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# LEXICAL-SEMANTIC FOUNDATIONS BEHIND THE FORMATION OF SOMATIC-COMPONENT RIDDLES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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**Abstract.** This study addresses a single question: how does the stock of body-part words feed the making of riddles in English and Uzbek? Adopting a side-by-side method, the author collects riddle texts whose pivotal word denotes a part of the body, files those words into groups based on shared meaning, and follows the two channels – one built on likeness, the other on nearness – through which the name of an organ ends up denoting an ordinary household or working object. The juxtaposition reveals a two-sided result: the impulse to portray the surrounding world by reference to one's own body returns in both cultures, while the particular organ that is chosen, the object it is mapped onto and the feeling it conveys are decided separately in each language. The conclusions are useful for contrastive lexicology, the study of folklore, translation theory and the teaching of foreign languages.

**Keywords:** riddle, somatism, body-part lexeme, lexical-semantic motivation, metaphor, metonymy, picture of the world, English, Uzbek.

**Annotatsiya.** Mazkur tadqiqot bitta savolga javob izlaydi: ingliz va o‘zbek tillarida tana a’zolarini ataydigan so‘zlar zaxirasi topishmoq yasashga qanday xizmat qiladi? Qiyosiy usuldan foydalangan holda muallif kalit so‘zi biror a’zoni bildiruvchi topishmoqlarni to‘playdi, bu so‘zlarni umumiy ma’noga ko‘ra guruhlarga ajratadi va organ nomining oddiy ro‘zg‘or yoki mehnat buyumini ifodalashga o‘tishini ta’minlaydigan ikki yo‘l – o‘xshashlik hamda yaqinlik (yondoshlik) ko‘chimini – kuzatadi. Solishtirish ikki yoqlama natija beradi: olamni o‘z tanasi orqali tasvirlash mayli har ikki madaniyatda qaytalanadi, biroq qaysi a’zo tanlanishi, u qaysi buyumga bog‘lanishi va qanday hissiyot ifodalashi har bir tilda alohida hal qilinadi. Xulosalar chog‘ishtirma leksikologiya, folklorshunoslik, tarjima nazariyasi va chet tilini o‘qitish uchun foydalidir.

**Kalit so‘zlar:** topishmoq, somatizm, tana a’zosi leksemasi, leksik-semantik asos, metafora, metonimiya, til manzarasi, ingliz tili, o‘zbek tili.

**Аннотация.** Данное исследование отвечает на один вопрос: каким образом запас слов, называющих части тела, питает создание загадок в английском и узбекском языках? Применяя сопоставительный метод, автор собирает загадки, опорное слово которых обозначает часть тела, распределяет такие слова по группам на основе общего значения и прослеживает два канала – опирающийся на сходство и опирающийся на смежность, – через которые название органа начинает обозначать обиходный или трудовой предмет. Сопоставление даёт двоякий результат: побуждение изображать окружающий мир через собственное тело возвращается в обеих культурах, тогда как конкретный выбираемый орган, предмет, на который он проецируется, и передаваемое им чувство решаются в каждом языке

отдельно. Выводы полезны для сопоставительной лексикологии, изучения фольклора, теории перевода и преподавания иностранных языков.

**Ключевые слова:** загадка, соматизм, лексема части тела, лексико-семантическая основа, метафора, метонимия, языковая картина мира, английский язык, узбекский язык.

## 1. Introduction

Whatever a community has lived through, the way it sorts the world and the things it treasures all settle into its words, and within folklore the riddle preserves these deposits with unusual density. The genre never points to its object directly; it draws the thing from the side – through an image, a contradiction or a planted puzzle – and leaves the listener to name what has been hidden. The Uzbek title of the form, topishmoq, is itself a call to 'find', and the English word issues the very same dare to guess. For all its brevity, a riddle compresses into a handful of lines an entire scheme for naming and grouping reality, which is precisely what makes it instructive for the linguist.

