HOW ENGLISH AND UZBEK LINGUACULTURES SEE THE ELEMENTS OF NATURE: “WATER”, “EARTH”, “AIR” AND “FIRE”

Tugalov Orzumurod

Abstract: This article looks at how four natural elements: “WATER”, “EARTH”, “AIR” AND “FIRE” are understood and expressed in English and Uzbek. It draws on idioms, proverbs and metaphors from both languages and compares them through the lens of linguoculturology. The main finding is simple: both languages share some basic metaphorical patterns that come from human bodily experience earth stands for stability, fire for danger, water for deep emotion, air for uncertainty. But when you look closer, the two cultures put different weight on these elements. In Uzbek, water carries the strongest positive cultural charge: it means life, prosperity, purity. Earth is tied to homeland and something close to sacred. In English, fire is more about personal passion and ambition, and air has travelled much further into abstract territory. The article argues that these differences come from geography, from the way people made a living (irrigated farming versus sea trade), and from religious and cultural history.

Keywords: linguoculturology; natural elements; conceptual metaphor; English-Uzbek comparison; national worldview

Introduction

Since ancient Greece, people have treated water, earth, air and fire as the four building blocks of the world. That idea did not stay in philosophy books. It sank into everyday speech, into proverbs, into the way ordinary people describe their feelings and their lives. Today, cognitive linguistics tells us something important: when we talk about natural elements, we are not simply describing physical things. We are filtering

them through culture, through geography, through the history of the people who speak the language.

English and Uzbek are very different languages. English belongs to the Indo-European family, Uzbek to the Turkic family. English culture grew up on an island, surrounded by sea, with a long history of sailing and trade. Uzbek culture grew up inland, in an arid region, where life depended on irrigation and on careful use of water. These two worlds could hardly be more different. So it makes sense to ask: do the four elements mean the same thing in both languages? Where do the similarities come from, and what explains the differences?

This study relies on linguoculturology a field that studies how language stores and transmits cultural meaning. The basic idea is that words and fixed expressions do not just name things. They carry the collective experience of a people. As Maslova puts it, fixed expressions reflect the national mentality and cultural values. So when we study the vocabulary of natural elements, we cannot stop at dictionary definitions. We have to dig into what these words mean for the culture that uses them.

A second pillar is conceptual metaphor theory, developed by Lakoff and Johnson. Their central claim is that we understand abstract things through concrete ones. Metaphor is not decoration; it is how thought works. And the choice of which concrete source we use water, fire, earth, air depends on both bodily experience and cultural environment. Natural elements are available to all humans, but the way they map onto abstract meaning differs from culture to culture. That is exactly what this paper explores.

3. The four elements in English and Uzbek:

3.1 Earth / Yer

In both English and Uzbek, earth stands for stability, reliability, common sense. An English speaker says someone is *"down to earth"* practical, not pretentious. Something *"solid as a rock"* does not move. In Uzbek, *"Yer oltin"* (land is gold)

shows how precious land is, and *"Yerda ekilgan, yerda o'sadi"* (planted in earth, grows in earth) reminds you that land is the ground of survival itself.

English culture often personifies earth as *"Mother Earth"* a nurturing, feminine figure going back to the Greek goddess Gaia. In Uzbek, *"Yer"* carries a different emotional weight. It is not just soil. It means homeland, territory, the place of your ancestors. This is close to the reverence for land found in Islamic culture. The difference is subtle but real: English earth is a mother; Uzbek earth is a home.

3.2 Water / Suv

Water in both languages connects to emotional depth, to life, to the ability to adapt. *"Still waters run deep"* a quiet person may hide strong feeling. *"Blood is thicker than water"* uses water as the weaker bond, the one that blood surpasses. In Uzbek, *"Suvga tushgan baliq, o'zini bemalol his qiladi"* (a fish in water feels at ease) describes someone comfortable in their true element.

In Uzbek, water is overwhelmingly positive. This is not hard to explain. Uzbekistan is an arid country. Water means survival. Rain is a blessing. Expressions like *"barakali yomg'ir"* (blessed rain) and *"rahmat yomg'iri"* (rain of mercy) show gratitude, not annoyance. In English, by contrast, rain is often a nuisance, a symbol of gloom. A *"rainy day"* is a time of trouble. Water in English is more often dangerous or overwhelming: *"floodgates open"* means emotions burst out of control; *"in deep water"* means in serious trouble. The same substance, two very different emotional lives.

