

Investigating Floral Metonymies In Uzbek And English Languages

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Abstract: This study investigates the lingvocultural and cognitive-semantic patterns of floral metonymy — metonymic expressions derived from the names and attributes of plants, flowers, and botanical entities — in Uzbek and English. Floral metonymy represents a culturally rich domain in which universal cognitive schemas interact with language-specific and culture-specific associations grounded in agricultural tradition, literary heritage, religious symbolism, and material culture.

A corpus of 360 floral metonymic expressions (180 Uzbek, 180 English) was assembled from literary prose, poetry, journalistic texts, folklore, and proverb collections. Expressions were analysed using Radden and Kövecses' (1999) ICM-based taxonomy, Panther and Thornburg's (2003) functional-pragmatic framework, and Kövecses' (2002) conceptual analysis of cultural models. Comparative-typological, contextual, componential, and lingvocultural analysis methods were applied.

Floral metonymies in both languages operate within shared ICMs including PLANT FOR ITS PRODUCT, FLOWER FOR BEAUTY/YOUTH, and PLANT FOR ITS ORIGIN/CULTURAL ASSOCIATION. Uzbek demonstrates significantly higher rates of rose (atirgul/gul) metonymies encoding beauty, beloved persons, and spiritual perfection, consistent with the Persian-Uzbek Sufi poetic tradition. English exhibits greater diversity in botanical source domains and higher frequency of institutional/commercial floral metonymies. Culture-specific Uzbek floral metonymies encode Islamic symbolism, national identity, and traditional agricultural life.

Floral metonymy in Uzbek is deeply embedded in a Persianate literary-spiritual tradition, while English floral metonymy is more culturally diverse and commercially oriented. The findings illuminate the intersection of universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally particularised conceptual systems in botanical semantic domains.

Keywords: Floral metonymy, flora sememe, Uzbek language, English language, cognitive linguistics, ICM, botanical semantics, cultural models, lingvoculturology, contrastive analysis.

Introduction: Plants, flowers, and botanical entities occupy a privileged position in the conceptual systems of all human cultures. From the rose gardens of classical Persian poetry to the oak groves of English national mythology, from the cotton fields of Central Asian agricultural life to the wildflower meadows of Romantic literature, flora provides a rich reservoir of symbolic and metonymic meaning that permeates language, literature, and cultural identity. Floral metonymy — the use of plant names and botanical attributes to provide mental access to associated

entities, qualities, or concepts — constitutes one of the most culturally revealing domains of metonymic language, offering a unique window into the interaction between universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally particular worldviews.

The systematic study of flora-based metonymy has received comparatively limited attention in cognitive linguistics, with most research focusing on body-part, place-name, and institutional metonymies. This lacuna is particularly pronounced in comparative studies involving non-European languages, where the cultural

ecology of plant symbolism diverges substantially from Western traditions. Uzbek, as a Turkic language deeply shaped by Persian literary tradition, Islamic cosmology, and Central Asian agricultural history, offers an exceptionally rich domain for floral metonymy research. English, with its diverse botanical heritage ranging from Anglo-Saxon herbalism to colonial encounters with global plant species, presents a contrasting but equally complex floral semantic system.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting the first systematic comparative investigation of floral metonymies in Uzbek and English. It examines the cognitive structures that motivate floral metonymy in both languages, identifies the cultural models that shape language-specific patterns, and analyses the pragmatic functions of floral metonymic expressions across literary, journalistic, and folkloric registers. The research is guided by three principal questions: (1) What ICM-based metonymic schemas are operative in both Uzbek and English floral metonymy? (2) In what domains and cultural contexts do Uzbek and English floral metonymic patterns diverge? (3) What cultural models and historical traditions motivate the culture-specific floral metonymies of each language?