In putting together so indirect a description, a speaker reaches first for the readiest yardstick of all, the body. This is why somatisms – the term comes from Greek soma, 'body' – recur so insistently among the materials of riddles. Being among the oldest and most resistant to change of all word-layers, body-part vocabulary also offers solid footing for comparing languages that are otherwise unrelated. The subject gains in timeliness from two directions: from the current pull of cognitive and contrastive approaches to the lexicon, and from the practical weight of the cultural knowledge locked inside folklore, knowledge that proves decisive in translation and in cross-cultural contact within an increasingly connected world.

The task this article takes on is to bring to light the lexical-semantic motivation of somatic riddles in the two languages: which organ names are called into service, what they are made to denote, and at which points English and Uzbek converge or separate. Three working steps lead towards that goal: collecting and grouping riddles founded on body-part words in each language; determining which somatisms prove most productive in the genre; and weighing the semantic mechanisms and cultural associations that convert an organ name into a concealed image. The contribution of the work lies in choosing the riddle – rather than the far more frequently examined idiom or proverb – as the testing ground for a contrastive look at somatic vocabulary.

## 2. Review of the Literature

Attention to body-part words as a semantic and cultural resource gathered pace over the final decades of the twentieth century, moving in step with the growth of cognitive and cultural linguistics. The cognitive line of inquiry, most closely tied to Lakoff and Johnson, held that abstract thought is rooted in bodily experience and that the body accordingly acts as a leading source domain for metaphor; Kovecses later extended this account with a systematic survey of source and target mappings. The cultural line, advanced in the Russian and Central Asian setting by Maslova and Teliya, drew attention to the way settled expressions store the values, convictions and historical memory of a speech community. In Uzbek scholarship, the description and dictionary-fixing of somatic phraseology rest largely on the work of Rahmatullaev and Mamatov, who demonstrated that the components bosh, ko'z, qo'l and yurak stand among the most active in the building of set

phrases. The riddle was given a firm comparative basis by Taylor, whose classification of English oral riddles still serves as a point of reference, while Mieder's handbook supplies the wider frame of paremiology. Yet the bulk of contrastive research so far has settled on idioms and proverbs; the somatic riddle, and especially the lexical-semantic motivation behind it, has drawn far less orderly attention, and it is this opening that the present paper means to fill.

## 3. Materials and Methods

The body of material gathered for the study is made up of riddles whose pivotal image is a part of the body, taken from published English and Uzbek folklore collections together with entries in dictionaries. Four procedures were brought to bear. The descriptive procedure arranges the somatic material; the contrastive-typological procedure ranges the two languages alongside one another; componential analysis resolves the sense of each organ name into smaller semantic features; and a linguocultural reading construes the cultural load that the imagery carries. Every text was first placed under the body-part word it holds, after which its semantic composition and the trope at work – whether grounded in likeness or in nearness – were examined one by one. Where the tradition allowed a riddle more than one solution, the most widely recorded answer was taken as the ground of the analysis.

## 4. Results and Discussion

**4.1. Lexical-semantic groups of somatisms.** Arranging the gathered somatisms by sense produces three recurring clusters. The broadest covers the head and face: head (Uzb. bosh), eye (ko‘z), ear (quloq), mouth (og‘iz), nose (burun), tooth (tish) and tongue (til). A second cluster brings together the limbs: hand/arm (qo‘l), finger (barmoq) and foot/leg (oyoq). A third and narrower cluster keeps the trunk and the inner organs, including heart (yurak), liver (jigar) and back/waist (bel). Tallying their appearances across both traditions, the head-and-face items – chiefly eye, head and tooth – bear the greatest functional weight, which follows directly from how conspicuous and how indispensable those organs are. The limbs hold a middle ground, whereas the inner organs, screened from view, are summoned less frequently and surface mostly in riddles resting on function rather than on shape.

