



Cultural conceptualisations of emotion: Heart metaphors in Kyrgyz and English

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Abstract. The study of heart-related verbal metaphors expressing emotions in various languages remains a relevant area of modern cognitive linguistics. This is particularly important in the context of the need to understand different cultures and ensure effective intercultural communication. The aim of this study was to investigate and analyse heart-related verbal metaphors in the Kyrgyz and English languages. The methodological framework was based on Z. Derbisheva's cognitive-conceptual model and the Metaphor Identification Procedure. The British National Corpus and the Manas-UdS Kyrgyz Corpus were employed in the study. The findings revealed a considerable number of heart-related metaphors in both languages, indicating the significant role of the heart in the conceptualisation of emotions. It was established that in the Kyrgyz language, metaphors related to fear and emotional pain are particularly well developed. The metaphorical landscape demonstrated a strong influence of the nomadic tradition through images of nature, permeable containers and organic processes. In English, metaphorical models are characterised by a mechanistic and individualistic orientation, including metaphors of control and containment. It was also found that, although some metaphorical mappings are universal, their development differs considerably across languages. It was shown that metaphorical systems not only reflect cultural worldviews but also shape them. The results obtained may be applied by linguists, translators and specialists in intercultural communication in theoretical research, translation practice, and the development of intercultural competence programmes. Thus, this study contributes to the advancement of cognitive linguistics and intercultural studies

Keywords: heart-related verbal metaphors; cognitive linguistics; cross-linguistic comparison; somatic metaphor; conceptual metaphor theory; nomadic worldview

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Introduction

The study of emotional metaphors, as a branch of cognitive linguistics, has an importance with the rising role of cross-cultural communication as a central topic of the modern world. Heart-related verbal metaphors are seen to have a special position of prominence within the realm of emotional experience. The fact that the cognitive role of the heart is a universally shared phenomenon, whereas the metaphorical development surrounding it is seen to vary considerably from one culture to another. The study of emotional metaphors, especially within two languages like Kyrgyz, a Turkic language with a nomadic heritage, and English, a language with a heritage of industrialised, individualistic culture, promises a special opportunity to explore the universally shared bases of human emotional cognition, together with the culturally specific routes through which these bases are realised.

The study of emotional metaphors is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which views metaphors as fundamental cognitive tools for understanding abstract concepts through bodily experience. Its importance in cross-cultural research has grown significantly in recent years. X. Zhao *et al.* (2023), in their review of the past two decades, highlight the relevance of cultural variation in conceptual metaphor. While the cognitive basis of emotional metaphors is considered universal, their expression varies across cultures, making this area highly important for cognitive linguistics. In recent years, the concept of conceptual metaphor and its embodiment have once again become a major topic of research in cognitive linguistics. J. Pelkey (2023) provided a comprehensive review of how embodiment systematically shapes linguistic expressions across typologically diverse languages, arguing that bodily experience provides the grounding for abstract conceptualisation in ways that are both universal and culturally modulated. Building on this, P. Neumair *et al.* (2025) conducted a further study of how frames are semantically connected to the emotional experience that language conveys and concluded that cultural differences exist in how frames relate to emotional metaphor in language. This shows that the role of the body, culture, and language in emotions is not as simple as originally thought.

The cultural aspect of emotional metaphor has been researched from a number of theoretical stances. M. Ponsonnet (2022) proposed a model of emotional relativity, which demonstrated that cultural differences in emotional experience are not merely superficial but, on the contrary, point to fundamentally different ways of conceptualising emotions, which have a significant impact on emotional metaphor. Further, J. Zou *et al.* (2025) also demonstrated that cultural models have a significant impact on metaphor understanding across cultures, which leads to a clear conclusion that metaphor understanding is not merely a matter of linguistic understanding but also a product of cognitive frameworks. The above-mentioned research contributions highlight that cultural aspects need to be incorporated into any model of emotional metaphor.

Significant results have been obtained on the specific topic of heart metaphors. In his extended conceptual metaphor theory, Z. Kövecses (2020) systematised the evidence indicating that, despite the fact that heart metaphors of emotion are found to be widespread across languages of the world, there is a pattern of variation with respect to the elaborateness of heart metaphors of emotion. The importance of the heart as a metaphorical concept was also supported by the results of the study by N. Malik *et al.* (2022), who reviewed the methodological status quo of the field of corpus-based metaphor studies, with the authors of the paper highlighting the potential of large-scale linguistic data analysis for the identification of universal and culture-specific patterns of metaphor use with high precision. Research in this area on Turkic languages has prepared the ground for a unique yet less-developed focus of emotional metaphor research. For example, M. Baş (2023) examined the conceptual character of emotion term in Turkish, “heyecan”, and showed that the nature of unique cognitive frameworks on emotions in Turkish stand quite far from those detailed in Indo-European languages research so far; this result touches upon more general observations, suggesting that Turkic data should not be excluded from cross-linguistic considerations. Z. Derbisheva (2017) formulated a cognitive-conceptual approach to the analysis of Kyrgyz in particular and showed how cultural concepts are structured by means three layers: conceptual core, semantic planes, interpretational planes carrying culturally-embedded knowledge. This framework allows to use an appropriately methodological instrument for exploring the ways the Kyrgyz emotional metaphors encode nomadic and nature-embedded ontologies that lack an apparent English equivalent. Recent work by S. Almaghlouth & L. Alotaibi (2024) has also grounded the metaphor identification in methodological precision: the combination of the Metaphor Identification Procedure and quantitative lexical string analysis led to a significant improvement regarding systematicity, reliability in metaphor identification for large scale corpus studies – refinement that was applied within the analytical procedure employed for this research.

