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# Pragmatic Functions of Metonymic Relations in English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak Languages

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**Abstract:** This article explores the pragmatic functions of metonymic relations in English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages. Metonymy is examined not only as a linguistic device but also as a cognitive and communicative mechanism that plays a crucial role in discourse interpretation, inferencing, and cultural conceptualization. Drawing on cognitive linguistics, pragmatic theory and frame semantics, the study demonstrates that metonymy operates as a dynamic process of meaning construction in context. The comparative analysis reveals that while metonymy is universal in cognitive structure, its pragmatic realization varies significantly across languages due to cultural and literary traditions.

**Keywords:** Metonymy, Pragmatics, Cognitive Linguistics, Discourse, Uzbek, Karakalpak, English.

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## 1. Introduction

Metonymy is traditionally defined as a figure of speech based on a relationship of contiguity between two conceptual entities. In classical rhetoric, it was treated as a stylistic device used for expressive purposes. However, modern linguistic research has significantly expanded this understanding. Today, metonymy is considered a fundamental cognitive and pragmatic mechanism involved in everyday language use [1].

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), human conceptual systems are structured not only by metaphor but also by metonymy. While metaphor maps between different conceptual domains, metonymy operates within a single domain, allowing one element to provide mental access to another.

Lakoff (1987) further emphasizes that metonymy is closely connected to categorization processes. Certain salient members of a category can stand for the entire category, which explains why metonymy is so frequent in natural language [2].

From a pragmatic perspective, metonymy is crucial for communication because it reduces linguistic effort and increases inferential efficiency. Instead of explicitly naming a referent, speakers often rely on shared cognitive knowledge to trigger the intended meaning.

Despite extensive research in cognitive linguistics, there is still a lack of comparative studies analyzing how metonymy functions pragmatically in different linguistic and cultural environments. This article addresses this gap by examining English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages [3].

## 2. Material and methods

This study uses a qualitative comparative approach to examine the pragmatic functions of metonymic relations in English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages. The research data were collected from literary works, media texts, and other written sources containing metonymic expressions. The selected examples were analyzed using descriptive, comparative, and contextual methods.

Metonymic expressions were identified and classified according to their conceptual relations and communicative functions. The analysis focused on how metonymy contributes to linguistic economy, expressiveness, evaluation, and meaning construction in discourse. A cross-linguistic comparison was conducted to determine similarities and differences in the pragmatic use of metonymy across the three languages. The findings were interpreted within the framework of cognitive linguistics and pragmatics.

## 3. Results

Radden and Kövecses (1999) define metonymy as a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity provides mental access to another entity within the same idealized cognitive model (ICM). This definition highlights that metonymy is not random substitution but a structured mental operation.

For example, in the conceptual model of a RESTAURANT, elements such as customers, food, waiters, and tables are all interconnected. Referring to a customer as “the ham sandwich” activates the entire frame, allowing the hearer to identify the intended referent.

Lakoff (1987) also explains metonymy through prototype effects. In many cultures, a “mother” prototype is often associated with caregiving and household roles. This, one salient aspect of a category can represent the whole category. Another important aspect of metonymy is its dynamic nature in discourse production. Unlike static semantic relations, metonymy is activated in real-time communication and depends heavily on contextual cues. This means that the interpretation of metonymy is not fixed but variable, depending on speaker intention, shared knowledge, and situational context.

For instance, in institutional discourse, expressions such as “the government decided” or “the university announced” do not refer to physical entities but to abstract institutional structures. These structures are mentally constructed by speakers and hearers through cultural and social knowledge.

Croft (1993) emphasizes that metonymy involves domain highlighting, where one part of a cognitive domain becomes more prominent than others. This selective activation of conceptual structure is what allows metonymy to function efficiently in communication.

Furthermore, metonymy is closely related to the principle of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, relevance theory), since speakers tend to choose expressions that minimize processing effort while maximizing communicative effect. In this sense, metonymy is not an accidental linguistic phenomenon but a systematic strategy of efficient communication.

From a pragmatic perspective, Koch (2004) describes metonymy as a frame-based figure-ground phenomenon. One element becomes linguistically prominent, while the rest of the conceptual structure remains implicit but accessible.

Panther and Thornburg (2003) argue that metonymy functions as a natural inferencing mechanism. Hearers do not process metonymy mechanically; instead, they reconstruct meaning through contextual activation of shared knowledge.

For example, when hearing:

“The White House announced new measures,”

the listener does not interpret the building itself as speaking but activates the institutional frame associated with political authority.