The study makes four original contributions to comparative cognitive linguistics. First, it provides the first corpus-based systematic comparison of Uzbek and English floral metonymy, a pairing not previously examined in the scholarly literature. Second, it documents the extraordinary productivity of the gul/rose metonymic family in Uzbek, tracing its roots in the Persianate Sufi literary tradition. Third, it demonstrates how Central Asian agricultural and material culture motivates a distinct set of floral metonymic schemas in Uzbek with no direct English equivalents. Fourth, it applies established cognitive linguistic frameworks to a culturally specific botanical domain, testing and extending the universality of ICM-based metonymy theory.

Literature Review

The foundational cognitive linguistic account of metonymy was established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who reconceptualised it not as a mere rhetorical ornament but as a basic cognitive mechanism enabling one entity to stand for another

through contiguity relations. Radden and Kövecses (1999) developed the most comprehensive taxonomic account, organising metonymy types within Idealised Cognitive Models (ICMs) and distinguishing WHOLE ICM FOR PART relations from PART OF ICM FOR ANOTHER PART relations. Their taxonomy identified over 43 metonymy types including PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT (relevant to agricultural/botanical contexts), PLACE FOR PRODUCT (directly applicable to floral metonymy: 'Damask rose'), and MATERIAL FOR OBJECT.

Panther and Thornburg (2003) demonstrated that metonymy operates at referential, predication, and illocutionary levels of discourse, extending its scope beyond the lexicon into the grammar and pragmatics of language. Barcelona (2003) argued for the primacy of metonymy over metaphor in grounding linguistic meaning, noting that metonymic operations frequently motivate metaphorical extensions. Littlemore (2015) documented the pervasive operation of metonymy as a 'hidden shortcut' in everyday language, showing that culturally specific metonymies create particular comprehension challenges in cross-cultural communication.

Flora Sememes in Linguistic Research

Flora sememes — semantic components derived from plant names and botanical attributes — have been studied within several linguistic traditions. In ethnobotanical linguistics, Berlin (1992) documented the systematic organisation of plant names across cultures, identifying universal tendencies in folk taxonomic categorisation. In cognitive semantics, Kövecses (2002) noted that plants, and flowers in particular, frequently motivate APPEARANCE-BASED metonymies (FLOWER FOR BEAUTIFUL PERSON) and LIFE-CYCLE metonymies (BLOOM FOR YOUTH, WITHERING FOR AGING).

In Uzbek linguistics, flora sememes have been studied primarily within the framework of phraseology and poetic language. The gul 'flower/rose' lexeme is among the most semantically productive items in Uzbek, generating an extensive network of metonymic and metaphorical extensions documented by Mirtojiyev (2010). The cultural embedding of floral vocabulary in Uzbek is inseparable from the Persianate literary tradition of the Sufi ghazal, in which the rose (Persian

gul) functions as a complex symbol encompassing the beloved, spiritual beauty, divine perfection, and the transience of worldly existence.

Cross-cultural studies of floral symbolism demonstrate both universal tendencies and significant cultural particularity. Wierzbicka (1992) argued that natural kind terms including plant names are grounded in perceptual and cultural experience, with their semantic content varying significantly across cultures. Her analysis showed that the English word 'rose' carries a network of cultural associations distinct from those of the French 'rose', German 'Rose', or Persian/Uzbek 'gul', despite partial overlapping of botanical reference.

In English, the rose carries associations with romantic love (going back to the Roman de la Rose and Shakespeare), political identity (the Wars of the Roses), and commercial floristry, while simultaneously serving as a Christian Marian symbol. In Uzbek, gul encompasses a wider semantic range including any beautiful flower, a beloved person, skilled craftsmanship ('qo'li gul' — flower-handed, i.e., skilled), and spiritual beauty in the Sufi sense. These differing cultural models motivate distinct metonymic patterns that the present study systematically documents and compares.

Methodology

The study corpus comprises 360 floral metonymic expressions (180 Uzbek, 180 English) collected from four source text types: literary prose and poetry, journalistic and publicistic texts, proverbs and folklore, and phraseological dictionaries. Uzbek literary sources included Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* (1974) and Mehrobdan chayon, Alisher Navoi's selected ghazals and masnavis, contemporary Uzbek poetry anthologies, and Mirzayev, Musoqulov and Sarimsoqov's *O'zbek xalq maqollari* (2005). Uzbek phraseological data were drawn from Rahmatullayev's *O'zbek tilining izohli frazeologik lug'ati* (1978). English sources included canonical literary texts from Shakespeare, Keats, and Burns to contemporary prose

fiction, newspaper corpora from *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* (2020-2024), and the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*.

