



SEASONAL METAPHORS AND THEIR CONCEPTUAL MEANINGS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK FOLK NARRATIVES: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conceptual structure of seasonal metaphors in English and Uzbek folk narratives through the lens of Cognitive Linguistics, drawing primarily on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as formulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and its subsequent refinements. By analysing a corpus of 180 folk tales, proverbs, and oral narrative fragments drawn from canonical Anglophone folklore archives and classical Uzbek oral tradition, the research identifies, classifies, and comparatively evaluates the metaphorical mappings associated with the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—and their corresponding conceptual domains. The findings reveal that both traditions share a substantial number of primary metaphors rooted in embodied experience, yet diverge markedly in the cultural elaboration of those mappings, reflecting distinct agricultural histories, climatic realities, and cosmological worldviews. Spring is predominantly mapped onto BIRTH and NEW BEGINNING in both corpora, yet Uzbek narratives additionally encode spring as DIVINE MERCY, a mapping largely absent from Anglophone material. Winter metaphors, conversely, exhibit the sharpest cross-cultural divergence: whereas English folk narratives systematically conceptualise winter as DEATH and ADVERSITY, Uzbek counterparts more frequently frame it as PURIFICATION and SPIRITUAL TRIAL. These results contribute to ongoing debates in cross-cultural cognitive semantics, challenge universalist accounts of nature metaphor, and offer pedagogical implications for EFL instruction in Central Asian contexts.

Introduction

Metaphor is no longer regarded merely as a decorative feature of poetic or rhetorical language; it is, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) famously argued, a fundamental cognitive

mechanism through which human beings comprehend abstract or complex domains in terms of more concrete and experientially grounded ones. Within this theoretical paradigm, the natural world occupies a privileged position: phenomena such as the cycle of seasons, the behaviour of rivers, the movement of celestial bodies, and the transformations of plant life constitute the source domains from which vast conceptual networks are constructed across virtually all human cultures.

Folk narratives represent one of the most fertile textual environments in which such metaphors crystallise, circulate, and are reproduced across generations. Unlike literary texts produced by individual authors, folk tales and oral traditions encode the shared conceptual schemas of entire communities, rendering them uniquely valuable for cross-cultural cognitive research. The seasonal cycle – universally experienced, yet culturally interpreted in divergent ways – offers an exceptionally productive site for investigating both the universal and the culturally specific dimensions of metaphorical thought.

English and Uzbek folk traditions provide a particularly instructive pairing for such inquiry. Both are ancient and richly documented, yet they have developed within markedly different ecological, religious, and historical contexts. The Anglophone tradition is rooted in the temperate, maritime climate of the British Isles, shaped by Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norman cultural strata, and expressed through a predominantly Germanic and Latinate lexicon. The Uzbek oral tradition, by contrast, belongs to the broader Turkic and Persianate literary-cultural sphere of Central Asia, where arid continental climate, Islamic cosmology, and a pastoral-agricultural economy have historically structured the symbolic imagination. Comparing the seasonal metaphors operative in these two traditions therefore illuminates not only the cognitive universals that bind human metaphorical reasoning, but also the cultural particulars that differentiate it.

Despite the growing body of cross-cultural cognitive semantic research, comparative studies focusing specifically on seasonal metaphors within the folk narrative genres of English and Uzbek remain scarce. The present study addresses this lacuna by pursuing the following research objectives:

- (1) to identify and systematically classify the conceptual metaphors associated with each season in a balanced corpus of English and Uzbek folk narratives;
- (2) to determine the degree of cross-cultural overlap and divergence in seasonal metaphorical mappings between the two traditions;
- (3) to account for observed differences with reference to ecological, cultural, and ideological factors;
- (4) to evaluate the theoretical implications of the findings for Conceptual Metaphor Theory and cross-cultural cognitive semantics.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (a) What conceptual metaphors structure seasonal references in English and Uzbek folk narratives? (b) To what extent do these metaphors reflect shared embodied experience versus culturally specific meaning-making? (c) How do dominant metaphorical schemas for each season differ across the two traditions, and what sociocultural factors may account for these differences?

Literature review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Its Developments. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as originally articulated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal work *Metaphors*

We Live By, posits that metaphor is not a property of language per se but of the conceptual system underlying it. A conceptual metaphor consists of a systematic mapping of structure from a source domain—typically concrete, sensorimotor, or experientially grounded—onto a target domain—typically abstract or less clearly structured. The canonical example, ARGUMENT IS WAR, demonstrates that ordinary speakers do not merely describe arguments using war vocabulary; rather, they actually conceptualise and experience argumentation in terms of the structure of warfare.

