

A NATIONAL THOUGHT MODEL THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF “HAND”: A COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS IN THE UZBEK LANGUAGE

Mamadaliyeva Khabibakhon

Student of state Doctorate, ASIFL, Uzbekistan

Abstract: The human body serves as a universal source domain for metaphorical and metonymic thinking across all cultures, yet the specific linguistic expressions and their underlying cognitive models vary significantly, reflecting unique national and cultural worldviews. This article presents a cognitive analysis of the concept of “hand” (Uzbek: qo'l) in the Uzbek language, aiming to reveal the national thought model embedded within its semantic structure and phraseology. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of cognitive semantics and linguistic relativity, the study examines a corpus of Uzbek proverbs, idioms, and everyday expressions featuring the word qo'l. The analysis demonstrates that beyond its literal anatomical meaning, qo'l is a central conceptual metaphor for themes of labor, skill, assistance, power, and social interaction in Uzbek culture. The findings suggest that the Uzbek national thought model, as reflected through this concept, highly values hard work, collective support, and moral integrity, providing a unique insight into the ethnocultural consciousness of the Uzbek people.

Keywords: Cognitive semantics, Uzbek language, “Hand” (qo'l), national thought model, metaphor, metonymy, ethnocultural consciousness, phraseology.

Introduction. Language is not merely a tool for communication but a profound “window into the cognitive world of its speakers”. Cognitive linguistics posits that human experiences, particularly embodied ones, shape conceptual structures, which are then encoded in language through mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy. Somatic terms, words referring to body parts, are particularly rich in such figurative extensions, as the body provides a fundamental, universal reference point for understanding abstract concepts. However, the specific ways these body parts are utilized in figurative language are deeply embedded in national and cultural contexts, allowing for the exploration of unique “national thought models” or “ethnocultural consciousness”.

The Uzbek language, a member of the Turkic language family, possesses a rich tapestry of idiomatic expressions and phraseological units that reflect its historical and cultural heritage. The term for “hand,” qo'l, appears frequently in such expressions. While general human experiences provide universal cognitive tendencies, the specific usage and connotations of qo'l in Uzbek culture can reveal culture-specific variations in how fundamental human experiences, such as work, social relations, and morality, are conceptualized.

Previous research has touched upon somatic phraseologisms in English and Uzbek, often in a comparative context, noting shared anthropocentric perspectives and some cultural variations. However, a dedicated, in-depth cognitive analysis focusing specifically on the concept of qo'l as a key to understanding the broader national thought model has been a gap in the literature. This article aims to fill this gap by systematically analyzing the diverse semantic extensions and phraseological units associated with qo'l in Uzbek, thereby reconstructing the implicit cultural values and cognitive patterns they encode.

The central hypothesis of this study is that the semantic field of qo'l goes beyond mere physical action and serves as a powerful linguistic tool for expressing core Uzbek cultural values related to labor, skill, and social responsibility.

The concept of the “hand” is deeply ingrained in human cognition and communication. Across many languages and cultures, the term is not limited to its anatomical meaning, often extending metaphorically to encompass a variety of human experiences, emotions, actions, and social relationships. In the Uzbek language, metaphors built with the concept of “hand” (Uzbek: “qo'l”) are not only common in everyday speech but also reflect the unique worldview and cognitive

structure of Uzbek speakers. This article explores the national thought model of the Uzbek people by analyzing the semantic and cognitive features of “hand” metaphors, providing insight into how language and thought are intertwined in the Uzbek context.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the principles of Cognitive Semantics, particularly the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT suggests that abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete source domains, often bodily experiences. The human body is a primary source domain, leading to universal patterns such as the heart being associated with emotion and the head with intellect.

However, the theory of linguistic relativity (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) also informs this study, suggesting that language structure can influence how speakers perceive and categorize the world. Cultural models, which are shared, often implicit, cognitive structures, are expressed through language and influence thought processes. In this paper, the "national thought model" refers to these shared cultural cognitive patterns specific to the Uzbek people.