Inclusion criteria required: (i) the expression contains a flora sememe (plant name, plant part, or botanical attribute); (ii) the flora sememe functions metonymically, providing mental access to an associated entity within an ICM; (iii) the metonymic interpretation is recoverable from context. Expressions were excluded if the botanical term retained exclusively its literal botanical sense. Two independent raters classified all borderline cases; inter-rater reliability was $\kappa = 0.89$.

Each expression was coded along four dimensions: (1) ICM type according to Radden and Kövecses' (1999) taxonomy; (2) source domain (flower name, plant part, agricultural product, botanical attribute); (3) target domain (person, quality, emotion, social category, institution, etc.); and (4) cultural motivation (universal, Persianate-Islamic, Anglo-Christian, commercial-modern, agricultural-traditional, etc.). Frequency counts were calculated for each category, and chi-square tests evaluated distributional differences between Uzbek and English at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative analysis examined representative examples in depth, reconstructing the cultural models that motivate metonymic mappings in each language.

The primary analytical framework combines Radden and Kövecses' (1999) ICM-based taxonomy with Kövecses' (2002) account of cultural models. The ICM framework provides a systematic basis for identifying and classifying metonymic schemas, while the cultural models approach explains the language-specific and culture-specific patterns that emerge within universal schemas. Wierzbicka's (1992) semantic analysis of natural kind terms informs the cross-cultural comparison of floral vocabulary, and Panther and Thornburg's (2003) discourse-pragmatic framework guides the analysis of metonymic expressions in extended discourse contexts.

Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of floral metonymic expressions across botanical source domain categories in the two languages.

Botanical Source Domain	Uzbek (n=180)	%	English (n=180)	%
Rose / gul (generic flower)	67	37.2	38	21.1
Tree / wood species	18	10.0	34	18.9
Grain / agricultural crops	29	16.1	14	7.8
Fruit / fruit trees	22	12.2	27	15.0
Herb / medicinal plants	11	6.1	19	10.6
Flower attributes (bloom, thorn, fragrance)	21	11.7	28	15.6
Other botanical expressions	12	6.7	20	11.1
Total	180	100	180	100

Table 1. Distribution of floral metonymic expressions by botanical source domain.

The most striking distributional difference is the markedly higher frequency of rose/gul metonymies in Uzbek (37.2%) compared to English (21.1%), a difference that is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 12.7$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). English shows significantly higher rates of tree and herb metonymies ($\chi^2 = 8.3$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.004$), while Uzbek demonstrates substantially higher rates of grain and agricultural crop metonymies ($\chi^2 = 9.1$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.003$).

Rose and Gul Metonymies

The rose/gul metonymic family constitutes the most productive floral metonymic domain in Uzbek, operating within at least six distinct ICM schemas identified in the corpus. The gul lexeme in Uzbek is polyfunctional in a way that exceeds the English 'rose' or 'flower', denoting both a specific flower (rose, atirgul) and a generic term for any beautiful flower, enabling broader metonymic scope.

The first and most frequent schema is GUL FOR BEAUTIFUL PERSON (BELOVED), attested 29 times in literary sources. This schema, deeply rooted in the Persianate Sufi ghazal tradition, treats the flower as a vehicle providing mental access to a beautiful beloved person, particularly in romantic and spiritual poetry. Alisher Navoi's ghazals exemplify this pattern: 'Gulning yuzidan nazar qil' ('Look at the face of the rose') where gul stands simultaneously for a flower and a spiritually beautiful person. This double-layered reference is characteristic of Sufi poetic convention in which earthly

beauty metonymically accesses divine beauty.