**4.2. Transfer by resemblance.** Along the first and busier channel, a likeness of shape or office lets a body-part word slide onto a lifeless thing. Uzbek practice names the opening of a needle a ko‘z (eye), the bent handle of a jug a quloq (ear), and a mountain's summit a bosh (head); the prongs of a comb or the edge of a saw turn into tish (teeth). English proceeds identically: a needle owns its eye, a jug or bottle its mouth, a saw or comb its teeth, a clock its hands. That two unconnected traditions arrive at the same images argues for a shared, body-rooted cast of thought rather than for any loan passing between them. In componential terms the transfer retains one prominent feature – a small round aperture for ‘eye’, a file of sharp projections for ‘teeth’, an uppermost rounded part for ‘head’ – and lets the remainder of the organ's meaning fall away.

**4.3. Transfer by adjacency.** The second channel runs through nearness instead of likeness: an organ comes to represent the whole person, or the act it carries out. When a riddle has ‘a single tongue speak for the whole village’ and the answer is a bell, tongue/til is taken up because it is the source of sound, not because it resembles anything; in many local variants the clapper that strikes

the bell is itself called til. In the same way, riddles in which ‘ten brothers’ perform the work of the hands depend on a part-for-whole reading of barmoq (finger). Examples of this order show that the lexical-semantic motivation of a riddle is not penned in by outward likeness but leans just as willingly on cause-and-effect and part-for-whole ties – that is, on metonymy beside metaphor.

**4.4. Points of divergence.** The plain parting of the two languages lies in the choice of source objects, in the way the image is shaped, and in cultural overtone. Uzbek somatic riddles draw heavily on the furniture of rural labour and the home – field tools, kitchen vessels, farm animals – and are bound tightly by metre, rhyme and sound-play that make them easy to remember and to pass on by mouth. English riddles, the literary ones in particular, incline rather towards paradox and towards the twin sense of words; a familiar nursery item such as ‘Humpty Dumpty’ constructs a more tiered figure in which the hidden answer, an egg, is reached by way of narrative rather than a single likeness. Differences of this kind speak more to the everyday realia and the aesthetic preference of each tradition than to the body-part inventory itself, which is largely held in common.

**4.5. Cultural connotation.** Cultural overtone draws a last line of contrast. The word for heart (yurak) names the seat of feeling, love and the inner self in both communities, so on this point the two coincide. The word for liver, by contrast, sets them apart: in Uzbek – and over much of the East – jigar (also bag‘ir) gives off warmth, tenderness and blood-kinship and serves readily as a term of endearment, whereas English liver stirs nothing of the kind and, if anything, tilts towards unfavourable notions of temper. The discrepancy makes clear that, even where the list of organ names overlaps, the value and feeling pinned to each name are settled by a community’s own cultural code. Taken as a whole, these findings set the lexical-semantic motivation of somatic riddles upon two layers operating together: a universal, cognition-driven layer that accounts for the wide overlap of images, and a nationally bound layer that decides which lexeme is chosen, how the figure is fashioned, and what associations attach to it. Looked at in this light, the somatic riddle stands as a small-scale snapshot of the verbal picture of the world each people carries.

## 5. Conclusion

Holding English and Uzbek somatic riddles up against each other warrants several conclusions. First, riddles of this sort lay anthropocentric thinking open to view, and in both languages eye, head and tooth figure among the most heavily worked source words. Second, their formation runs on two broadly universal mechanisms – transfer by likeness (metaphor) and transfer by nearness (metonymy) – which is why so many parallels come to the surface across the pair. Third, the languages keep their separation in the objects they riddle about, in the craft of their imagery, and in the cultural feeling fastened to particular somatisms, each marking out the lines of its own cultural code. The picture drawn here can be of service to contrastive lexicology, to folklore and translation studies, and to the everyday business of language teaching and intercultural preparation, where alertness to such asymmetries helps learners steer clear of literal but misleading renderings. A larger corpus joined to statistical counts would refine and widen what has been set out here and would let the productivity of individual somatisms be gauged with finer accuracy.

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