However, despite this growing body of research, a comparative analysis of verbal metaphors concerning heart-related emotions in Kyrgyz and English has not been conducted using both corpus linguistics and cognitive conceptual models. The present study aimed to fulfill this function by identifying universal and culturally specific patterns in both languages and describing how this is a function of each language’s worldview.

Materials and Methods

A mixed-methods approach was used in the study, which included corpus-based analyses and ethnographic observation. The data collection was conducted between 2022 and 2024. The primary sources of information included the following: the Manas-UdS Kyrgyz Corpus, a collection



of 1,019 texts in the Kyrgyz language comprising novels, novelettes, epics, minor epics, fairy tales, and media texts totalling 2 million words; the British National Corpus (BNC), a balanced collection of spoken and written English; modern Kyrgyz literature and periodical press, including newspapers such as *Kyrgyz Tuusu* and *Azattyk*, as well as online forums and social media posts, which provided insight into contemporary Kyrgyz language use; and folk songs, proverbs, and traditional narratives, which were consulted to account for the historical and cultural dimensions of emotional metaphor. N. Malik *et al.* (2022) demonstrated the increasing effectiveness of corpus tools in metaphor analysis, underlying their capacity to process large-scale linguistic data with high precision, which informed the methodological decisions of the present study.

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), proposed by the P. Group (2007), was modified according to the specific morphological characteristics of the Kyrgyz language and carried out in three steps: identifying the word as a lexical unit by checking the word for basic and contextual meanings; checking for metaphoricity by comparing contextual and basic meanings for metaphorical usage; and classifying the metaphor, as determined, according to source and target domains. It was showed that the using MIP in combination with quantitative string analysis of the lexicon greatly improves the accuracy and methodological precision of metaphor identification in large-scale corpus studies, which was done in the present research. Heart-related metaphors (жүрөк (jürök) “heart” in Kyrgyz and “heart” in English) were given extra attention because they are common in emotional language. The study looked at both simple lexical metaphors and more complicated

metaphorical phrases that used more than one element. L. Cameron’s (2003) discourse dynamics approach was applied in the analysis to examine how metaphors function in real communicative contexts, capturing both stable metaphorical patterns and their context-dependent variation. The analytical framework is additionally grounded in Z. Derbisheva’s (2017) cognitive-conceptual model for the analysis of Kyrgyz language concepts, which distinguishes the conceptual core, semantic layer, and interpretational layer, thereby encoding the cultural peculiarities embedded in the lexical structure of the language.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of heart-related verbal metaphors in the Kyrgyz and English corpora yielded a total of 847 metaphorical expressions: 423 in Kyrgyz and 424 in English. Heart-related metaphors constituted the largest category, accounting for 34% of Kyrgyz expressions and 28% of English expressions, which confirms the central role of the heart as a conceptual domain for emotional experience across both languages. The analysis shows that there are two broad dimensions: the universal metaphorical patterns that are rooted in the shared embodied experiences of humans, and the culture-specific elaborations that are shaped by the particular historical, environmental, and social conditions of the individual language cultures (Fig. 1). According to Z. Derbisheva (2017), concepts are organised internally based on field principles encompassing the conceptual core, semantic layer, interpretational layer, informational content, and figurative layer – a framework that proved particularly productive for the systematic analysis of Kyrgyz emotional metaphors presented below.

