

**Conceptualizing Time through Idiomatic Expressions: A Comparative
Study of Spanish and Uzbek Phraseological Systems**

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Abstract: This article investigates the conceptualization of time as reflected in Spanish and Uzbek phraseology, focusing on the interaction between metaphor, cognition, and cultural models. Building upon the theoretical premises of conceptual metaphor theory and linguistic relativity, the study analyzes idiomatic expressions and proverbs that encode temporal meanings in both languages. The objective is to identify shared cognitive patterns in temporal metaphorization and to determine culturally specific configurations shaped by historical, religious, and socio-economic contexts. The analysis demonstrates that while both Spanish and Uzbek rely on spatial, motion-based, and resource metaphors to structure temporal experience, their phraseological systems differ in emphasis, semantic extension, and cultural resonance. Spanish idioms frequently conceptualize time as a linear resource subject to control and expenditure, whereas Uzbek expressions often integrate cyclicity, endurance, and communal temporality. The findings contribute to cross-linguistic phraseology and intercultural semantics by highlighting the linguistic encoding of culturally embedded temporal worldviews.

Keywords: temporal conceptualization, idioms, phraseology, Spanish linguistics, Uzbek linguistics, conceptual metaphor theory, cultural semantics, proverbs, intercultural communication.

Time is an abstract cognitive domain that lacks direct sensory perception. Human languages therefore rely heavily on metaphorical structures to make temporal experience intelligible. Idiomatic expressions and proverbs provide particularly rich material for examining how abstract temporal relations are encoded and conventionalized in specific linguistic communities. In both Spanish and Uzbek, phraseological systems contain numerous expressions that reflect culturally salient ways of perceiving duration, sequence, repetition, urgency, and continuity. A comparative analysis of these systems allows for a deeper understanding of how language mediates cultural conceptions of time.

The theoretical foundation of this study is conceptual metaphor theory as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who argued that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism structuring thought rather than a purely rhetorical device. According to this framework, abstract domains such as time are systematically mapped onto more concrete experiential domains such as space, motion, substance, and possession. Subsequent cross-linguistic research has demonstrated that while the mapping of time onto space appears nearly universal, languages differ in the orientation, elaboration, and lexical realization of these mappings. Such differences often correspond to cultural practices and historical experience.

In Spanish, temporal expressions frequently reflect a linear conception of time structured along a horizontal axis. Expressions such as *mirar hacia el futuro* (“to look toward the future”), *dejar atrás el pasado* (“to leave the past behind”), and *estar por delante* (“to be ahead”) illustrate a directional mapping in which the future is located in front of the experiencer and the past behind. This spatialization aligns with broader Indo-European tendencies to conceptualize time as a path along which individuals move. Motion verbs such as *pasar* (to pass) and *llegar* (to arrive) are commonly employed in temporal contexts, reinforcing the metaphor **TIME IS MOTION**.

In addition to spatial metaphors, Spanish phraseology frequently conceptualizes time as a quantifiable resource. Idioms such as *ganar tiempo* (“to gain time”), *perder el tiempo* (“to waste time”), and *ahorrar tiempo* (“to save time”) instantiate the metaphor **TIME IS MONEY** or **TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY**. This metaphorical pattern reflects socio-economic developments associated with industrialization and modern productivity norms, in which time becomes measurable, schedulable, and economically valuable. Proverbs such as *El tiempo es oro* (“Time is gold”) make this conceptual mapping explicit.

Uzbek phraseology also employs spatial and motion metaphors to structure temporal meaning, yet the semantic extensions often differ in emphasis. Uzbek expressions such as *vaqt o‘tadi* (“time passes”) and *vaqt keladi* (“time comes”) reveal similar motion-based metaphors. However, Uzbek idiomatic discourse frequently integrates cyclical and endurance-oriented models of time, reflecting historical patterns of agrarian life, seasonal rhythms, and communal organization. Temporal expressions may refer to seasons (*bahor kelganda* — “when spring comes”) or life stages, emphasizing recurrence rather than linear progression.

