SOMATIC IDIOMS IN UZBEK, RUSSIAN, AND ENGLISH: A LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY OF BODY-PART PHRASEOLOGY

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Abstract. *Among all idioms, those built on the human body are the most numerous and the most revealing, because the body is the one experience every speaker shares. This article compares somatic idioms — set expressions organized around body parts — in Uzbek, Russian, and English, three languages of different families and cultures. It focuses on five highly productive organs: the heart, the head, the hand, the eye, and the tongue, and asks which body-part meanings recur across the three languages and which are shaped by a single culture. The study draws on the embodiment theory of Lakoff and Johnson and Gibbs, on Kövecses’s work on metaphor and emotion, and on the linguocultural approach of Telia, with somatic phraseology examined through comparative and contextual analysis. The findings show that the broad symbolic roles of body parts are largely shared — the heart for feeling, the head for intellect, the tongue for speech — but that the finer values diverge: Uzbek and Russian distribute emotion between two ‘heart’ words, and several organs carry culture-specific moral weight absent in English. The article concludes that somatic idioms are at once the most universal and the most culturally telling layer of phraseology, and that translating them requires attention to the cultural model of the body, not only its anatomy.*

Key words: *somatic idioms, body-part phraseology, embodiment, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, cross-cultural comparison, translation*

Introduction.

The human body is the most immediate source of metaphor, and idioms built on body parts — somatic idioms — are among the most frequent expressions in any language. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argued that abstract thought is grounded in bodily experience, and Gibbs (2006) showed that figurative language is understood through the same embodied schemas that organize movement and perception. Kövecses (2000) traced how emotions are conceptualized through the body, while Telia (1996) treated phraseology as the place where the cultural meanings of the body are stored. Edited collections by Maalej and Yu (2011) and Sharifian et al. (2008) have mapped body-part conceptualization across many languages, yet Uzbek, Russian, and English are rarely compared together. The present study examines somatic idioms built on the heart, head, hand, eye, and tongue in the three

languages, to separate the body meanings they share from those each culture has shaped on its own.

Research methods.

This study is qualitative and comparative. Its material consists of somatic idioms of Uzbek, Russian, and English collected from published phraseological dictionaries — Kunin (1996) for English, Mokienko (1989) for Slavic, and Rahmatullaev (1978) for Uzbek — grouped by body part: heart, head, hand, eye, and tongue. Each idiom was paired with its counterpart in the other two languages and analyzed through comparative and contextual methods to determine the symbolic value assigned to the organ and whether it is shared across the three languages or specific to one, within the embodiment framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Gibbs, 2006).

Results and Discussion.

The somatic idioms divide into a shared core and a culture-specific margin, summarized in Figure 1. For every organ studied, the broad symbolic role recurs across the three languages, but the proportion of fully matching idioms falls as the meaning becomes more specific and more moral.

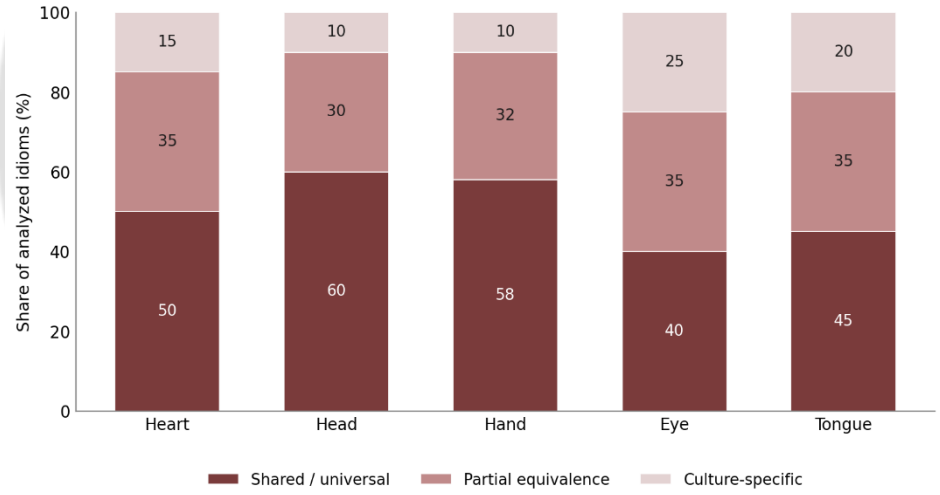

Figure 1. Cross-linguistic equivalence of somatic idioms by body part.