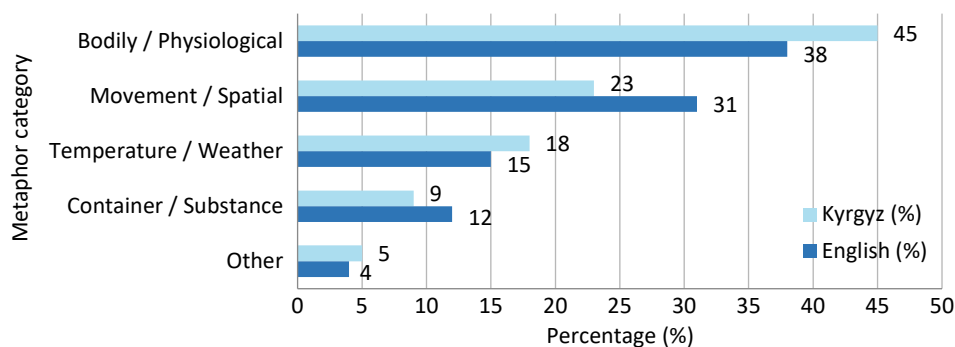


Figure 1. Distribution of metaphor types in Kyrgyz and English languages

Source: authors' own data

The metaphors were grouped into five main categories based on their conceptual origins: in the Kyrgyz language, there is a more marked preference for bodily/physiological metaphors (45% versus 38%), particularly those related to the heart, which indicates a more somatically based conceptualisation of emotions; In English, spatial and kinetic metaphors are used more frequently (31% vs. 23%), reflecting the cultural significance of directionality and progression in emotional experience; metaphors related to temperature and weather occur in both languages with comparable frequency (18% vs. 15%), indicating potentially

universal bodily experiences; in English, there is a slightly higher proportion of “capacity/substance” metaphors (12% vs. 9%), which may reflect different cultural orientations regarding the containment of emotions; in both languages, other types of metaphors are used minimally (5% vs. 4%), suggesting that emotional expression tends to cluster within specific conceptual domains. The study found that heart-related verbal metaphors of emotions were similar in both languages, which strongly supports the embodied cognition hypothesis and the universal foundations of conceptual metaphor theory. These patterns show that even

though Kyrgyz and English are very different in terms of culture and language, some basic ways of thinking about emotions through the heart seem to be universal.

Anger is heat/fire: Z. Kövecses (2020) identified this metaphorical pattern as one of the strongest cross-linguistic universals for how people think about emotions. Both languages use verbs that relate to heat and the heart to describe anger. This is based on the fact that when people are angry, their body temperature rises. In English, there are things like “heart burning with anger”, “heart ablaze with fury”, and “heart on fire”. In Kyrgyz, there are also strong heat images, like жүрөгү өрттөнүү (jürögü örttönüü) “lit. heart catching fire”, жүрөк күйүү (jürök küyüü) “lit. heart burning”, and жүрөгү жанып кетүү (jürögü janıp ketüü) “lit. heart burning up completely”. The cross-linguistic evidence presented here supports this claim.

Love is a physical force: another basic universal pattern is seeing love as a physical force acting on the heart. Z. Kövecses (2020) explains this pattern by nothing that love is something that “happens to” people rather than something they consciously choose. Verbs that suggest physical impact, penetration, or striking of the heart are used in both languages. English uses phrases like “heart struck by love”, “love piercing the heart”, “cupid’s arrow hitting the heart”, and “being hit by love”. Kyrgyz uses similar phrases like жүрөккө чок салуу (jürökkö chok saluu) “lit. to strike the heart with love”, жүрөк тартылуу (jürök tartıluu) “lit. heart being pulled”, and жүрөктү жаралоо (jüröktü jaraloo) “lit. wounding the heart with love”. This metaphorical pattern shows how love is something that happens to everyone and can happen suddenly and strongly. Because people think of the heart as the centre of their emotional lives, it is the natural target for this metaphorical force. The fact that Kyrgyz and English phrases are similar suggests that this way of thinking is based on basic physical experiences of impact and force that all people have, no matter what culture they are from.

Sadness is descent: the metaphor of sadness moving downward is a well-known way that people think about emotions. Both languages use metaphors for downward movement all the time. For example, in English, there are phrases like “heart sinking”, “heart dropping”, “heart falling”, and “feeling down-hearted”. In Kyrgyz, there are phrases like көңүл түшүү (köñül түşüü) “lit. spirit/heart falling”, көңүл чөгүү (köñül chögüü) “lit. spirit/heart sinking”, and other phrases that have to do with downward movement. This universal pattern is based on the connection between body language and emotions: when someone is sad, their body language usually shows it by slumping, lowering their head, and losing energy. When someone is happy, their body language usually shows it by standing up straight and moving around energetically. The heart, which is the metaphorical centre of emotional experience, naturally fits into this vertical schema. When the heart moves down, it means that the person is getting sadder. The fact that this pattern appears consistently in genetically unrelated languages like Kyrgyz and English provides strong evidence for the embodied foundations

of emotional metaphor. The fact that this pattern appears consistently in genetically unrelated languages like Kyrgyz and English provides strong evidence for the embodied foundations of emotional metaphor.

Fear is trembling and agitation: the use of metaphors of heart instability, trembling, and agitation to describe fear reflects how everyone reacts to fear stimuli in the same way. Both languages use metaphors of the heart moving and being unstable to talk about fear. English expressions include “heart trembling”, “heart quaking”, “heart fluttering”, “heart racing”, and “heart pounding” correspond to Kyrgyz expressions such as жүрөк калтыроо (jürök kaltıroo) “lit. heart trembling”, жүрөк титирөө (jürök titiroo) “lit. heart shivering”, жүрөк дүкүлдөө (jürök düküldöö) “lit. heart palpitating”, and жүрөк лак-лак этүү (jürök lak-lak etüü) “lit. heart doing lak-lak (rapid beating)”. Interpreting these bodily feelings as heart movement or agitation provides a natural basis for expressing fear experiences. Even though Kyrgyz and English are from different cultures and have different ways of speaking, they are very similar in this area. This shows how powerful embodied experience is in metaphorical thinking. These universal patterns provide strong support for several important theoretical claims in cognitive linguistics. First, they confirm the embodied cognition hypothesis, according to which abstract concepts are grounded in bodily experience. The cross-linguistic consistency of heart-related metaphors suggests that certain aspects of emotional conceptualisation are constrained by shared human physiology, regardless of cultural or linguistic differences.