A salient feature of Uzbek temporal phraseology is its frequent integration of patience and endurance as evaluative dimensions of time. Proverbs such as *Sabr lining*

ishi oson (“The patient person’s task becomes easy”) imply that time rewards perseverance. Another widely cited proverb, *Vaqt hamma narsani joyiga qo’yadi* (“Time puts everything in its place”), parallels Spanish *El tiempo lo pone todo en su sitio*, yet the pragmatic use in Uzbek discourse often carries a stronger connotation of moral order and communal harmony restored over time. This suggests that while structural metaphors may overlap, pragmatic interpretation is culturally mediated.

The comparison of Spanish and Uzbek phraseology also reveals differences in the conceptualization of temporal agency. Spanish idioms frequently portray the individual as an active manager of time. The speaker can *hacer tiempo* (“make time”) or *organizar su tiempo* (“organize their time”), implying control and planning. In Uzbek discourse, temporal expressions more often emphasize accommodation to time’s flow rather than mastery over it. The grammatical structure of Uzbek, a Turkic language with agglutinative morphology, also allows for nuanced temporal marking through suffixation, reinforcing habitual or iterative temporal patterns within the verbal system.

Religious and historical influences further shape temporal metaphors. Spanish, shaped by Christian liturgical calendars and later secular modernity, retains expressions tied to saints’ days, historical events, and liturgical cycles, but its everyday temporal metaphors tend to emphasize chronological precision. Uzbek, influenced by Islamic temporal frameworks such as prayer times and lunar months, incorporates references to religiously marked times that structure communal routines. These frameworks contribute to a culturally embedded understanding of cyclical sacred time alongside secular chronological time.

From a cognitive perspective, the similarities between Spanish and Uzbek confirm the embodied basis of temporal metaphorization. Both languages employ bodily orientation (front/back), motion, and containment to conceptualize temporal relations. The metaphor **TIME IS A CONTAINER** appears in Spanish expressions like *en aquellos tiempos* (“in those times”) and Uzbek equivalents such as *o’sha davrda* (“in that period”), suggesting that temporal intervals are conceptualized as bounded spaces within which events occur. Such parallels support the argument that metaphorical structuring is grounded in shared human experience.

Nevertheless, cultural divergence becomes evident in the density and salience of specific metaphorical schemas. Spanish economic metaphors for time are pervasive and productive in contemporary discourse, while Uzbek idioms foreground relational and moral aspects of temporality. These differences reflect distinct socio-cultural trajectories and patterns of modernization. In rapidly urbanized Spanish-speaking

societies, punctuality and scheduling acquire high social value, which is mirrored in idiomatic language. In Uzbek cultural contexts, while punctuality is also valued, idiomatic discourse more frequently underscores communal continuity and intergenerational temporality.

The implications of these findings extend to translation studies and intercultural communication. Translators must identify not only lexical correspondences but also underlying conceptual metaphors. When a Spanish speaker says *estoy corto de tiempo* (“I am short of time”), the metaphor conceptualizes time as a measurable quantity possessed by the individual. An Uzbek equivalent may express the same meaning through a structurally similar but culturally nuanced phrase, and pragmatic appropriateness must be carefully evaluated. Direct translation without attention to metaphorical framing can result in semantic distortion or pragmatic incongruity.

Moreover, comparative phraseological analysis contributes to broader discussions of linguistic relativity. While the evidence does not support strong determinism, it suggests that habitual metaphor use can guide attention and evaluative stance toward temporal experience. Spanish speakers may be more inclined to frame temporal issues in terms of efficiency and management, whereas Uzbek speakers may emphasize endurance, appropriateness, and communal alignment. These tendencies are not absolute but represent culturally reinforced cognitive patterns.

In conclusion, the comparative study of temporal idioms in Spanish and Uzbek demonstrates that phraseology functions as a repository of cultural cognition. Temporal metaphors are structured by universal embodied experiences yet elaborated through culturally specific schemas. Spanish phraseology predominantly emphasizes linearity, resource management, and individual temporal agency, while Uzbek idioms integrate cyclicity, moral endurance, and communal temporality. The intersection of metaphor theory, phraseological research, and cultural linguistics thus provides a productive framework for analyzing how languages encode fundamental human experiences. Further research should incorporate corpus-based quantitative methods and ethnographic contextualization to deepen understanding of temporal metaphor variation within and across linguistic communities.

References

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