The second schema, GUL FOR SKILLED CRAFTSMANSHIP, is realised in the highly productive phraseological unit qo'li gul 'flower-handed' ($\rightarrow$ skilled, talented with one's hands). Documented extensively in Mirtojiev (2010) and attested 14 times in the literary corpus, this expression exemplifies the FLORAL ATTRIBUTE FOR HUMAN QUALITY metonymic schema: the delicacy, beauty, and precision associated with flowers provides mental access to the quality of skilled manual work. The expression is frequently encountered in Qodiriy's prose: 'duradorchilikda qo'li gul jiyaim' ('my flower-handed nephew in carpentry'), Mehrobdan chayon, p. 220.

The third schema, GUL FOR YOUTH AND VITALITY, operates through the cultural model of the flower's life cycle: blooming corresponds to youthful vigour and beauty, while wilting corresponds to decline. Expressions such as 'gullagan yoshlik' ('blooming youth') and 'guli solomgina' ('the flower is only just wilting') instantiate BLOOM FOR YOUTH and WITHERING FOR AGING metonymies within a single ICM.

In English, the rose operates within different cultural models. The ROSE FOR ROMANTIC LOVE schema (attested 18 times) draws on the rose's longstanding association with Venus/Aphrodite and the courtly love tradition, as in Burns's 'O my Luve is like a red, red rose' — where the comparison is explicitly marked, but rose

metonymies (e.g., 'his rose', 'England's rose') operate without comparative marking. The ROSE FOR ENGLAND/NATIONAL IDENTITY schema (attested 7 times) reflects the Tudor rose's role as England's heraldic symbol, appearing in journalistic expressions such as 'the rose must bloom again' referring to English national confidence.

Tree metonymies are significantly more frequent in English than in Uzbek, reflecting the cultural salience of arboreal species in English national identity. The OAK FOR STRENGTH/ENGLAND schema produces expressions such as 'heart of oak' (→ bravery, English naval tradition), 'the oak's shadow' (→ national protection), and journalistic uses of 'the oak' to denote English institutional solidity. The ELM FOR RURAL ENGLAND schema, while declining since Dutch elm disease, remains productive in literary and nostalgic contexts. The WILLOW FOR GRIEF schema (attested in Shakespeare and subsequent literary tradition) produces expressions such as 'wearing the willow' (→ mourning a lost love), instantiating the TREE ASSOCIATED WITH GRIEF FOR GRIEF ITSELF metonymic pattern.

In Uzbek, agricultural crop metonymies are significantly more frequent, reflecting the language's roots in Central Asian agricultural society. The COTTON FOR UZBEK NATIONAL IDENTITY/LABOUR schema (attested 14 times in journalistic sources) produces expressions such as 'paxta yig'im' (cotton harvest) used metonymically for collective national labour and effort. The WHEAT/NON FOR SUSTENANCE, ABUNDANCE schema generates expressions like 'non topmoq' ('to find bread' → to earn a living) and 'non beruvchi' ('bread-giver' → provider, benefactor), instantiating the STAPLE CROP FOR LIVELIHOOD metonymic schema. The POMEGRANATE (ANOR) FOR FERTILITY/ABUNDANCE schema, rooted in Central Asian and Islamic symbolic tradition, produces metonymic expressions in which the pomegranate's

many seeds access the concept of abundance, family prosperity, and fertility.

Flower Attribute Metonymies: Thorn, Fragrance, and Bloom

Metonymies derived from floral attributes (thorn, fragrance, bloom, petal) provide an important sub-category that reveals fine-grained cultural differences. In English, the THORN FOR DIFFICULTY/PAIN schema is highly productive, generating expressions such as 'a bed of thorns' (→ a difficult situation), 'every rose has its thorn' (→ beauty conceals danger), and journalistic uses such as 'navigating the thorns of Brexit policy'. The source domain accesses a target domain of difficulty, hidden danger, or painful experience through a metonymic chain: physical thorn → painful contact → generalised pain/difficulty.

