

The PATH Image Schema in English and Uzbek Phraseology: Shared Cognitive Patterns and Culture-Specific Realizations

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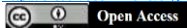
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the PATH image schema in English and Uzbek phraseology through a focused contrastive cognitive-linguistic analysis. A purposive core sample of 16 dictionary-attested conventional expressions (eight English and eight Uzbek) is analysed in terms of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL structure and the related components of direction, obstacle, deviation, guidance, and destination. The study distinguishes conceptual correspondence from formal phraseological equivalence and classifies the observed relations as shared, partially shared, or language- and culture-specific within the English-Uzbek comparison. The findings show recurrent mappings such as solving a problem is finding a way, opportunity is an open path, difficulty is a blocked path, acceptable behaviour is the right path, and guidance is showing the way. At the same time, the two languages differ in how these mappings are lexicalized and culturally elaborated. English distributes PATH imagery across several lexical items, including way, track, and crossroads, whereas Uzbek concentrates many conventional expressions around a single path-related lexeme and also contains a culturally salient positive-wish formula based on PATH imagery. The results support a shared embodied basis for PATH conceptualization while showing that phraseological realization remains sensitive to linguistic convention and cultural evaluation.

1. Introduction

Human beings frequently understand abstract experience through recurring patterns derived from physical interaction with the world. Movement from one location to another is among the most basic of these experiences: it presupposes a starting point, movement through space, a direction, and a possible destination. In cognitive linguistics, such recurrent spatial organization is described through image schemas, relatively abstract structures that emerge from embodied experience and help organize more complex conceptual domains (Johnson, 1987; Hampe, 2005).

The PATH image schema is especially productive because actual movement rarely consists only of a start and an endpoint. It may involve choosing a direction, maintaining or losing a route, encountering an obstacle, opening access, being guided, or reaching a point at which further movement is impossible. These elements can be metaphorically projected onto non-spatial experience. As a result, goals may be conceptualized as destinations, problems as blocked routes, opportunities as open paths, decisions as alternative directions, and behavioural deviation as leaving an accepted course. This relation between concrete spatial experience and abstract conceptualization is consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory, in which a more concrete source domain structures a more abstract target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010).

Phraseology is particularly suitable for examining such mappings because conventional expressions preserve recurrent ways of construing experience. The English idioms *find a way*, *pave the way*, *be on the right track*, and *be at a crossroads*, for example, retain different components of the PATH schema even when no literal journey is involved. Uzbek phraseology likewise contains a dense cluster of expressions built around *yo'l*, including *yo'lini topmoq*, *yo'l ochmoq*, *yo'ldan ozmoq*, *yo'lga solmoq*, and *yo'l ko'rsatmoq*. These expressions show that the same physical domain can motivate meanings connected with problem solving, opportunity, social behaviour, guidance, and evaluation.

Cross-linguistic similarity, however, should not be equated with identical wording or with absolute universality. Cognitive metaphor research has repeatedly shown that broadly shared embodied structures may receive different linguistic and cultural elaborations (Kövecses, 2005, 2020). Recent English-Uzbek research has also discussed broad conceptual metaphors, including LIFE IS A JOURNEY (Dekhkonova, 2025). The specific contribution of the present study is therefore not to claim the discovery of the journey metaphor itself. Rather, it treats PATH as a componential image schema and applies the same analytical grid—SOURCE, PATH, DIRECTION, OBSTACLE, DEVIATION, GUIDANCE, and GOAL—to conventional phraseological material in both languages. This makes it possible to separate conceptual correspondence from formal phraseological equivalence.

The study addresses three questions: (1) Which PATH-based conceptual mappings recur in both English and Uzbek phraseology? (2) Which components of the PATH schema are foregrounded by the phraseological units of each language? (3) At what level do the two languages show shared, partially shared, or language- and culture-specific realizations? By answering these questions, the article aims to clarify how a common embodied structure interacts with language-specific phraseological convention and culturally meaningful evaluation.