Subsequent work elaborated and challenged various aspects of CMT. Grady (1997) distinguished primary metaphors, which arise directly from correlations in bodily experience (e.g., MORE IS UP, emerging from the perceptual correlation between vertical height and quantity), from complex or compound metaphors, which combine primary metaphors and cultural beliefs into more elaborate conceptual structures. Johnson (1987) foregrounded the role of image schemas – pre-conceptual, recurrent patterns of sensorimotor experience such as CONTAINMENT, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, and FORCE – in grounding metaphorical mappings. Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) Conceptual Integration Theory extended CMT by accounting for the dynamic, emergent properties of meaning construction that simple two-domain mapping models cannot fully capture.

Cross-cultural validation of CMT has been a major research agenda since the 1990s. Yu (1995) demonstrated that Chinese metaphors for emotion, while sharing some universal features with English counterparts, diverge significantly in their cultural elaboration. Kövecses (2005, 2015) developed a systematic account of the relationship between universal and culture-specific aspects of conceptual metaphor, arguing that while primary metaphors tend to be universal due to their embodied basis, complex metaphors exhibit substantial cultural variability because they are shaped by locally specific beliefs, values, and conceptual models. Musolff (2004) and Steen et al. (2010) have further refined methodological frameworks for identifying and analysing conceptual metaphors in naturally occurring discourse.

Nature Metaphors in Folklore Studies. The intersection of cognitive linguistics and folklore studies has generated a productive, if relatively recent, body of scholarship. Sims and Stephens (2011) have argued that folk genres – including proverbs, riddles, fairy tales, and oral epics – encode and transmit conceptual schemas that are both cognitively fundamental and culturally elaborated, making them ideal objects for investigating the interplay between universalism and relativism in metaphorical thought. Norrick (1985) demonstrated that proverbs, a sub-genre particularly rich in metaphorical language, systematically exploit a small inventory of natural phenomena – seasons, weather, animals, plants – as source domains for conceptualising human social life.

With specific reference to seasonal metaphors, Turner (1987) conducted a pioneering analysis of death and rebirth imagery in English poetry, tracing the conceptual roots of the LIFE IS A YEAR metaphor to ancient mythological and agricultural cycles. Steen (2008) and Charteris-Black (2004) have examined seasonal metaphors in contemporary English discourse, noting the persistence of mappings that originate in folk tradition. Research on Uzbek and broader Turkic folk literature has, to date, given less systematic attention to metaphor in the cognitive linguistic sense, though ethnographic and literary-historical studies by Mirzayev (1999), Imomov (2008), and Sarimsoqov (1978) provide invaluable documentation of the symbolic repertoires deployed in Uzbek oral tradition. Recent work by Yuldasheva (2019) on

colour symbolism in Uzbek proverbs represents an emerging engagement with cognitive approaches in Uzbek linguistics, but no study to our knowledge has applied CMT systematically to seasonal imagery in Uzbek folk narratives.

Theoretical Gap and Contribution of the Present Study. The foregoing review reveals a clear theoretical and empirical gap: while both CMT-informed cross-cultural metaphor research and Uzbek folk literary scholarship have produced substantial findings, they have not been brought into sustained dialogue around the specific domain of seasonal metaphor. The present study addresses this gap by providing the first systematic, corpus-based, cognitive linguistic analysis of seasonal metaphors in both English and Uzbek folk traditions within a unified comparative framework. In doing so, it contributes to the broader project of testing CMT's universalist claims against cross-cultural evidence, while also enriching understanding of Uzbek conceptual semantics specifically.

Materials and methods

Corpus Design and Data Sources. The research corpus was assembled from two parallel subcorpora of comparable scope and generic diversity. The English subcorpus comprises 90 texts drawn from the following canonical sources: Joseph Jacobs's English Fairy Tales (1890) and More English Fairy Tales (1894); selected volumes of the Folk-Lore Society's County Folk-Lore series; the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (3rd ed.); and digitised transcriptions from the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library's oral narrative archive. Texts were selected to ensure representation of all four seasons and multiple narrative genres (märchen, legends, proverbs, and seasonal songs).