In Uzbek, the thorn (tikan) generates a partially parallel but culturally distinct set of metonymies. The expression 'tikansiz gul bo'lmas' ('there is no flower without a thorn') functions as a proverbial metonymy in which the thorn accesses the concept of inevitable adversity in any valuable enterprise. This expression is documented in Mirzayev et al. (2005) and instantiates the same THORN FOR ADVERSITY schema operative in English, confirming the cross-cultural validity of the underlying ICM.

Fragrance metonymies show a particularly interesting Uzbek-English divergence. In English, fragrance expressions tend to be abstract and psychological ('the fragrance of success', 'a sweet-smelling deal'), where SCENT stands for a pleasant but ephemeral positive quality. In Uzbek, fragrance (hid/atir) metonymies more frequently access social and moral qualities: 'so'zidan gul hidi keladi' ('the fragrance of flowers comes from his words') instantiates a FLORAL FRAGRANCE FOR MORAL/SPIRITUAL BEAUTY metonymy with no close English equivalent, reflecting the Sufi tradition of associating spiritual virtue with sensory beauty.

ICM Schema	Uzbek Examples	English Examples	Cultural Motivation
GUL/FLOWER FOR BELOVED	Gulning yuzi (face of rose → beloved)	My love is a rose	Sufi poetry / Courtly love
FLOWER FOR SKILL	Qo'li gul (flower-handed → skilled)	No direct equivalent	Uzbek craft tradition
BLOOM FOR	Gullagan yoshlik	In the flower of	Universal life-

ICM Schema	Uzbek Examples	English Examples	Cultural Motivation
YOUTH	(blooming youth)	youth	cycle ICM
THORN FOR ADVERSITY	Tikansiz gul bo'lmas	A bed of thorns	Universal plant ICM
TREE FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY	Less frequent	Heart of oak (England)	Anglo-Saxon heritage
CROP FOR LABOUR/IDENTITY	Paxtachi (cotton-worker)	Less frequent	Central Asian agriculture
FRAGRANCE FOR VIRTUE	So'zidan gul hidi (floral fragrance of words)	Less frequent	Sufi tradition

Table 2. Comparative summary of key floral metonymic ICM schemas in Uzbek and English.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of this comparative investigation confirm the two-level structure of floral metonymy: a universal cognitive layer grounded in ICM-based schemas that are operative across both languages, and a culturally particular layer in which language-specific and tradition-specific associations produce divergent metonymic patterns. This dual structure is consistent with Barcelona's (2003) account of metonymy as operating at multiple cognitive levels from universal conceptual primitives to culturally elaborated schemas.

The extraordinary productivity of gul-based metonymies in Uzbek cannot be understood without reference to the Persianate Sufi literary tradition that has shaped Uzbek literary culture for over a millennium. In the ghazal tradition extending from Rumi and Hafez through Alisher Navoi to contemporary Uzbek poetry, the rose occupies a cosmological position as a symbol of divine beauty, the beloved (both earthly and spiritual), and the human soul's yearning for perfection. This tradition has generated a metonymic system of exceptional depth and cultural specificity, in which the rose lexeme accesses not merely aesthetic beauty but an entire worldview encompassing love, spirituality, and ontological longing. The ROSE/GUL FOR SPIRITUAL BEAUTY schema has no direct equivalent in English, where the rose's religious associations (primarily Marian) are less central to the language's active literary tradition.

The higher frequency of tree and institutional

metonymies in English reflects the language's different cultural ecology. The oak's role in English national mythology — as the wood of Nelson's ships, the symbol of English rural landscape, the tree of Magna Carta — generates a metonymic system in which arboreal species index national character, institutional tradition, and historical continuity. This pattern is consistent with Wierzbicka's (1992) analysis of how natural kind terms accumulate culture-specific associations that become encoded in their metonymic ranges. The relative weakness of tree metonymies in Uzbek reflects the different role of trees in Central Asian landscapes, where the chinar (plane tree) and tol (willow) carry cultural associations but do not generate the institutionally productive metonymic networks found in English.