2. Theoretical Framework and Previous Studies

Image schemas are commonly understood as recurrent, schematic structures of sensorimotor experience that organize conceptualization without being tied to one specific lexical form. M. Johnson treats such schemas as part of the embodied basis of meaning, while later cognitive-linguistic work has developed their role in categorization, metaphor, and semantic extension (Johnson, 1987; Hampe, 2005). Frequently discussed schemas include CONTAINER, UP-DOWN, CENTER-PERIPHERY, FORCE, and PATH.

The prototypical PATH schema can be represented as SOURCE-PATH-GOAL. SOURCE corresponds to the point of departure, PATH to the trajectory or progression, and GOAL to the destination. For phraseological analysis, however, this minimal structure needs to be expanded to include functionally relevant components such as DIRECTION, OBSTACLE, DEVIATION, and GUIDANCE. These components are not separate schemas in the present study; they are treated as recurrent elaborations of directed movement. The advantage of this componential view is that it makes comparison possible even when two expressions use different lexical images.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory explains how such spatial organization can structure abstract domains. The mapping is systematic rather than merely ornamental: speakers can reason about progress, failure, choice, or morality using the logic of movement through space (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The PATH schema has also been used to account for moral conceptualization, where correct conduct is represented as remaining on a path and deviation as leaving it (Basson, 2011). Thus, expressions of behavioural correctness can combine embodied spatial structure with normative cultural evaluation.

Variation is equally important. Kövecses (2005, 2020) argues that conceptual metaphors may display cross-cultural commonality while differing in elaboration, emphasis, and conventional expression. This distinction is crucial for phraseology. Two languages may share a mapping such as OPPORTUNITY IS AN OPEN PATH but realize it through different verbs and images. Conversely, a visually similar expression may differ in conventional meaning. Accordingly, the present study treats conceptual equivalence and phraseological equivalence as related but distinct analytical levels.

In English-Uzbek research, broad comparisons of conceptual metaphor have already identified shared journey-based conceptualization (Dekhkonova, 2025). What remains less clearly described is the internal distribution of PATH components across conventional phraseological units and the degree to which equivalent cognitive structures are phraseologically matched. The present analysis focuses precisely on this narrower issue. Its novelty lies in comparing the two phraseological systems through a common componential model rather than through isolated translation pairs or a single target-domain metaphor such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

3. Materials and Methods

The study uses a qualitative contrastive cognitive-linguistic design. A purposive core sample of 16 conventional expressions was selected: eight English and eight Uzbek units. The sample is intentionally focused rather than exhaustive, because the aim is to test a component-based comparative procedure on clear dictionary-attested cases. English items were checked against Cambridge Dictionary



entries and supplemented by Ayto (2020). Uzbek items were checked against the ‘Idiom’ listings and semantic descriptions in the Uzbek Educational Corpus and supplemented by Rahmatullaev (1992).

Three inclusion criteria were applied. First, an item had to be attested as an idiom, phraseological unit, or established conventional expression in a lexicographic source. Second, its non-literal meaning had to depend on movement, route, direction, access, obstruction, deviation, or guidance. Third, the PATH-based meaning had to structure an abstract target domain rather than refer only to literal travel. Freely generated combinations such as *choose a path*, *yo‘l tanlamoq*, and *qaysi yo‘ldan borishni bilmaslik* were therefore excluded from the core dataset, even though they can be metaphorical in context. This restriction reduces the risk of treating ordinary compositional phrases as phraseological evidence.

Table 1

Core analytical sample			
Language	Expression	PATH component / function	Primary check
English	<i>find a way</i>	GOAL / solution	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>be on the right track</i>	DIRECTION / successful progress	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>pave the way</i>	OPEN PATH / facilitation	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>get in the way</i>	OBSTACLE / interference	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>reach / hit a dead end</i>	END OF PATH / no progress	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>go astray</i>	DEVIATION / incorrect course	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>point the way</i>	GUIDANCE / direction	Cambridge Dictionary
English	<i>be at a crossroads</i>	ALTERNATIVE DIRECTIONS / decision	Cambridge Dictionary
Uzbek	<i>yo‘lini topmoq</i>	GOAL / solution	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘lga solmoq</i>	DIRECTION / correction	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘l ochmoq</i>	OPEN PATH / facilitation	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘lini to‘smoq</i>	OBSTACLE / interference	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘ldan ozmoq</i>	DEVIATION / unacceptable behaviour	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘ldan chiqarmoq</i>	DEVIATION / causing deviation	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>yo‘l ko‘rsatmoq</i>	GUIDANCE / advice	Uzbek Corpus Educational
Uzbek	<i>oq yo‘l</i>	PATH + positive evaluation / good wish	Uzbek Corpus Educational