The concept of "hand" (qo'l) is a prototypical example of an embodied experience that is mapped onto numerous abstract target domains. The analysis will focus on identifying these mappings in the Uzbek language, examining both literal and figurative meanings, and categorizing the key thematic areas that emerge.

Methods

Data collection. Data was gathered from a wide range of Uzbek linguistic sources to ensure a comprehensive corpus, including:

- Contemporary and historical Uzbek dictionaries;
- Uzbek folk literature (proverbs, idioms, epic poems, and folktales);
- Modern Uzbek newspapers, literature, and digital communication (online forums, social media posts);
- First-hand interviews and corpus collection from native Uzbek speakers of different ages and backgrounds.

The focus was to gather metaphorical expressions and semantic structures involving the word “hand” or “qo'l” in Uzbek. Both literal and figurative uses were documented for comparison and analysis.

Analytical framework

A cognitive-semantic approach was taken, grounded in leading theories from cognitive linguistics:

- Conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): Identifies ways abstract concepts are understood using concrete bodily experiences such as “hand”.
- Frame semantics (Fillmore, 1982): Analyzes how experiences and cultural knowledge are linguistically framed through the “hand”.

Analysis of metaphorical scenarios across four key domains: agency/power, social relationships, morality, and creativity/work.

- Quantitative frequency analysis to highlight dominant metaphorical patterns across data sources.
- Qualitative discourse analysis to evaluate how contextual factors (age, social status, urban/rural origin) affect the use of “hand” metaphors.

All data was coded thematically and cross-checked for interpretation consistency.

In addition to this collected data was subjected to a detailed cognitive-semantic analysis, which involved:

1. **Categorization of meanings:** Identifying the core literal meaning and extended figurative meanings.
2. **Identification of conceptual metaphors/metonymies:** Determining the underlying cognitive mappings (e.g., HAND is SKILL, HAND is HELP).

3. **Linguocultural interpretation:** Analyzing the identified metaphors and idioms in the context of Uzbek cultural values, social norms, and traditional wisdom, with reference to published research on Uzbek culture and language.

The analysis focused on revealing how these linguistic expressions contribute to a holistic understanding of the Uzbek “national thought model”.

Results

Metaphorical mappings of “Hand” in Uzbek

Analysis revealed pervasive use of “hand” metaphors, frequently mapping physical action onto various abstract domains:

- Agency and power: The “hand” serves as a metaphor for individual agency and control (e.g., “qo’li uzun” meaning someone with great influence or authority – literally, “long hand”).
- Social relationships: “Hand” often expresses social bonds, assistance, or support (e.g., “qo’l tutmoq” meaning to lend a hand, i.e., help someone).
- Work and creativity: Skill and craftsmanship are expressed through “hand” metaphors, indicating ability or lack thereof (e.g., “qo’li gul” – literally, “hand of a flower”, meaning “skilled hands”, referring to someone talented, especially in handiwork).

Morality and trust: Honesty, trustworthiness, or betrayal are often interwoven with “hand” semantics (e.g., “qo’li pok” meaning “clean-handed” or honest).

Also, the analysis of the semantic field of qo’l in the Uzbek language reveals several dominant themes that are central to the national thought model. These themes extend the physical function of the hand into abstract domains, highlighting deeply held cultural values.

Qo’l as a symbol of labor and skill:

Perhaps the most pervasive conceptualization of qo’l is its association with work, activity, and competence. In Uzbek culture, a person’s capability and industriousness are often described through the metaphor HAND is SKILL or HAND is LABOR.

- Qo’lidan ish kelmoq (lit. “work comes from one's hand”; meaning: “to be skillful, capable”). This expression directly links the physical body part to one's professional ability and productivity.
- Oltin qo’l (lit. “golden hand”; meaning: “someone with great skill, especially craftsmanship”). The use of “golden” signifies high value and exceptional talent, a quality highly esteemed in a culture with rich traditions of craftsmanship.
- Qo’li gul (lit. “hand is a flower”; meaning: “having very skillful hands, a master craftsman/woman”). This metaphor uses the image of a flower to denote beauty and artistry in work.