**Pragmatic Functions of Metonymy.** One of the most important functions of metonymy is referential economy. Instead of long descriptions, speakers use compact expressions.

For instance:

“Buckingham Palace issued a statement.”

Here, a place stands for an institution. This reduces linguistic complexity while maintaining clarity.

Metonymy forces the listener to actively construct meaning. Consider:

“The ham sandwich is waiting for his check.”

The expression is not literal. The hearer activates the restaurant scenario and identifies the customer. This demonstrates how metonymy relies on cognitive participation.

**Discourse Compression.** Metonymy compresses meaning without losing semantic richness. Literary texts especially rely on this function because it allows authors to evoke complex images in minimal linguistic form. Metonymy plays a crucial role in discourse compression by allowing speakers to encode complex situational meanings in reduced linguistic forms without losing interpretative richness. Unlike simple lexical shortening, metonymic compression involves cognitive activation of entire conceptual frames, where one salient element stands for a more complex structure.

This mechanism is particularly important in both literary and institutional discourse, where communicative efficiency is combined with stylistic or rhetorical goals. The speaker or writer does not explicitly verbalize all components of meaning but relies on the hearer’s ability to reconstruct the missing elements through contextual inference.

For example, when an author writes “*The White House reacted immediately*”, the expression compresses a complex chain of institutional actors, decision-making processes, and communicative actions into a single metonymic reference. The reader reconstructs the full scenario through the activation of the political frame associated with the institution [4].

According to frame semantics (Fillmore; Koch, 2004), such compression is possible because each lexical unit is embedded in a structured network of knowledge. Metonymy selectively activates only one element of this network while leaving the rest implicit but accessible.

Thus, discourse compression is not merely a stylistic economy but a cognitive strategy that reduces processing effort while maintaining conceptual completeness.

**Evaluative Function.** Metonymy often carries implicit evaluation. Instead of directly stating judgment, speakers shift focus to a related element, which softens or intensifies meaning. One of the less obvious but highly significant pragmatic functions of metonymy is its evaluative potential. Metonymy allows speakers to express attitudes, judgments, and emotional positioning in an indirect and often more persuasive manner than explicit statements.

This evaluative function operates through the shift of focus from the whole entity to a specific salient feature. By highlighting one aspect of a conceptual frame, the speaker implicitly evaluates the entire referent without direct characterization.

For instance, expressions such as “*a pretty face*” may function metonymically to evaluate a person not directly, but through a single physical feature. Similarly, institutional metonymy such as “*the Kremlin decided*” may carry ideological or political evaluation depending on discourse context.

In literary discourse, evaluation is often subtle and embedded in metonymic structures. Writers use metonymy to avoid direct judgment while still guiding reader interpretation. This indirectness increases the pragmatic force of the utterance, since implied meanings often have stronger persuasive effect than explicit statements.

From a pragmatic point of view, evaluative metonymy aligns with the theory of implicature (Grice), since meaning is not explicitly stated but inferred by the hearer. The evaluation is therefore not part of the literal meaning but emerges through contextual reasoning.

In this sense, metonymy functions as a powerful tool of persuasive and stylistic strategy, allowing speakers to encode ideology, emotion, and stance in a compact linguistic form.

**Cultural Representation.** Metonymy reflects cultural knowledge. In many cases, understanding metonymy requires familiarity with cultural practices, traditions, and historical background. Metonymy is also deeply connected with cultural representation, as it reflects the way communities structure knowledge about the world. Cultural models, traditions, and historical memory are often encoded in metonymic expressions that require shared background knowledge for correct interpretation.

In this respect, metonymy serves as a linguistic bridge between language and culture. It activates culturally specific frames that are not universally accessible but are grounded in collective experience [5].

For example, in Uzbek literary tradition, the mention of classical authors such as *Navoiy* or *Bedil* often functions metonymically to represent not the individuals themselves, but the entire body of their literary heritage. This reflects a cultural model in which authorship and textual production are tightly interwoven with identity and national memory.

Similarly, in Karakalpak poetic tradition, references to historical poets function as symbolic carriers of cultural continuity. Such metonymic usage reinforces collective identity and preserves cultural knowledge across generations.

In English discourse, cultural representation through metonymy is often institutional rather than literary. Expressions such as “*Downing Street*” or “*the White House*” represent political systems rather than physical locations, reflecting a culture of institutional abstraction.

Thus, metonymy operates as a cultural coding mechanism, transforming linguistic expressions into carriers of collective identity, ideology, and historical memory.