Each unit was analysed in five steps. First, its conventional figurative meaning was established from the lexicographic description. Second, the PATH component activated by the expression was identified. Third, the source and target domains of the metaphorical mapping were reconstructed. Fourth, English and Uzbek units were compared for conceptual mapping, internal imagery, and evaluative

orientation. Finally, the correspondence was classified as shared, partially shared, or language- and culture-specific within the present two-language dataset.

The label shared is deliberately narrower than universal. It indicates that a comparable mapping is conventionally represented in both English and Uzbek and can plausibly be motivated by common spatial experience. Partially shared refers to cases in which the underlying mapping corresponds but the lexical imagery or semantic emphasis differs. Culture-specific is used only for a distinctive conventional elaboration in the present comparison; it does not imply that the image is unattested in every other language. This methodological restriction is important because a two-language study cannot establish linguistic universality in the strong typological sense.

4. Results and Analysis

The core dataset shows that English and Uzbek phraseology repeatedly exploit the same broad logic of directed movement, but the individual PATH components are distributed differently. The strongest correspondences occur in solution, facilitation, obstruction, behavioural orientation, and guidance. More distinctive realizations emerge in decision-point imagery and evaluative formulae.

4.1. Solving a Problem and Successful Progress as Finding or Maintaining a Route

The English idiom *find a way* conceptualizes solving or managing a problem as discovering a viable route. Cambridge Dictionary explicitly defines the expression in terms of discovering how to achieve or deal with something. Uzbek *yo'lini topmoq* activates a closely comparable structure: the abstract solution is conceptualized as a route that can be found. The two units therefore instantiate a shared mapping in which the GOAL is not simply a physical destination but a workable solution.

Solving a problem is finding a way

A solution is a viable Path

English *be on the right track* foregrounds DIRECTION rather than discovery: successful progress depends on being aligned with the correct route. Uzbek *yo'lga solmoq* also activates directed movement, but its conventional meanings include placing something or someone on a correct course and improving the functioning of an activity. The conceptual core is therefore shared, while the grammatical perspective differs: English typically describes the actor as already located on the correct route, whereas Uzbek frequently profiles the causative act of putting a person or process onto such a route. This is a partially shared realization rather than a direct phraseological equivalent.

4.2. Opportunity and Facilitation as an Open or Prepared Path

A close cross-linguistic correspondence appears in the conceptualization of opportunity. English *pave the way* means to make a later action possible or easier, while Uzbek *yo'l ochmoq* uses the image of opening a road or access. Both expressions recruit the PATH schema to represent the removal of conditions that prevent further movement.

Opportunity is an open Path

Facilitating action is preparing or opening the Path

The mapping is shared, but the internal imagery is not identical. Paving foregrounds preparation of a traversable surface; opening foregrounds access. The distinction is small but analytically useful: conceptual equivalence can coexist with non-identical source imagery. This is precisely the type of relation that a purely translational comparison may overlook.

4.3. Difficulty and Interference as a Blocked Path

Obstruction is another strongly shared PATH extension. English *get in the way* presents interference as occupying or obstructing another person's route. Uzbek *yo'lini to'smoq* similarly represents prevention as blocking a path. In both cases, an abstract hindrance inherits the spatial logic of an obstacle that stops forward movement.

Difficulty is an obstacle on the path

Preventing action is blocking movement

English *reach or hit a dead end* develops the same logic differently. Here the problem is not an obstacle placed on a continuing route but a route whose continuation has disappeared. The figurative meaning "a situation with no hope of progress" makes the PATH endpoint itself the source of the abstract meaning. The present Uzbek core sample does not contain a fully equivalent fixed unit with the same dead-end image. Thus, the broader mapping NO PROGRESS IS NO FURTHER PATH is available in

English as a salient phraseological realization, while Uzbek in this dataset preferentially lexicalizes active obstruction through *yo 'lini to 'smoq*.