Second, as Z. Kövecses (2020) argued, emotional metaphors display significant cultural variation at the level of linguistic expression, yet their underlying conceptual structures frequently reflect experiences that are universal and embodied. The heart stands out as a particularly important domain for emotional metaphorisation across cultures, which is consistent with its biological role in the body’s response to emotional stimuli. Finally, these universal patterns demonstrate that Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides a productive framework for identifying cross-linguistic regularities in metaphorical thinking. The consistent similarities in heart-related emotional metaphors across Kyrgyz and English – languages from very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds – constitute strong evidence that conceptual metaphors represent fundamental building blocks of human thought. Both languages demonstrate a rich inventory of heart metaphors, reflecting the heart’s status as a primary conceptual domain for emotional experience across cultures. However, a closer examination of linguistic usage reveals substantial cultural differences in how emotions are conceptualised, experienced, and expressed. The following analysis demonstrates that while both languages locate emotional experience in the heart, their metaphorical elaborations reflect fundamentally different cultural assumptions about the nature of emotions, their intensity, and the ways in which they are managed and overcome. Metaphors for fear and anxiety. Kyrgyz and English heart metaphors for



fear and anxiety differ considerably in their richness and internal differentiation (Tables 1, 2). Kyrgyz displays an

exceptionally rich and nuanced vocabulary for distinguishing different levels and types of fear experience.

Table 1. Kyrgyz metaphors expressing fear and anxiety

Kyrgyz metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
жүрөгү түшүү (jürögü tüşüü)	heart falling/sinking	being afraid or worried in general
жүрөгү калтыроо (jürögü kaltıroo)	heart trembling	being nervous or anxious
жүрөгү титирөө (jürögü titiroo)	heart shivering	experiencing intense fear or cold fear
жүрөгү дүкүлдөө (jürögü düküldöo)	heart palpitating	heart beating rapidly from fear
жүрөгү лакылдоо (jürögü lakıldoo)	heart rattling	heart beating rapidly from fear
жүрөгү дикилдөө (jürögü dikildöo)	heart drumming	heart beating rapidly from fear
жүрөгү атып кетүү (jürögü atıp ketüü)	heart jumping/leaping	being scared all of a sudden
жүрөгү оозуна тыгылуу (jürögü oozuna tıgıluu)	heart getting stuck in mouth	experiencing extreme fear
жүрөгү алкымына тыгылуу (jürögü alkımına tıgıluu)	heart getting stuck in throat	experiencing extreme fear
жүрөгү жарылуу (jürögü jarıluu)	heart exploding	being overwhelmed by fear or shock
жүрөгү шуу дей түшүү (jürögü şuu dey tüşüü)	heart falling with a whoosh	experiencing a sudden drop in mood/spirits
жүрөгүм кабынан чыгуу (jürögüm kabınan chıguu)	heart coming out of its shell/case	heart jumping out of chest from intense emotion

Source: authors' own data

Table 2. English metaphors expressing fear and anxiety

English metaphorical expression	Figurative meaning
have one's heart in one's mouth	to be very scared or worried
not have the heart	to not have the courage because you are scared or sorry
heart skipping a beat	sudden fear or excitement
heart pounding	very high levels of fear or anxiety
heart racing	being nervous or excited

Source: authors' own data

The Kyrgyz expressions show a high level of specificity and variety, suggesting that Kyrgyz culture operates with a more finely differentiated taxonomy of fear. These metaphors frequently draw on dramatic physical imagery – a heart exploding, becoming lodged in the throat, or escaping its protective casing, which renders fear more visceral and corporeal than the corresponding English expressions. The metaphorical pattern of the heart leaving its natural place during extreme fear, as in жүрөгү алкымына тыгылуу (jürögü alkımına tıgıluu) “lit. heart getting stuck in throat”, reflects the cultural assumption that emotional equilibrium corresponds to the heart occupying its proper anatomical position, and that fear disrupts this natural order. This pattern of spatial displacement appears to be culturally specific to Kyrgyz and illustrates how different

cultures interpret shared embodied experiences of fear, as noted by Z. Kövecses (2020) in his discussion of cultural variation in metaphorical elaboration.