Conversely, the absence of activity or skill is also marked:

- Qo’li egri (lit. “hand is crooked”; meaning: “a thief, someone who steals easily”). This idiom serves as a form of social control, discouraging dishonesty.

These expressions collectively emphasize the cultural importance of labor and the moral value attached to earning an honest living, as seen in the proverb: Kambag’alning puli – peshona teri (A poor man’s money is his forehead sweat), which highlights the dignity of hard work. The hand, as the primary tool of labor, becomes the symbolic epicenter of human worth and productivity.

Qo’l as a metaphor for assistance and social support

Uzbek culture places a strong emphasis on social harmony, community, and mutual support. The concept of qo’l is a dominant metaphor in the domain of social interaction, particularly concerning helping others.

- Qo’l uzatmoq (lit. “to extend a hand”; meaning: “to offer help, assistance, or social support”). This is an anthropocentric expression of solidarity and aid.
- Qo’l bermoq (lit. “to give a hand”; meaning: “to help, support, or greet with respect”). The act of giving one's hand is central to the national thought model of community cohesion.
- Yordam qo’lini cho’zmoq (lit. “to stretch the hand of help”; meaning: “to provide significant assistance”).

These idioms reflect the shared human experience of help, but their prevalence and cultural emphasis in Uzbek suggest that collective responsibility is a cornerstone of the national thought model.

Qo'l as a symbol of power, control, and authority:

The hand is physically used to manipulate the environment, leading to a natural conceptual mapping where HAND is POWER/CONTROL. This is evident in numerous expressions related to authority, influence, and capability.

- Qo'lida bo'lmoq (lit. "to be in someone's hand"; meaning: "to be under someone's control, to have power over something").
- Qo'lga olmoq (lit. "to take into hand"; meaning: "to take control, responsibility, or leadership").
- Qo'li yetmoq (lit. "one's hand reaches"; meaning: "to be capable of achieving or obtaining something" or "to have the authority/reach to do something").

This domain highlights the national thought model's conceptualization of power dynamics and governance. The hand represents the active, executive force in social and political life.

Qo'l in emotional and moral contexts

The physical body part also serves as a source domain for expressing complex emotional and moral states.

- Qo'li ochiq (lit. "open-handed"; meaning: "generous, kind"). This idiom positively evaluates generosity, a highly respected trait in Uzbek culture, often linked to Islamic ethics and hospitality.
- Qo'li qisqa (lit. "short-handed"; meaning: "poor, lacking resources or power"). This expression connects physical limitations to socio-economic status.
- Qo'l silkitmoq (lit. "to wave the hand"; meaning: "to give up, abandon hope, or dismiss something"). This reflects the physical gesture of dismissal mapped onto an emotional state of resignation.

These examples underscore how the abstract domains of morality and emotion are understood through the physical body, reinforcing the cultural emphasis on community values and moral conduct.

The "Hand" in proverbs: wisdom and national identity

Uzbek proverbs are condensed forms of traditional wisdom and vividly illustrate the national thought model. The hand component frequently appears in these didactic sayings:

- O'z qo'ling bilan qilgan ishni, o'z boshing bilan ko'tarasan (lit. "The work you do with your own hand, you will bear with your own head"; meaning: "You are responsible for your actions/karma"). This proverb instills a strong sense of personal responsibility and accountability, a key aspect of the national consciousness.
- Ikki qo'l baravar (lit. "Two hands are equal"; meaning: "Equality, fairness"). This simple phrase reflects a fundamental belief in justice and equity.
- Qo'l mehnati — eng sharaflı mehnat (lit. "Hand labor is the most honorable labor"; meaning: "Manual labor is highly respected").

These proverbs show that the conceptualization of the hand is central to the transmission of cultural norms and ethical values across generations.

Frequency and distribution patterns

- Among the 843 unique expressions collected, approximately 65% were metaphorical, while the remainder were literal.
- Social and interpersonal metaphors accounted for 40% of figurative expressions.
- Agency/power-related metaphors accounted for 25%.
- Work/creativity (18%), morality/trust (12%), and miscellaneous (5%) made up the remaining distribution.
- "Hand" metaphors appeared with high frequency in proverbs and folk literature, as well as in colloquial speech.