The Uzbek subcorpus likewise comprises 90 texts drawn from: the multi-volume Uzbek Xalq Ertaklari (Uzbek Folk Tales) series edited by Imomov and Mirzayev (1987–2002); the collection Maqollar va Topishmoqlar (Proverbs and Riddles) compiled by Sarimsoqov (1978); and selected epics and oral lyric texts (lapar, askiya, doston fragments) from the archives of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences. Translations of Uzbek texts were produced by the present author, a native speaker of Uzbek with advanced competence in English, and were reviewed by a second bilingual linguist for accuracy.

Analytical Framework and Coding Procedure. Metaphor identification was carried out using an adapted version of the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIP-VU) developed by Steen et al. (2010). Under this procedure, all lexical units in each text were examined at the word level; those whose contextual meaning differed from their basic meaning and whose basic meaning could be understood in relation to the contextual meaning by some form of comparison or analogy were flagged as metaphorical. Seasonal terms and their semantic fields (spring, summer, autumn/fall, winter; and Uzbek equivalents: bahor, yoz, kuz, qish) were designated as primary foci of analysis.

Identified metaphorical expressions were subsequently grouped into conceptual metaphors following standard CMT notation (TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN). Each conceptual metaphor was assigned to one of four season-based categories and further classified by target domain type: LIFE CYCLE (birth, growth, death, rebirth); EMOTIONAL STATE (joy, sorrow, hope, despair); SOCIAL CONDITION (prosperity, hardship, justice, corruption); SPIRITUAL/MORAL DOMAIN (divine favour, purification, trial, transcendence).

Inter-rater reliability was established through independent coding of a 20% stratified random sample by a second trained analyst (Cohen's $\kappa = .84$, indicating strong agreement).

Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and recourse to the analytical protocol. Frequency counts and cross-cultural comparisons were computed using descriptive statistics; chi-square tests were applied to assess the statistical significance of differences in metaphor-type distribution across the two subcorpora (significance threshold: $p < .05$).

Limitations. Several limitations of the present study merit acknowledgement. First, the corpus, while substantial for a qualitative cognitive semantic study, does not aspire to the scale of corpus-linguistic analyses of large electronic corpora; generalisations should therefore be treated as indicative rather than exhaustive. Second, the translation of Uzbek texts inevitably involves interpretive decisions that may influence metaphor identification; the double-blind review procedure mitigates but cannot eliminate this risk. Third, the study's focus on published and archival sources means that very recent or regionally marginal folk materials may be under-represented.

Results

Overview of Corpus Findings. Analysis of the complete corpus yielded a total of 1,247 metaphorical expressions with seasonal reference: 628 from the English subcorpus and 619 from the Uzbek subcorpus. These were grouped into 68 distinct conceptual metaphors (38 in English, 30 in Uzbek), with 22 conceptual metaphors appearing in both subcorpora (i.e., attested in both traditions, though with varying frequency and elaboration). The four seasons generated markedly unequal numbers of metaphorical expressions in both subcorpora: winter and spring each generated substantially more metaphorical material than summer and autumn, a pattern consistent across both traditions.

Spring Metaphors. Spring is the most densely metaphorised season in both subcorpora. The dominant cross-cultural mappings are SPRING IS BIRTH / NEW BEGINNING and SPRING IS HOPE, both of which appear to be grounded in universal embodied experience of seasonal renewal—the emergence of plant life after winter dormancy, the lengthening of daylight, and the return of warmth providing immediate sensorimotor grounding for mappings onto vitality and positive anticipation.

In the English subcorpus, spring metaphors cluster predominantly around SPRING IS YOUTH and SPRING IS ROMANTIC LOVE, mappings that pervade the Anglophone fairy-tale tradition ('The maiden's laughter was the first birdsong of spring'; 'His heart opened like a field in April'). These align with well-documented Western European literary and folk conventions associating spring with courtship, fertility, and erotic awakening, and are consistent with Turner's (1987) analysis of seasonal imagery in English poetry.

The Uzbek subcorpus, while attesting all the cross-cultural mappings, adds a statistically significant cluster of metaphors mapping spring onto DIVINE MERCY and SPIRITUAL RENEWAL. Expressions such as Bahor — Olohning marhamati ('Spring is God's mercy'), recurring across multiple proverb and tale types, encode spring not merely as a natural or biological phenomenon but as a manifestation of divine grace within an Islamic cosmological framework. This mapping, which has no significant equivalent in the English subcorpus, reflects the deep integration of Islamic theology into Uzbek folk cosmology.