4.4. Behavioural and Moral Deviation as Leaving the Correct Path

The PATH schema becomes especially revealing when physical direction is mapped onto behavioural evaluation. English *go astray* can refer to moving away from the correct path and, by extension, to acting wrongly. Uzbek *yo 'ldan ozmoq* is explicitly glossed in the educational corpus as entering a bad path or becoming morally/behaviourally deviated. Both expressions therefore instantiate a highly comparable mapping.

Acceptable behaviour is the correct path

Unacceptable behaviour is deviation from the PATH

Uzbek also conventionalizes the causative pattern *yo 'ldan chiqarmoq*, “to lead someone onto a bad course / cause deviation.” This is important because it makes the interpersonal structure of the metaphor explicit: one participant causes another to leave the accepted path. The embodied distinction between maintaining and losing direction is shared, but the evaluative content is supplied by social convention. In other words, bodily experience provides the spatial frame; culture and language determine what counts as the “correct” or “incorrect” course in a given context.

4.5. Guidance as Showing the Way

Guidance provides one of the clearest near-parallels in the dataset. English *point the way* is conventionally used to mean showing how something can be done or indicating a promising direction. Uzbek *yo 'l ko 'rsatmoq* is glossed as advising what should be done. In both expressions, knowledge or advice is conceptualized as spatial orientation supplied to a traveller.

Guidance is showing the way

Knowing how to act is knowing the direction

The expressions are not literal translations in every context, but they share both the central PATH component and the target-domain function. This constitutes a strong case of conceptual correspondence with relatively close phraseological imagery.

4.6. Language- and Culture-Specific Elaborations within the Comparison

Two items illustrate how the same PATH schema can be elaborated in directions that are not directly matched in the other language's core sample. English *be at a crossroads* profiles a point at which several routes become possible and a major decision is required. The conventional idiom therefore turns spatial branching into a model of critical choice. Its salient component is not movement itself but the availability of alternative directions.

A Critical Decision is a Crossroads

Alternatives are Different Directions

Uzbek *oq yo 'l*, by contrast, combines PATH with positive colour evaluation in a conventional formula of good wishes. The educational corpus explicitly treats *oq yo 'l* as an ibora and gives the example *Sizga oq yo 'l tilayman*. Here the path is not simply a route toward a goal: it is positively evaluated through *oq* “white,” which in the expression contributes an auspicious, favourable orientation. This makes *oq yo 'l* a useful example of culture-sensitive elaboration because spatial movement is fused with a conventional evaluative symbol rather than with the choice structure foregrounded by English crossroads imagery.

These two items should not be interpreted as mirror-image equivalents, nor does the present study claim that crossroads imagery is uniquely English or that positive “white path” symbolism is impossible elsewhere. The narrower claim is that, within the present English–Uzbek phraseological sample, the languages conventionalize different peripheral elaborations of PATH. This is the level at which culture-specificity can be argued responsibly in a two-language study.

4.7. Comparative Synthesis

Across the dataset, the strongest shared mappings are SOLUTION IS A VIABLE PATH, OPPORTUNITY IS AN OPEN PATH, DIFFICULTY IS A BLOCKED PATH, DEVIATION FROM ACCEPTED BEHAVIOUR IS DEVIATION FROM THE PATH, and GUIDANCE IS SHOWING THE WAY. These correspondences are compatible with an embodied explanation because they preserve relational structures that are familiar from physical movement: routes can be found, opened, blocked, lost, corrected, and indicated.

The comparison also reveals a lexical asymmetry. English distributes PATH-related phraseology among way, track, dead end, and crossroads, while Uzbek repeatedly recruits the lexeme *yo'l* in a wider family of phraseological constructions. This does not by itself prove a deeper cultural difference, but it does show different patterns of lexical concentration. More importantly, formal non-equivalence does not prevent conceptual correspondence: *pave the way* and *yo'l ochmoq* differ in source imagery, while *be on the right track* and *yo'lga solmoq* differ in viewpoint, yet the relevant PATH relations remain comparable.