The onomatopoeic dimension of жүрөгү шуу дей түшүү (jürögü şuu dey tüşüü) “lit. heart falling with a whoosh” demonstrates how Kyrgyz emotional metaphors integrate visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic experience into a single metaphorical expression. The greater multimodal richness of Kyrgyz fear metaphors suggests a more comprehensive and sensorially grounded conceptualisation of fear compared to the predominantly visual and kinaesthetic metaphors characteristic of English. Excitement and good feelings. The use of metaphors for positive emotions shows that the two languages think about emotional elevation and warmth in both the same and different ways (Tables 3, 4).

Table 3. Kyrgyz metaphors expressing excitement and good feelings

Kyrgyz metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
жүрөгү алып учуу (jürögü alıp uchuu)	heart taking flight	feeling happy or excited
жүрөк толкуу (jürök tolkuu)	heart being stirred/agitated	excitement or anticipation
жүрөгү ыргалуу (jürögü ırgaluu)	heart swinging/oscillating	emotional excitement
жүрөгү жылуу (jürögü jıluu)	heart warming	to develop warm feelings or to be touched
жүрөгү ийүү (jürögü iyüü)	heart melting	to develop warm feelings or to be touched
жүрөгү жибүү (jürögü jibüü)	heart softening	to develop warm feelings or to be touched
жүрөгү элжирөө (jürögü eljiröo)	heart becoming tender	to develop warm feelings or to be touched

Source: authors' own data

Table 4. English metaphors expressing excitement and good feelings

English metaphorical expression	Figurative meaning
heart soaring	feeling very happy
heart leaping	sudden joy or excitement
heart warming	growing fond of someone
heart melting	being very moved

Source: authors' own data

The universal metaphorical pattern “happiness is up” is realised through upward movement metaphors in both languages. Each language elaborates this pattern in culturally distinctive ways. The Kyrgyz expression жүрөгү алып учуу (jürögü alıp uchuu) “lit. heart taking flight” implies autonomous, purposeful movement of the heart, whereas the English expression “heart soaring” suggests a more passive upward trajectory. This difference may reflect divergent cultural orientations toward emotional agency and control. The Kyrgyz expression жүрөгү ыргалуу (jürögü ırgaluu) “lit. heart swinging/oscillating” introduces a rhythmic quality to emotional excitement that has no direct English equivalent. This metaphor conceptualises positive emotion as harmonious, self-contained

movement of the heart. It may reflect a cultural understanding of emotional wellbeing as balance and rhythm rather than the linear progression characteristic of Western emotional frameworks.

The lexical density of Kyrgyz warmth and tenderness expressions – жылуу (jıluu) “warming”, ийүү (iyüü) “melting”, жибүү (jibüü) “softening”, элжирөө (eljiröö) “becoming tender” – points to a highly developed semantic field in this emotional domain, which suggests that fine gradations of tenderness carry significant cultural weight in Kyrgyz and require precise linguistic differentiation. Concern and worry. The metaphorical conceptualisation of worry and unease reveals fundamentally different cultural models of anxiety in two languages (Tables 5, 6).

Table 5. Kyrgyz metaphors expressing concern and worry

Kyrgyz metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
жүрөк опкоолжуу (jürök opkoolzhuu)	heart getting tangled or confused	feeling bad
жүрөгүн өйүйт (jürögün öyüyit)	heart churning	worry or anxiety
жүрөк болкулдоо (jürök bolkuldoo)	heart bubbling	feeling uneasy or restless
жүрөк солкулдоо (jürök solkuldoo)	heart gurgling	feeling uneasy or restless
жүрөк оодарылуу (jürök oodarıluu)	heart turning over	worry or concern
жүрөк аңтарылуу (jürök aңtarıluu)	heart being disturbed	worry or concern

Source: authors' own data

Table 6. English metaphors expressing concern and worry

English metaphorical expression	Figurative meaning
heart heavy	feeling weighed down by worry
heart troubled	feeling anxious
heart aching	emotional pain or worry

Source: authors' own data

Kyrgyz emphasises worry as an internal movement and stirring, using intricate mechanical and liquid-related images. In contrast, English uses static images of weight and stirring. In the phrase жүрөк опкоолжуу (jürök opkoolzhuu) “lit. heart getting tangled”, worry is conceptualised as a state in which the heart’s regular functioning becomes knotted and blocked and must be untangled in order to regain equilibrium. In the liquid-related images жүрөк болкулдоо (jürök bolkuldoo) “lit. heart bubbling” and жүрөк солкулдоо (jürök solkuldoo) “lit. heart gurgling”, worry is conceptualised as an image of boiling liquid in motion within the body. M. Aksan (2006b) found

a similar pattern in Turkish and related it to the nomadic culture in which observation of nature, such as the motion of boiling water, is conceptualised as a source of understanding internal emotional states. In contrast, English “heart heavy” and “heart troubled” conceptualise worry as a static state of weight and stirring. These cultural variations imply that Kyrgyz people conceptualise emotions as a process that must be managed, while English people conceptualise them as a state that must be endured. Sadness and emotional pain. The metaphorical treatment of sadness and emotional pain reveals a particularly striking asymmetry between the two languages (Tables 7, 8).