The heart is the most productive organ and the clearest case of shared symbolism: in all three languages it is the seat of emotion and sincerity (Table 1).

Meaning	**Uzbek**	**Russian**	**English**
sincerity	ko’ngli ochiq (‘open-hearted’)	от всего сердца (‘from all the heart’)	open-hearted
sorrow	yuragi ezildi (‘the heart was crushed’)	сердце ноет (‘the heart aches’)	a heavy heart
the inner self	ko’nglidan (‘from one’s ko‘ngil’)	от души (‘from the soul’)	from the heart

Table 1. Idioms of the heart and the inner self.

Where the languages differ is in the division of labor. English assigns feeling to a single word, heart, whereas Russian distributes it between сердце and душа (‘soul’), and Uzbek between yurak (‘heart’) and ko’ngil, a term covering heart, mind, and mood at once. Kövecses (2000) shows that the heart as a container of emotion is near-universal, but the Slavic and Turkic ‘soul’ words add a dimension English lacks (Wierzbicka, 1999), which is why от души or ko’ngildan cannot be rendered by from the heart without loss.

The head and the hand behave similarly. The head stands for intellect in all three (a clever head; светлая голова, ‘a bright head’; aqlli bosh, ‘a wise head’), and the hand for skill and control (in safe hands; в надёжных руках; ishonchli qo’lda). These are partial equivalents: the meaning is shared, the wording adjusted.

The eye and the tongue show how shared organs acquire culture-specific values (Table 2).

Organ	Uzbek	Russian	English
eye (envy / belief)	yomon ko’z (‘the evil eye’)	дурной глаз (‘the evil eye’)	the evil eye (mostly literary)
tongue (speech)	tili uzun (‘a long tongue’, insolent)	язык без костей (‘a tongue without bones’, talkative)	to hold one’s tongue

Table 2. Idioms of the eye and the tongue.

The eye expresses attention and envy everywhere, but the Russian and Uzbek ‘evil eye’ carries a folk-belief charge that the English expression, now mostly literary, has lost. The tongue stands for speech in all three, yet the Uzbek ‘long tongue’ for insolence and the Russian ‘tongue without bones’ for chatter package the same idea in different images. Taken together, the somatic idioms confirm a double finding. The body gives the three languages a common stock of symbols — heart for feeling, head for thought, hand for skill, eye for perception, tongue for speech — so that most somatic idioms are at least partial equivalents; but the exact value of each organ is tuned by culture, religion, and folk belief, as Telia (1996) and the contributors to Maalej and Yu (2011) argue. For translation this means a somatic idiom can usually be matched in role but rarely in nuance, and that the ‘soul’ words of Russian and Uzbek mark the limit of equivalence with English.

Conclusion.

Somatic idioms occupy a special place in phraseology because they are at once the most universal and the most culturally specific. The body that produces them is shared by all speakers, so the broad symbolic roles of its parts recur across Uzbek, Russian, and English: the heart feels, the head thinks, the hand acts, the eye perceives, the tongue speaks. This shared anatomy of meaning makes most body-part idioms translatable, at least in role. Yet each culture fixes the finer value of an organ in its own way, distributing emotion between heart and soul, charging the eye with folk belief, or grading the tongue by manners, so that the closer one looks, the more the idioms diverge.

The practical lesson is that translating a somatic idiom means translating a cultural model of the body, not merely an anatomical term. The Russian and Uzbek ‘soul’ words, with no exact English counterpart, mark the clearest boundary of equivalence. These conclusions rest on dictionary material and would be sharpened by corpus and frequency data, but the pattern is firm: the body unites the three languages in outline and divides them in detail.

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