricate interplay between language, culture, and ethical behavior.

In the context of cultural differences in moral framing, English proverbs often emphasize individual responsibility, reflecting the values of individualistic societies. Proverbs such as “Charity begins at home” highlights the significance of personal accountability and the direct consequences of one’s actions. This expression is rooted in Western ideals, where individual agency and autonomy are central, and people are seen as morally responsible for their own behavior and choices. The framing in this proverb emphasizes self-directed actions, where moral responsibility is placed firmly on the individual. In contrast, many Uzbek proverbs place goodness within a communal or relational framework, reflecting the collectivist orientation of Uzbek culture. For example, the proverb “*Ota-onaga xizmat – jannat kaliti*” (“Serving your parents is the key to heaven”) illustrates how

³¹ Umarova, N., & Yigitaliyeva, M. (2023). Proverbs as a reflection of moral and cultural values. *Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy and Culture*, 4(1), 12–18.

³² Gadoyeva, M. I., & Yodgorova, L. B. (2023). Ingliz va o‘zbek tillari to‘plamlarida somatizmlarning qo‘llanilishi. *Scientific Aspects and Trends in the Field of Scientific Research*, 1(9), 236–241.

³³ Gadoyeva, M. I. (2023). Ingliz tilida soz yasash usullari. *Scientific Aspects and Trends in the Field of Scientific Research*, 1(9), 266–270.

moral value is assigned not to abstract ethical ideals but to socially prescribed actions, especially within the family. Here, *xizmat* (service) is not merely a task or obligation; it is culturally framed as a primary expression of *yaxshilik* (goodness), because it signifies respect, loyalty, and selflessness within a hierarchical and relational context. By serving one's parents, an individual demonstrates moral maturity and fulfills a deeply embedded social expectation, one that is believed to lead to divine reward (*jannat*). Thus, in the Uzbek frame, *goodness* is enacted through relationships and duties rather than isolated personal choice. This collectivist framing emphasizes that moral behavior is not only about internal virtues but about maintaining social harmony and honoring one's place in the family and community structure³⁴.

Proverbs are dynamic and context-dependent, with their meanings evolving based on the circumstances in which they are used. As Xamdamova (2023) notes, a single proverb can activate multiple cognitive frames depending on the context, highlighting the flexibility inherent in their interpretation³⁵. For instance, the English proverb "Kill them with kindness" can evoke very different meanings depending on how it is employed. In a situation of genuine compassion, it conveys the idea of disarming hostility through benevolence, whereas, in a more strategic context, it can suggest the use of politeness as a calculated tactic to gain advantage. Similarly, an Uzbek proverb about generosity may change its connotation based on the context in which it is spoken—whether as advice, criticism, or reflection. This fluidity in meaning demonstrates the polysemous nature of proverbs and their cultural dependence. Frame activation, therefore, is influenced not only by the literal meaning of a proverb but also by the shared knowledge, tone, and context in which it is situated. This makes the interpretation of proverbs a dynamic cognitive act, where the listener's understanding is shaped by both linguistic and cultural factors. For example, consider the Uzbek proverb "Ochiq qo'l, to'q yurak," which can be interpreted differently depending on the speaker's intent and the situation: as a warm invitation to generosity, as a critique of someone's lack of openness, or as a reflection on the value of giving. In each case, the frame activated will differ, illustrating how the meaning of proverbs is not fixed but continuously negotiated through context³⁶.

Conclusion. Proverbs are more than linguistic artifacts; they're moral blueprints. They show how cultures conceptualize values like goodness, not just in

³⁴ Sotvaldieva, D., & Masharipova, M. (2022). Comparative study of proverbs in English and Uzbek: Structural and semantic analysis. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 5(4), 102–109.

³⁵ Xamdamova, G. (2023). Polysemy and frame activation in Uzbek proverbs. *Journal of Modern Philology and Translation Studies*, 6(2), 59–67.

³⁶ Rakhmatova, M. (2016). Discussion on values, culture, and languages. In *International Scientific and Practical Conference World Science* (Vol. 2, No. 11, pp. 40–42).

what they say, but in how they say it. Through Frame Semantics, we can see that while the concept of goodness is universal, the frames used to understand and express it are deeply cultural. English and Uzbek proverbs reveal different emphases—individual vs. communal responsibility, secular vs. spiritual reward, delayed vs. immediate moral logic—but they all serve the same purpose: to pass on what it means to live a good life. This analysis not only contributes to the study of cognitive linguistics and phraseology but also has practical applications in education, translation, and intercultural communication. Understanding how moral values are framed across languages can help build empathy, improve communication, and promote cultural literacy in an increasingly connected world.

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