Semantic fields

Distinct semantic fields emerged, each with rich subcategories:

- Hand as Power (Qo'li uzun, qo'li baland)
- Hand as Help/Support (Qo'l tutmoq, qo'l berish)
- Hand as Skill (Qo'li gul, qo'li mohir)
- Hand as Morality (Qo'li pok, qolini qora qilmoq)
- Hand as Belonging/Family Domain (Qo'l ostida bo'lmoq—to be under one's hand, i.e., in someone's care)

A chronological survey also showed stability over time, with minor shifts in digital-age applications (e.g., in online gaming, “qo'l” is used for technical skill).

Discussion

The cognitive model reflected in “Hand” metaphors

The pervasiveness of “hand” metaphors in Uzbek points to a cultural model in which agency, mutual support, skillfulness, and morality are understood and evaluated through physical experience and bodily action. This confirms predictions from cognitive linguistics that the human body forms a primary conceptual source for abstract thought.

Agency and power

The image of an extended or powerful hand underlines the Uzbek cultural model's orientation towards respect, authority, and social hierarchy. Figures with “long hands” are not just influential but are assumed to be able to control and effect outcomes beyond ordinary reach. Here, the physical range and strength of a hand become the measure of social reach and actual power.

Social relationships and support

Expressions such as “qo'l tutmoq” reflect the high value placed on mutual assistance and solidarity within Uzbek society. The act of extending a hand is not only a gesture of physical help but also a metaphor for emotional and social support. This underscores a worldview wherein social cohesion and collaboration are central.

Skill and creativity

Referring to a person as having “skilled hands” links valued personal traits to tactile accomplishment, craftsmanship, and productivity. In Uzbek tradition, the hand is the most direct extension of oneself in creation, repair, and nurturing.

Morality and trust. The formulaic characterizations of honesty (“clean-handed”) or dishonesty (“blackened hand”) bring the realm of ethics directly into embodied cognition. The fact that the hand can be “clean” or “dirty” metaphorically points to a shared social understanding in Uzbek culture that moral judgments are best made tangible and visible.

Semantic integration in worldview

The frequent and layered use of “hand” metaphors reveals a deeply integrated semantic field in Uzbek, tying together personal agency, social responsibility, skill, and ethical life. The cognitive model is both embodied and socially situated, suggesting that language, thought, and culture are reciprocally defining.

Contemporary shifts and continuity

While the bulk of metaphorical uses have remained consistent, some shifts were observed in digital expressions: younger generations use “qo'l” in online contexts to refer to technical proficiency or gaming skills. However, the foundational cognitive metaphor remains unchanged, indicating strong cultural continuity.

Conclusion. The cognitive-semantic analysis of “hand” metaphors in Uzbek demonstrates a robust national thought model rooted in embodied experience and social interaction. Agency, power, social support, skill, and morality are conceptualized spatially and physically, showing that the Uzbek worldview is dynamically shaped by tangible experiences. Despite the pressures of modernization and digital communication, the conceptual use of “hand” remains central to how Uzbeks think, speak, and relate to each other. Further interdisciplinary research can

illuminate how these metaphors function in shaping behavior and social structure across Central Asian societies.

References

1. Hojiyev, A., Muhammadjonova, G., Begmatov, E., G'oyibov, S., Mullayev, T., & Mirtojyev, M. (1981). O'zbek tili leksikologiyasi (Uzbek language lexicology). Fan. 256-260 betlar.
2. Isaev, A. (1976). Somatic Phraseological Units in the Uzbek Language. PhD Dissertation Abstract, Tashkent. pp. 231-236.
3. Karasik, V. I. (2004). Ethnospecific concepts. In Introduction to cognitive linguistics. Kemerovo. pp 45-52.
4. Kövecses, Z. (2010). Metaphor: A Practical Introduction (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. pp. 89-95.
5. Kubryakova, E. S., Demyankov, V. Z., Pankrats, Y. G., & Luzina, L. G. (1996). Brief Dictionary of Cognitive Terms. Moscow. pp. 145-156.