Table 7. Kyrgyz metaphors expressing sadness and emotional pain

Kyrgyz metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
жүрөккө тийүү (jürökö tiyüü)	touching the heart	having an emotional effect
жүрөгүнө так калтыруу (jürögünö tak kaltruu)	leaving a mark on the heart	making someone feel bad for a long time
жүрөгү үшүү (jürögü üšüü)	heart getting cold	to get disappointed or lose faith
жүрөгүн өлтүрүү (jürögün öltürüü)	killing someone's heart	making someone feel fear caused by a continuous physical and moral suppression
жүрөгүнүн үшүн алуу (jürögünün üšün aluu)	taking the heart's sense	to scare someone by torturing him/her
жүрөгүн сүрүп алуу (jürögün sürüp aluu)	pulling/dragging the heart	making someone feel bad for a long time
жүрөгүн эзүү (jürögün ezüü)	crushing the heart	making someone sad
жүрөктү жаралоо (jürökü jaraloo)	wounding the heart	causing emotional pain
жүрөгү тилинүү (jürögü tilinüü)	heart being torn	feeling heartbroken
жүрөгү каноо (jürögü kanoo)	heart bleeding	feeling very sad
жүрөк сыздоо (jürök sizdoo)	heart aching	emotional pain

Source: authors' own data

Table 8. English metaphors expressing sadness and emotional pain

English metaphorical expression	Figurative meaning
break someone's heart	make somebody very sad or disappointed
heart aching	emotional pain
heartbreaking	overwhelming grief or distress
heart sinking	feeling of losing hope
eat one's heart out	feel bitter anguish, grief, worry, jealousy, or another strong negative emotion

Source: authors' own data

Kyrgyz draws on an exceptionally wide range of source domains to express emotional pain, including physical violence – өлтүрүү (öltürüü) “killing”, эзүү (ezüü) “crushing”, жаралоо (jaraloo) “wounding”; temperature change – үшүү (üşüü) “getting cold”; physical manipulation – сүрүп алуу (sürüp aluu) “pulling/dragging”, тилинүү (tilinüü) “being torn”; and medical conditions – каноо (kanoo) “bleeding”, сыздоо (sizdoo) “aching”. The progressive intensification from surface impact – жүрөккө тийүү (jürökö tiyüü) “touching the heart” – through lasting marking – так калтыруу (tak kaltruu) “leaving a mark” – to irreversible damage – өлтүрүү (öltürüü) “killing” – suggests that Kyrgyz culture maintains a more elaborated and graduated understanding of psychological harm than is reflected in

English emotional vocabulary. So, the metaphorical sense provides evidence that certain cultures place particular value on recognising the lasting nature of emotional injury and the importance of understanding emotional scars, as noted by Z. Kövecses (2020). The temperature metaphor жүрөгү үшүү (jürögü üšüü) “lit. heart getting cold” functions as a counterexample to the universal “anger is heat” pattern, indicates in Kyrgyz culture emotional withdrawal and abandonment, which are construed as the absence of fundamental warmth – a warmth that is culturally associated with life, social belonging, and emotional availability. Courage and emotional healing. The final emotional domain reveals divergent cultural models of bravery and emotional recovery (Tables 9, 10).

Table 9. Kyrgyz metaphors expressing courage and emotional healing

Kyrgyz metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Figurative meaning
жүрөгү кабына келүү (jürögü kabına kelüü)	heart returning to its shell/case	to calm down and get composure back
жүрөгү тынчтануу (jürögü tıchtanu)	heart becoming peaceful	getting emotionally calm
жүрөгү толоо (jürögü toloo)	heart being full/complete	being brave and strong
жүрөгү майлуу (jürögü mayлуу)	heart being oily/rich	being brave and giving
жүрөгү эки (jürögü eki)	heart being doubled	being brave and kind

Source: authors' own data

Table 10. English metaphors expressing courage and emotional healing

English metaphorical expression	Figurative meaning
take heart	to get your courage back
have a heart	to be kind
have one's heart in the right place	to feel calm and relaxed
set one's heart at rest	to stop worrying, to stay calm

Source: authors' own data

Kyrgyz metaphors for courage and recovery draw on images of fullness, richness, and return to a natural state, reflecting cultural values of wholeness and abundance. The expression жүрөгү кабына келүү (jürögü kabına kelüü) “lit. heart returning to its shell/case” constructs emotional equilibrium as the heart occupying its proper protective position – a direct counterpart to the fear metaphors in which the heart is displaced from that position. The quality metaphors жүрөгү майлуу (jürögü mayлуу) “lit. heart being oily/rich” and жүрөгү толоо (jürögü toloo) “lit. heart being full/complete” conceptualise courage as abundance rather than absence, framing emotional strength as a positive resource. This contrasts with English expressions that emphasise volitional action – “take heart” – or correct orientation – “heart in the right place” – reflecting a more agency-centred cultural model of emotional resilience.

