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**BODY-PART IDIOMS AS EXPRESSIONS OF CHARACTER: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF KARAKALPAK AND ENGLISH PROVERBS**

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Abstract: This study explores the conceptualization of human character through somatic (body-part) idioms in Karakalpak and English. While both languages utilize the human body as a primary source domain for metaphorical mapping, the specific target domains—traits such as courage, honesty, stubbornness, and wisdom—reveal distinct cultural axiologies. Karakalpak idioms, rooted in Turkic nomadic traditions and Islamic ethics, emphasize communal honor (namis), spiritual purity, and endurance. In contrast, English idioms often reflect individualistic psychology, empirical observation, and a dichotomy between reason and emotion. Through comparative analysis, this paper demonstrates how linguistic embodiment serves as a mirror for cultural values.

Keywords: Karakalpak language, English idioms, somatic metaphors, conceptual metaphor theory, cultural linguistics, proverbs (maqola).

Introduction

Language is not merely a tool for communication but a repository of cultural wisdom. One of the most universal mechanisms for expressing abstract psychological traits is the use of body-part idioms. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), humans understand abstract concepts (like character) in terms of concrete experiences (like the body).

In Karakalpak, a Kipchak branch of the Turkic language spoken primarily in Uzbekistan, proverbs (maqola and matal) play a crucial role in socialization. Similarly, English idioms are deeply embedded in Western literary and colloquial tradition. This study compares how these two linguistically and culturally distinct groups map body parts to character traits, highlighting convergences and divergences.

Theoretical Framework: Embodiment and Culture

The body is a universal source domain, but its interpretation is culturally filtered.

Universalism: All humans have hearts, heads, and hands; thus, all languages use them to describe feelings, thoughts, and actions.

Cultural Specificity: The value assigned to these parts differs. For instance, is the heart the seat of courage or love? Is the head the seat of wisdom or stubbornness?

Comparative Analysis of Key Body Parts

The Heart (Jürek vs. Heart): The Moral Compass

In both cultures, the heart is central to character, but the nuances differ significantly.

A. Karakalpak: Jürek as Courage and Purity

In Karakalpak culture, jürek is strongly associated with bravery (batıllıq) and moral integrity (tazalıq).



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"Jüregi taza" (Clean heart): Describes a person who is honest, sincere, and free from malice. This reflects the Islamic influence on Karakalpak ethics, where internal purity is essential.

"Jürekli adam" (Person with heart): Means a brave, courageous person. Here, the heart is the seat of valor, not just emotion.

"Qara jürek" (Black heart): Describes someone cruel, evil, or treacherous.

B. English: Heart as Emotion and Generosity

English idioms with "heart" focus more on emotional capacity and generosity.

"Big-hearted": Generous and kind.

"Heart of gold": A very kind and generous person.

"Cold-hearted" or "Hard-hearted": Unfeeling, cruel, unsympathetic.

"Follow your heart": Prioritize emotion over reason.

Cultural Insight: The Karakalpak jürek is tied to namıs (honor) and moral character, whereas the English heart is more psychological and emotional.

The Head (Bas vs. Head): Wisdom and Stubbornness

A. Karakalpak: Bas as Leadership and Fate

"Bası biyik" (High head): A respected, dignified person with high status.

"Aqıllı bas" (Wise head): A prudent, thoughtful person.

"Bası bos" (Empty/loose head): A foolish, reckless person who acts without thinking.

"Qattı bas" (Hard head): Stubborn, obstinate.

B. English: Head as Reason and Control

"Level-headed": Calm and sensible.

"Hard-headed": Stubborn, practical, sometimes unreasonably so.

"Airheaded" or "Scatterbrained": Foolish, lacking sense.

"Use your head": Think logically.

Cultural Insight: Both cultures associate the head with wisdom and stubbornness, but Karakalpak proverbs often emphasize the social consequences of a "bası bos" (foolish) leader, reflecting communal values.

The Tongue (Til vs. Tongue): Speech and Morality

A. Karakalpak: Til as a Tool for Unity or Harm

"Tili tatlı" (Sweet tongue): Diplomatic, kind-speaker.

"Sözinde turıw" (To stand by one's word): Linked to tongue/speech, this is a major virtue.

"Tili uı" (Poisonous tongue): A slanderer or gossip.

B. English: Tongue as Gossip or Eloquence

"Silver-tongued": Eloquent, persuasive (can be positive or manipulative).

"Sharp-tongued": Critical, sarcastic.

"Hold your tongue": Be quiet.

"A slip of the tongue": An accidental remark.



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Cultural Insight: Karakalpak culture places immense value on keeping one's word (söz), making tongue-related idioms morally charged. English idioms often focus on the style or accuracy of speech.

The Hand (Qol vs. Hand): Action and Generosity

A. Karakalpak: Qol as Support and Skill

"Qolı ashıq" (Open hand): Generous, hospitable.

"Qolı jeñil" (Light hand): Skillful, talented.

"Qolı aur" (Heavy hand): Clumsy or oppressive.

B. English: Hand as Help and Control

"Open-handed": Generous.

"Have a light touch": Skillful, delicate.

"Heavy-handed": Oppressive, clumsy.

"Give a hand": Help someone.

Cultural Insight: Both cultures share similar metaphors for hands, likely due to universal physical experiences. However, in Karakalpak nomadic culture, hospitality ("open hand") is a survival virtue.

Discussion: Cultural Values Reflected in Somatic Idioms

Honor vs. Individualism: Karakalpak idioms frequently reference communal honor (namıs) and social reputation. English idioms focus more on individual psychological states.

Spiritual Purity: The Karakalpak emphasis on "taza jürek" (clean heart) reflects Islamic and Turkic spiritual values. English "pure heart" exists but is less central to character description.

Hospitality and Endurance: Karakalpak somatic idioms often praise traits necessary for nomadic life: endurance, generosity, and courage. English idioms reflect a more settled, industrial, and psychological worldview.

Reason vs. Emotion: English frequently contrasts "head" (reason) and "heart" (emotion). Karakalpak distinguishes "aqıl" (mind) and "jürek" (heart/courage), but the heart is more often a moral center than just an emotional one.

Conclusion

This comparative study reveals that while Karakalpak and English both use body-part idioms to express character, the cultural mappings differ significantly. Karakalpak somatic metaphors are deeply embedded in a value system of honor, hospitality, spiritual purity, and communal responsibility. English idioms reflect a more individualistic, psychological, and empirical tradition.

These linguistic differences are not arbitrary; they are fossils of cultural history. For Karakalpak speakers, the body is a vessel of honor and moral duty. For English speakers, the body is a site of individual experience and psychological conflict. Understanding these metaphors is essential for cross-cultural communication and translation, as literal translations often fail to capture the deep cultural axiology encoded in somatic idioms.



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Future research could expand this study to include other Turkic languages or explore how modernization and globalization are shifting these traditional metaphorical mappings.

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