Summer Metaphors. Summer generates fewer metaphorical expressions than spring or winter in both subcorpora, suggesting that it functions as a baseline or neutral period rather than a site of intense conceptual activity. The most frequent English summer metaphors construct summer as ABUNDANCE and FULFILMENT ('a summer of plenty', 'the summer of

their happiness'), while negative summer metaphors – less frequent but attested – associate intense summer heat with OPPRESSION and DANGER ('the tyrant's summer', 'scorched by the sun of his wrath').

Uzbek summer metaphors reveal a more complex ambivalence. Given Central Asia's climatic reality – summers re intensely hot and dry, with temperatures regularly exceeding 40°C in much of the region – the SUMMER IS ADVERSITY mapping is considerably more prominent in the Uzbek subcorpus than in the English one. Summer heat (jazirama) functions as a recurrent metaphor for TRIAL, HARDSHIP, and TEST OF CHARACTER. Simultaneously, the association of summer with ripening grain and fruit produces robust ABUNDANCE mappings, creating a conceptual tension between plenty and suffering that is largely absent from the more uniformly positive English summer metaphor schema.

Autumn Metaphors. Autumn metaphors in both traditions are dominated by the AUTUMN IS DECLINE/AGEING schema, which is unsurprising given the direct perceptual correspondence between leaf-fall, harvest-end, and biological senescence. Both subcorpora attest expressions in which ageing protagonists are described in terms of autumnal imagery, and both use autumnal framing for narratives of impending death or end of a life stage.

A notable cross-cultural difference concerns AUTUMN IS WISDOM. In the Uzbek subcorpus, this mapping is markedly more frequent and positively valenced than in the English one: kuz - donishmandlik fasli ('autumn is the season of wisdom') is a recurrent proverb-type, and elderly characters are frequently described through autumn metaphors that emphasise accumulated knowledge and moral authority rather than decline. This pattern may reflect the high social prestige accorded to elder figures in Uzbek traditional culture, in contrast with the more ambivalent English folk representation of old age.

Winter Metaphors. Winter generates the most pronounced cross-cultural divergence in the entire dataset. In the English subcorpus, winter is overwhelmingly conceptualised as DEATH, HOSTILITY, and ADVERSITY. Protagonists who face winter alone are almost invariably doomed; winter landscapes function as metonyms for existential threat; and the resolution of many English folk tales hinges on surviving or escaping winter's power. The WINTER IS AN ENEMY schema is both frequent and elaborately realised ('Old Man Winter', 'Jack Frost', 'the cold that kills').

In the Uzbek subcorpus, while WINTER IS HARDSHIP is also well attested, a statistically prominent alternative schema—WINTER IS PURIFICATION / SPIRITUAL TRIAL—has no robust English equivalent. In numerous Uzbek tales and proverbs, winter is the season in which the hero undergoes moral testing, emerges transformed, and earns divine favour: Qishni o'tkazgan bahorga loyiq ('One who has survived winter deserves spring'). This schema reflects both the practical significance of winter endurance in continental Central Asian climates and the influence of Sufi-inflected Islamic spirituality, in which hardship and renunciation are understood as paths to inner purification.

Discussion

Universals and Particulars in Seasonal Metaphor. The findings support a nuanced version of the theoretical position advanced by Kövecses (2005, 2015): primary metaphors – those grounded in universal embodied experience of seasonal change – are indeed shared across the two traditions. SPRING IS BIRTH, WINTER IS DEATH, AUTUMN IS DECLINE: these mappings appear to arise from the direct sensorimotor correlations available to any human

being who experiences the annual cycle of seasons, and their cross-cultural recurrence is consistent with Grady's (1997) account of primary metaphor formation. The present data thus lend empirical support to the embodied universalist component of CMT against strong cultural-relativist critiques.

However, the data also demonstrate conclusively that embodied primary metaphors do not determine the full semantic content of seasonal conceptualisations in any tradition. Cultural elaboration—the process by which primary schemas are extended, combined, and inflected by culturally specific knowledge, values, and beliefs—produces substantive divergences that are not predictable from embodied experience alone. The WINTER IS PURIFICATION mapping in Uzbek folk tradition, the SPRING IS DIVINE MERCY schema, and the SUMMER IS TRIAL elaboration all represent culturally distinctive extensions of primary experiential schemas, shaped by the intersection of Islamic cosmology, Central Asian ecology, and the social values encoded in Uzbek oral tradition.

Ecological and Cosmological Determinants. Two categories of cultural factor appear to exert particularly strong influence on the culturally specific aspects of seasonal metaphor in the present corpus: ecological context and cosmological worldview. The climatic differences between the British Isles and Central Asia are reflected directly in the metaphorical systems: English winter metaphors emphasise the lethality of cold and darkness in ways that correspond to the genuine survival stakes of pre-modern winters in a cold, wet, northern European climate; Uzbek summer metaphors emphasise the adversity of heat in ways that map onto the ecological reality of a semi-arid continental environment.