**Metonymy and Discourse Structuring.** Beyond referential economy and inferencing, metonymy plays a crucial role in structuring discourse. It helps organize information by foregrounding relevant conceptual elements while backgrounding less important details. This allows speakers to maintain coherence and cohesion in both spoken and written texts [6].

For example, in political discourse, institutions are often referred to through metonymic expressions such as “*Downing Street*,” “*the Kremlin*,” or “*the White House*.” These expressions do not simply replace names but also frame the discourse in a specific ideological and institutional perspective.

Thus, metonymy contributes not only to linguistic economy but also to discourse framing and perspective shaping.

**Metonymy in English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak Languages.** In English, metonymy is highly productive in institutional and media discourse [7].

Examples include:

“The White House said...”

“The Crown approved the law”

“Downing Street announced...”

These expressions demonstrate PLACE FOR INSTITUTION or SYMBOL FOR AUTHORITY mappings.

English metonymy is strongly associated with political communication and journalistic style, where brevity and clarity are essential.

In Uzbek, metonymy is deeply connected with cultural identity and literary tradition. The poetry of Erkin Vohidov provides rich examples of metonymic usage.

For example, when classical authors such as “Navoiy” or “Bedil” are mentioned, they often represent not the individuals themselves but their literary heritage and works.

This reflects a strong AUTHOR FOR WORK metonymic pattern.

Another culturally significant example is the word *osh*. While literally meaning a dish, it also represents social gathering, hospitality, and national tradition. Thus, it functions as a cultural metonym [8].

Uzbek metonymy is therefore not only linguistic but also deeply symbolic and culturally embedded.

Karakalpak metonymy is strongly represented in poetic and oral traditions. In the works of Berdakh and other classical poets, names of literary figures such as Navoi, Fuzuli, and Makhtumkuli are used to represent their poetic legacy.

This is another clear example of AUTHOR FOR TEXT metonymy.

In Karakalpak discourse, metonymy often serves to preserve cultural memory and transmit collective identity. It is especially common in poetry, where indirect expression is valued.

#### 4. Discussion

The comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages reveals both universal and language-specific characteristics of metonymy. The comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Karakalpak languages also reveals differences in the degree of conventionalization of metonymic structures [9].

In English, metonymy is highly conventionalized and institutionalized, especially in media and political communication. Many metonymic expressions are lexicalized and function almost as fixed expressions. This indicates that metonymy in English is strongly integrated into standard discourse practices [10].

In contrast, Uzbek metonymy, particularly in literary texts, shows a higher degree of stylistic and expressive variability. Writers such as Erkin Vohidov actively use metonymy to create aesthetic effects, emotional resonance, and cultural symbolism. This suggests that metonymy in Uzbek discourse retains a stronger connection to poetic creativity [11].

Karakalpak metonymy demonstrates a close relationship with oral tradition and collective cultural memory. Metonymic expressions often rely on shared historical and literary knowledge, which makes them highly context-dependent. As a result, interpretation requires deeper cultural competence.

These differences show that metonymy is not only a universal cognitive mechanism but also a culturally shaped discourse strategy [12].

#### Universal features:

- reliance on conceptual contiguity;
- activation of cognitive frames;
- inferential interpretation;
- communicative efficiency [13].

**Language-specific features:**

English: institutional and media-oriented metonymy;

Uzbek: literary and cultural-symbolic metonymy;

Karakalpak: oral-traditional and poetic metonymy.

These differences demonstrate that while metonymy is cognitively universal, its pragmatic realization is shaped by cultural experience and discourse traditions [14].

**Scientific Novelty.** The scientific novelty of this research lies in:

comparative analysis of metonymy across three typologically different languages;

integration of cognitive and pragmatic approaches;

identification of culturally specific metonymic models in Uzbek and Karakalpak discourse;

demonstration of metonymy as a discourse-level mechanism, not only lexical phenomenon [15].

**5. Conclusion**

Metonymy is a fundamental cognitive-pragmatic mechanism that plays an essential role in human communication. It enables speakers to compress information, activate inferential processes, and express cultural meanings implicitly.

The comparative analysis shows that while metonymic cognition is universal, its realization varies across languages depending on cultural, literary, and communicative traditions.

Therefore, metonymy should be viewed not only as a linguistic trope but as an integral part of human cognition and discourse organization. In addition, the study shows that metonymy is not a marginal linguistic phenomenon but a central mechanism in human communication. It bridges the gap between linguistic expression and conceptual thought, allowing speakers to navigate between explicit and implicit meaning. The comparative evidence suggests that metonymy should be studied not only within linguistics but also within cognitive science, anthropology, and discourse studies.

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