This detailed analysis demonstrates that both languages employ the heart as a primary metaphorical domain for emotion, but do so in ways that are deeply shaped by distinct cultural values. Kyrgyz displays greater lexical density and more elaborated metaphorical creativity. It can be noticed particularly in the domains of fear and emotional pain, which may indicate that these emotional experiences carry greater cultural salience and require finer linguistic differentiation in Kyrgyz culture. The predominance of dynamic, movement-based metaphors in Kyrgyz contrasts with the more static, state-based orientation of English emotional metaphors, reflecting a broader cultural difference in whether emotions are construed as processes or conditions, as discussed by Z. Kövecses (2020). However, it should be noted that despite these universal patterns, there are significant culture-specific patterns that reflect deeper cultural values and worldviews. Z. Kövecses has proposed that although the patterns of conceptual metaphors are universally grounded, the culture-specific patterns indicate that different cultures perceive and organise emotional experience in fundamentally different ways.

Kyrgyz-specific patterns. The metaphorical system of the Kyrgyz people has several unique patterns, which are rooted in their nomadic way of life and their close relationship with nature, as seen in the culture of Central Asia. The Kyrgyz people show a clear preference for using natural phenomena as source domains for heart-related emotional experience. This pattern is rooted in the long history of the nomadic culture’s relationship with nature. J. Gibbs (2005) has shown that the culture-environment engagement has a significant effect on the cognitive and linguistic systems of nomadic and pastoral cultures. M. Aksan (2006a) has noted that this pattern is seen in other Turkic languages as well, in which natural metaphors are used as source domains for emotional experience. The Kyrgyz language shows a distinct preference for natural phenomena as source domains for heart-related emotional metaphors. This preference originates in the long history of interaction between nomadic culture and the natural environment. T. Ingold (2021) demonstrated how environmental engagement shapes cognitive and linguistic systems in cultures with close ties to nature, while

J. Gibbs (2005) showed that this phenomenon extends to other Turkic-speaking communities, where natural metaphors similarly structure emotional expressions.

For instance, the expression жүрөгү өрттөнүү (jürögü örttönüü) “lit. heart catching fire” conveys passionate anger, drawing on the image of spontaneous combustion or wildfire – that is, anger that flares up suddenly and without warning. This metaphorical pattern, grounded in meteorological imagery, reflects what anthropologists have described as environmental embeddedness: the tendency of cultural groups living close to nature to develop conceptual systems that mirror environmental processes. The consistent linking of emotional states to weather and natural phenomena suggests that Kyrgyz culture perceives emotions as natural forces – ones that change rapidly, are triggered by external causes, and affect the individual as a whole.

Kyrgyz metaphors frequently conceptualise the heart as a permeable container that can be filled, emptied, or transformed by external forces. Unlike Western container metaphors, which tend to emphasise fixed boundaries, Kyrgyz container metaphors suggest a fluid and interactive relationship between inner emotional states and the outside world. Expressions such as сагынычка толуу (saginichka toлуу) “lit. fill with longing” and жүрөктөн арман төгүлүп (jüröktön arman tögölüp) “lit. sorrow is pouring out of the heart” illustrate this permeability. This pattern reflects collectivistic cultural values in which individual emotional experience is understood as inseparable from the social and natural environment. Container metaphors in Kyrgyz thus suggest that emotional wellbeing depends on proper circulation and exchange rather than on containment and protection – a conceptual orientation consistent with the nomadic valorisation of movement, flow, and adaptive response.

Many Kyrgyz expressions draw on metaphors of biological growth, decay, and organic processes. The phrase жүрөгү элжирөө (jürögü eljiröö) “lit. heart becoming tender” derives from the biological process of tissue softening, suggesting that certain emotional experiences render the heart more open and responsive – a change understood as natural rather than deliberate. The phrase жүрөгү каноо (jürögü kanoo) “lit. heart bleeding” draws on the imagery of physical injury and blood loss to express profound sadness, implying that emotional pain is as real and lasting as physical harm, and that recovery may be slow and may leave permanent traces. Z. Derbisheva (2017) observed a related tendency in Kyrgyz, noting that speakers apply body-part metaphors to the natural landscape – using төш (töş) “chest” for foothills, бел (bel) “waist” for mountain passes, and алкым (alkım) “throat” for the junctions between mountains and valleys – which points to a broader cognitive pattern of perceiving the natural world through the lens of the human body. This organic mode of conceptualisation stands in clear contrast to the mechanistic metaphors prevalent in English, which foreground control, efficiency, and predictable operation.

English specific metaphors. English heart metaphors reflect the cultural values and history of industrialised,



individualistic societies, in which technological advancement and an emphasis on personal control have shaped the metaphorical conceptualisation of emotion. English draws extensively on machine and technology analogies when referring to the heart. Expressions such as heart stopping and heart pumping conceptualise the heart as a mechanism operating according to fixed principles, foregrounding regularity, efficiency, and technical function rather than organic vitality. The expression heart pumping derives from the vocabulary of mechanical engineering and reflects the influence of technology and medicine on everyday emotional language. This mechanistic perspective implies that emotions can be understood through cause and effect, corrected through intervention, and managed as part of a structured process. E. Semino (2008) demonstrated that such technological framings of emotion are characteristic of cultures in which scientific rationality and systemic control are central values. The expression heart stopping frames extreme emotional impact as mechanical failure – a system breakdown requiring technical repair, which reflects a deeper cultural assumption that emotional health resembles proper mechanical function and that emotional difficulties, like technical faults, require expert diagnosis rather than natural recovery.