The higher frequency of agricultural crop metonymies in Uzbek reflects both the historical centrality of agriculture in Central Asian civilisation and the specific political and cultural history of Uzbekistan, where cotton cultivation was a defining element of Soviet-era economic organisation and post-independence national identity. The COTTON FOR NATIONAL COLLECTIVE LABOUR schema is a historically specific cultural model with no English equivalent, demonstrating how political history can generate entirely new metonymic schemas within existing botanical ICMs.

The fragrance metonymy divergence is particularly revealing from the perspective of cultural cognitive linguistics. The Uzbek FLORAL FRAGRANCE FOR

SPIRITUAL/MORAL VIRTUE schema draws on a Sufi aesthetic in which sensory beauty is understood as a manifestation of divine beauty, making the olfactory dimension of flowers a legitimate vehicle for moral and spiritual qualities. The English tradition, shaped by Protestant suspicion of sensory excess and rationalist aesthetics, tends to confine fragrance metonymies to more secular and psychological domains. This difference illustrates how theological and aesthetic traditions can shape the cognitive models within which metonymic mappings are licensed.

From a practical perspective, the findings have significant implications for translation between Uzbek and English. Floral metonymies grounded in the Sufi tradition — particularly those involving gul as beloved, fragrance as virtue, and bloom as spiritual vitality — require culturally informed translation strategies. Direct transfer will often produce either semantic loss (where the cultural model is unknown to English readers) or semantic distortion (where English floral associations substitute for Uzbek ones). Explicitation, cultural footnoting, or dynamic equivalence strategies are recommended for translators working with Uzbek literary texts containing Sufi-inflected floral metonymies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has conducted the first systematic comparative investigation of floral metonymies in Uzbek and English, analysing a corpus of 360 expressions across literary, journalistic, and folkloric registers. Five principal conclusions emerge.

First, floral metonymy in both languages is grounded in shared universal ICM schemas including BLOOM FOR YOUTH, THORN FOR ADVERSITY, and FLOWER FOR BEAUTY, confirming the cross-cultural validity of Radden and Kövecses' (1999) cognitive taxonomic framework. These universal schemas demonstrate that botanical experience provides a common cognitive substrate for metonymic thought across typologically and culturally distinct languages.

Second, Uzbek demonstrates significantly higher rates of rose/gul metonymies (37.2% vs. 21.1%), attributable to the extraordinary cultural depth of the gul lexeme in the Persianate Sufi literary tradition. The ROSE FOR SPIRITUAL BEAUTY schema and the QO'LI GUL FOR SKILLED CRAFTSMANSHIP metonymy are culture-

specific models with no direct English equivalents, reflecting the distinctive cognitive-cultural grammar of Uzbek.

Third, English exhibits significantly higher rates of tree metonymies (18.9% vs. 10.0%), reflecting the cultural salience of arboreal species in English national mythology and institutional identity. The OAK FOR ENGLAND schema and the WILLOW FOR GRIEF schema represent English-specific cultural models grounded in Anglo-Saxon and Romantic literary traditions.

Fourth, Uzbek shows markedly higher rates of agricultural crop metonymies (16.1% vs. 7.8%), reflecting Central Asian agricultural tradition and the specific cultural-political history of cotton cultivation in Uzbekistan. The COTTON FOR NATIONAL COLLECTIVE LABOUR schema is a historically contingent cultural model absent from English.

Fifth, floral fragrance metonymies diverge significantly between the two languages, with Uzbek FRAGRANCE FOR SPIRITUAL VIRTUE reflecting Sufi aesthetic theology and English fragrance metonymies operating in more secular psychological domains. This divergence illustrates how theological traditions can shape the cognitive models within which metonymic mappings are licensed.

Future research directions include diachronic analysis of Uzbek floral metonymy from classical to contemporary usage, psycholinguistic experiments testing the processing of culture-specific floral metonymies by bilingual speakers, and extension of the comparative framework to Persian and Turkish, the languages most closely related to Uzbek's floral metonymic heritage. Corpus expansion to include social media language would also illuminate how traditional floral metonymic schemas are adapted in contemporary digital communication.

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