5. Discussion

The results support a two-level account of PATH-based phraseology. At the first level, English and Uzbek share a relatively stable embodied structure of directed movement. At the second level, each language conventionalizes selected components of that structure through its own lexical resources, grammatical perspectives, and evaluative associations. Embodiment and culture therefore function as complementary rather than competing explanations.

The shared mappings are not surprising if the experiential basis of the schema is considered. Human movement routinely involves searching for a route, maintaining direction, encountering barriers, receiving guidance, and reaching points where further progress is impossible. These recurrent experiences provide readily available source structures for reasoning about abstract problems. The similarity between *find a way* and *yo'lini topmoq*, or between *point the way* and *yo'l ko'rsatmoq*, is therefore plausibly grounded in common spatial experience rather than direct lexical borrowing.

At the same time, the data caution against treating shared embodiment as identical phraseology. English often differentiates PATH functions lexically: track emphasizes correctness of course, dead end emphasizes impossibility of further progress, and crossroads emphasizes decision among alternatives. Uzbek, in the present sample, uses *yo'l* across solution, facilitation, obstruction, behavioural deviation, correction, guidance, and positive evaluation. The result is a greater lexical concentration around a single path lexeme, although a broader corpus would be needed before any quantitative claim about productivity could be made.

The distinction between conceptual and phraseological equivalence is therefore one of the main analytical outcomes. A translation-based method might classify *pave the way* and *yo'l ochmoq* as only partially equivalent because the verbs differ. A cognitive analysis, however, reveals a strong shared mapping: making future action possible is understood as creating a traversable route. Conversely, expressions may contain similar spatial vocabulary but differ in conventional target meaning. The cognitive level and the phraseological level must consequently be analysed separately.

The behavioural group also shows why culture matters. The spatial distinction between staying on and leaving a route is embodied, but the moral interpretation of “correct” direction is normative. Basson (2011) similarly demonstrates how PATH can organize moral conduct. In the Uzbek data, *yo'ldan ozmog* and *yo'ldan chiqarmoq* make the evaluative dimension particularly explicit. The formula *oq yo'l* adds another layer by attaching positive symbolic evaluation to the path itself. These cases show how a shared image schema can be enriched by culturally conventional meanings.

The study is deliberately limited. Its 16-item core sample is suitable for qualitative model testing but not for claims about frequency or statistical dominance. A larger follow-up study should combine phraseological dictionaries with corpus data and quantify the distribution of PATH components across genres. The present contribution is methodological and comparative: it demonstrates how the internal components of one image schema can be used to distinguish shared cognitive organization from partial phraseological equivalence and culture-sensitive elaboration in English and Uzbek.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the PATH image schema in a focused set of English and Uzbek phraseological expressions. The analysis identifies a shared embodied cognitive core in which abstract experience is structured through the logic of movement: solutions are found as routes, opportunities are opened as paths, difficulties block movement, behavioural deviation leaves the correct course, and guidance shows a direction.

The comparison also demonstrates that conceptual equivalence does not require identical phraseological form. English and Uzbek may activate the same PATH relation while selecting different lexical images or grammatical viewpoints. English distributes the imagery among several lexical

resources such as *way*, *track*, *dead end*, and *crossroads*, whereas Uzbek shows repeated conventionalization around *yo'l*. Distinctive elaborations such as *be at a crossroads* and *oq yo'l* further show how particular components of PATH may acquire language- and culture-sensitive meanings.

The principal contribution of the study is therefore the componential comparison of PATH rather than the identification of a new journey metaphor. By separating SOURCE-PATH-GOAL structure and its elaborations direction, obstacle, deviation, guidance, and choice from the surface wording of individual idioms, the analysis provides a more precise account of cross-linguistic phraseological correspondence. The results support a view in which embodied cognitive structure is relatively stable, while phraseological realization remains shaped by linguistic convention and cultural evaluation.

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