Cosmological factors—particularly the integrative role of Islamic theology in Uzbek folk culture versus the syncretic but largely secularised cosmology of English folk tradition—account for the distinctively spiritual valence of several Uzbek seasonal metaphor schemas. The reinterpretation of natural cycles through the lens of divine mercy, spiritual trial, and moral purification reflects the deep interpenetration of Islamic religious culture and indigenous Turkic folk tradition in Uzbek narrative imagination, a process extensively documented by literary historians (Karimov, 1993; Hakimov, 2007) but not previously analysed from a cognitive semantic perspective.

Implications for Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The present findings have several implications for CMT and its cross-cultural extension. First, they reinforce the case for a two-tier model of metaphorical universality: universal primary metaphors grounded in embodied experience, and culturally variable complex metaphors shaped by locally specific factors. Second, they suggest that the domain of nature metaphor—often treated implicitly as straightforwardly universal in early CMT work—is in fact a domain where cultural elaboration plays a particularly significant role, because natural phenomena, though universally experienced, are interpreted through culturally variable cosmological, agricultural, and symbolic frameworks.

Third, the findings highlight the methodological importance of corpus diversity in cross-cultural metaphor research. Studies relying exclusively on English-language corpora, or on typologically and culturally similar language pairs, risk overgeneralising from a narrow empirical base. The English-Uzbek comparison undertaken here reveals divergences that would be invisible in, for instance, an English-German or English-French comparison, because

the relevant cultural variables—Islamic cosmology, Central Asian ecology, oral-traditional aesthetics—lie outside the shared heritage of Western European cultures.

Pedagogical Implications. The research also has practical implications for foreign language pedagogy, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Uzbekistan. Understanding the conceptual metaphor schemas operative in one's L1 folk tradition—and recognising where these schemas overlap with or diverge from L2 schemas—can facilitate both metaphor comprehension and metaphor production in the target language. Pedagogical materials that make these cross-cultural metaphorical mappings explicit, rather than treating English seasonal expressions as merely figurative vocabulary items to be memorised, may produce more robust and transferable metaphorical competence in EFL learners.

Conclusion

This study has presented a systematic, corpus-based, cognitive linguistic analysis of seasonal metaphors in English and Uzbek folk narratives. The principal findings may be summarised as follows. Both traditions share a core inventory of primary seasonal metaphors grounded in universal embodied experience: SPRING IS BIRTH/RENEWAL, SUMMER IS ABUNDANCE, AUTUMN IS DECLINE, and WINTER IS ADVERSITY/DEATH constitute cross-cultural constants. However, both traditions also exhibit culturally distinctive elaborations of these primary schemas: English folk narratives emphasise the SPRING IS ROMANTIC LOVE and WINTER IS AN ENEMY schemas, while Uzbek folk narratives are distinguished by the SPRING IS DIVINE MERCY, WINTER IS PURIFICATION/SPIRITUAL TRIAL, and AUTUMN IS WISDOM schemas—mappings that reflect the influence of Islamic cosmology, Central Asian ecology, and the social values embedded in Uzbek oral tradition.

These findings support a two-tier model of metaphorical universality, confirm the theoretical importance of distinguishing primary from complex metaphors, and demonstrate the fruitfulness of methodologically rigorous cross-cultural comparison for testing and refining CMT. They also reveal significant underexplored territory in the cognitive linguistic analysis of Uzbek—and, more broadly, Turkic and Central Asian – folk discourse, a territory whose exploration promises substantial contributions to the field.

Future research might extend the present analysis to a wider range of folk genres, including epic poetry (*doston*) and ritual verbal art (*maqom* texts); to a broader typological sample including Persian, Kazakh, or Tajik folk traditions for regional comparison; or to the diachronic dimension, examining how seasonal metaphor schemas have evolved as Uzbek folk tradition has been subjected to successive cultural influences. Computational approaches enabling larger-scale corpus analysis could also complement and expand upon the present findings.

The natural world, and the seasonal cycle in particular, provides one of the most ancient and enduring foundations for human metaphorical imagination. As the present study demonstrates, that imagination is both universally grounded and irreducibly cultural—a conclusion with implications not only for cognitive semantics, but for our understanding of the relationship between environment, culture, and mind.

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