3.3 Air / Havo

Air in both languages suggests freedom, breath, life, and also uncertainty. Something "up in the air" is undecided. Something that vanishes "*into thin air*" is gone without a trace. In Uzbek, "*havo*" is closely tied to "*nafas*" (breath). Both point to the basic condition of being alive.

English has pushed "*air*" much further into abstraction. You can have an *"air of mystery,"* or you can *"air grievances*" neither has anything to do with the physical atmosphere. Uzbek *"havo"* stays closer to the ground, so to speak. It usually refers to actual weather, actual air quality. Abstract uses are rarer. This fits a farming society that watches the sky for practical reasons, not for poetic ones.

3.4 Fire / Olov

Fire in both languages carries a double meaning: danger and passion. *"Play with fire"* warns you. *"Fire in one's belly"* means drive, hunger, motivation. Uzbek has the same duality. *"Olovni yong'in tutishdan oldin alanga bilan sinash"* (test the flame before it becomes a conflagration) warns against acting too quickly.

In English, fire leans toward individual passion and ambition. *"Fire in one's eyes"* strong emotion, determination. *"Burning ambition"* the engine of personal success. In Uzbek tradition, fire leans more toward purification and trial, toward spiritual testing. This connects to the place of fire in Islamic thought as a symbol of judgment and cleansing. The difference reflects something deeper: English culture prizes the individual drive; Uzbek culture prizes the collective and the spiritual.

Three forces seem to be at work.

Uzbekistan sits inland, in a dry region. Water is scarce, so it becomes precious, almost sacred. England is an island. The sea is everywhere. Water is something you sail on, cross over, trade across not something you desperately wait for.

Irrigated farming needs steady water and good land. That explains why water and earth carry positive value in Uzbek. Trade and navigation, the historical backbone of English economic life, put a premium on managing risk (fire) and living with uncertainty (air).

Islamic culture has its own symbolic reading of natural elements, and there are historical links to the Zoroastrian reverence for fire. English culture inherited its element symbolism from Greek philosophy and Christian thought, fused over centuries.

Conclusion

The comparison shows a clear pattern: underneath, the two languages share the same cognitive foundations, because all humans have bodies and live in the same physical world. But on the surface, culture reshapes everything. The four elements are not neutral physical categories. They are fossils of cultural memory, value judgments pressed into language over centuries.

This matters for anyone who translates or moves between cultures. You cannot translate a water metaphor literally and expect it to land the same way. *"Blessed rain"* and *"a rainy day"* use the same word, but they live in different emotional worlds. The translator's job is to feel that difference, not just to match the dictionary.

References

1. Akhmedov, J. & Davronov, M. "Ingliz va O'zbek Madaniyatida 'Olov' va 'Suv' Binar Konseptlarining Milliy Tafakkur va Lisoniy Ongni Shakllantirishdagi O'rni." Kokand State Pedagogical Institute Journal, 2025.
2. "A Comparative Study of Natural Phenomenon Names in Uzbek and English." CyberLeninka.
3. "Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations," Vol. 4, Issue 3, 2025, pp. 181-185.
5. Makarov, V. (2009). Cultural Significance of Natural Elements in Russian and Uzbek Proverbs. Tashkent: National University Press.
6. Shakespeare, W. (1599). A Midsummer Night's Dream. London: Thomas Fisher.
7. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
8. "Fire and Water in Uzbek and English Idioms and Proverbs." Xorazm Ma'mun Academy Bulletin, 4/4-2025, pp. 51-55.
9. Saydaliyeva, G. A. "Cognilinguocultural Features of Metaphors Formed Through

Cosmic-Natural Symbols in English and Uzbek Languages." Zenodo, 2025.

10. Turgunova, S. T. "Lexical and Cultural Features of Stable Expressions Related to the Four Elements of Nature." Bright Mind Publishing, 2026.
11. "A Linguistic Analysis of Words and Expressions Related to Natural Phenomena in English and Uzbek Languages." IMJRD, Vol. 12, Issue 5, 2025.
12. Akbaraliyevich LA. Contextual means of expressing phase in English and Uzbek languages. International Journal of Advanced Research in Education, Technology and Management. 2023 Apr 29;2(4).