

THE CONCEPT OF LOVE IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS: A CONCEPTUAL AND METAPHORICAL APPROACH

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Love is an emotionally intense, culturally significant, and cognitively complex human experience. It transcends time, language, and geography, and yet it is articulated and understood in diverse ways across cultures. From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, abstract concepts such as love are shaped and expressed through conceptual metaphors—mental mappings between domains of experience [5;5].

This article explores how the concept of love is metaphorically conceptualized in English and Karakalpak. These two languages represent distinct cultural, historical, and linguistic systems, offering rich material for comparative cognitive analysis. While English reflects Western, often individualistic values, Karakalpak, shaped by Central Asian Turkic traditions and Sufi influences, reveals collectivist, emotional, and moral conceptualizations of love.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive linguistics posits that language reflects mental structures and that metaphor is a tool of thought, not just a rhetorical device [5;3]. According to Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), people understand abstract domains (like love) via concrete, embodied source domains (such as journeys, war, fire, illness) [5;4]. These metaphors are grounded in bodily experience but mediated by cultural models and linguistic practices [2;25].

Metaphors are not arbitrary; they follow systematic mappings and often reflect universal human experiences. However, the selection, elaboration, and interpretation of metaphors vary across cultures, influenced by historical, social, and literary traditions [4;45].

Metaphors of Love in English

Numerous metaphorical models are used to conceptualize love in English. Some of the most dominant include:

LOVE IS A JOURNEY

This metaphor frames romantic relationships as joint movement toward a common goal, often emphasizing compatibility and obstacles. Examples:

“Our relationship is going nowhere.”

“We're at a crossroads.”

“They've come a long way together.”

This metaphor reflects the Western cultural emphasis on progress, direction, and agency [4;37].

LOVE IS WAR

Love is seen as a battle, conquest, or struggle. Examples:

“He won her heart.”

“They fought for each other.”

“She conquered him with a smile.”

This metaphor emphasizes conflict, passion, and strategic interaction—elements aligned with English-speaking cultures' emphasis on individualism and competition [1;89].

LOVE IS MADNESS/ILLNESS

Love is seen as an irrational or uncontrollable force. Examples:

“He's crazy about her.”

“Love is blind.”

“She was lovesick.”

Such metaphors capture the disorienting, uncontrollable nature of deep emotional attachment.

Love Metaphors in Karakalpak

Karakalpak, as part of the Turkic language family and shaped by nomadic, Islamic, and poetic traditions, presents different metaphorical models for love. While some share universal features, others reflect unique cultural elements.

LOVE IS FIRE

This is one of the most pervasive metaphors in Karakalpak poetry and oral tradition.

Examples:

“Kónlime ot túsken” – Fire has fallen into my soul

“Mahabbat jalını” – The flame of love

Fire metaphorically conveys both passion and pain, signaling emotional intensity and suffering [3;201]. The fire burns the heart, consumes reason, and leads to spiritual purification—a motif prominent in Sufi thought.

LOVE IS PAIN/WOUND

This metaphor reflects the emotional suffering love brings. Examples:

“Mahabbat jaralı” – Love is my wound

“Súyiw – azap” – To love is torment

Love is frequently portrayed as emotional and physical suffering, aligning with the themes of sacrifice and devotion in classical Karakalpak poetry.

LOVE IS SLAVERY

This metaphor expresses deep emotional dependence and powerlessness. Examples:

“Sağınış penen qırq jıl qul boldım” – I was a slave to longing for forty years

Love is not a mutual journey but a one-sided submission, evoking images of loyalty, endurance, and fate.

LOVE IS NATURE

Natural imagery plays a central role in expressing love: the moon, flowers, wind, and rivers symbolize beauty, longing, and transformation. Example:

“Sen – ay, men – tún” – You are the moon, I am the night

This metaphor emphasizes harmony, distance, and the cyclical rhythms of nature, reflecting the nomadic and poetic worldview of the Karakalpaks [3;233].

The concept of love, though universally experienced, is linguistically and culturally mediated through metaphor. Cognitive linguistic analysis of English and Karakalpak reveals shared embodied experiences (such as fire, pain, and madness) but culturally divergent interpretations of these metaphors.

The English metaphor system reflects an active, strategic, and goal-oriented understanding of love. The Karakalpak metaphor system emphasizes passivity, emotional depth, and spiritual suffering, rooted in poetic, moral, and Sufi traditions. Through the lens of metaphor, we not only understand how love is expressed, but how it is lived within a given culture.

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