English also favours heart metaphors that encode the cultural values of progress and upward mobility. Expressions such as heart rising and heart falling organise emotional experience along a vertical spatial axis, mapping positive states onto upward movement and negative states onto downward movement. This spatial logic mirrors broader social and economic metaphors in English-speaking cultures, where moving up signifies success and falling down signifies failure. A. Barcelona (2003) argued that such cross-domain mappings reveal how personal and collective systems of value develop in parallel, with emotional and social hierarchies structured by the same underlying conceptual framework. Unlike Kyrgyz metaphors, which are organised around cycles and natural processes, English spatial metaphors imply that emotions have destinations and that emotional wellbeing consists in moving in the right direction rather than in maintaining balance.

The expressions steel one's heart and harden one's heart reflect the individualistic cultural value placed on self-reliance, emotional regulation, and personal responsibility. Both metaphors define emotional strength as the capacity to resist external influence – to set boundaries, maintain control, and act independently. Steel one's heart draws on metalworking imagery and implies that emotional resilience must be deliberately constructed through effort and practice, framing emotional vulnerability as a correctable weakness. Harden one's heart similarly suggests that emotional safety is achieved by intentionally reducing sensitivity, a framing that aligns with cultural preferences for independence and self-management over emotional openness and social interdependence.

These individualistic and mechanistic patterns contrast sharply with the fluid, environmentally embedded

metaphors characteristic of Kyrgyz. As F. Sharifian (2011) demonstrated, emotional expressions that appear structurally similar across languages may carry fundamentally different cultural meanings and behavioural expectations. A. Barcelona (2003) likewise emphasised that while universal metaphorical patterns arise from shared human experience, their cultural elaborations reflect distinct values, worldviews, and historical trajectories. The nomadic, nature-oriented patterns of Kyrgyz and the individualistic, technologically influenced patterns of English thus not only reflect but actively reinforce different cultural ways of being in the world – a distinction with direct implications for translation, cross-cultural communication, and intercultural psychological practice.

Analysis of frequency and distribution of verbal metaphors. Statistical analysis of the corpus data revealed clear patterns in the frequency and distribution of different metaphor types across the two languages. A. Stefanowitsch & S. Gries (2007) demonstrated that corpus-based quantitative methods provide reliable empirical support for claims about cultural differences in metaphorical conceptualisation, and the present findings are consistent with that methodological position. The corpora contained 847 metaphorical expressions in total: 423 in Kyrgyz and 424 in English. Heat metaphors for anger: heat-based heart metaphors for anger account for 31% of Kyrgyz heart expressions and 23% of English heart expressions. This eight-point difference indicates that Kyrgyz speakers are considerably more inclined to conceptualise heart-based anger through thermal imagery, a pattern that may be attributed to the traditional nomadic lifestyle in which the management of fire was of central practical and cultural importance. Kyrgyz expressions such as жүрөгү өрттөнүү (jürögü örttönüü) “lit. heart catching fire” draw on sudden, dramatic fire imagery, whereas English heat metaphors tend to emphasise gradual warming. This distinction suggests that the two cultures hold different assumptions about how anger develops and manifests.

Metaphors for love: love-related heart expressions account for 35% of English heart metaphors and 28% of Kyrgyz heart metaphors. The higher relative frequency of movement metaphors in English suggests that kinaesthetic and spatial conceptualisations of love carry greater cultural weight in English emotional language. English movement metaphors for love function according to two related cultural patterns: an achievement orientation, in which love is framed through progress metaphors such as “relationship going somewhere” and force metaphors such as “swept off feet”, reflecting the cultural alignment of romance with goal-directed achievement; and an individual agency orientation, in which expressions such as “pursuing someone” foreground personal control and deliberate choice in romantic relationships. Kyrgyz, by contrast, favours state-based expressions such as жүрөгү жылуу (jürögü jilu) “lit. heartwarming”, which focus on internal transformation rather than directed movement, suggesting that Kyrgyz speakers conceptualise love as a natural process rather than a goal-oriented pursuit.

Heart metaphor frequency: cultural importance. Heart-based metaphors account for 34% of emotional expressions in Kyrgyz and 28% in English. The higher frequency in Kyrgyz can be attributed to two interrelated cultural factors. First, Kyrgyz emotional conceptualisation appears to be more centrally organised around the heart as a structuring principle, whereas English distributes emotional metaphorisation across a broader range of source domains; second, the greater cultural centrality of heart-based conceptualisation in Kyrgyz may reflect deeply held cultural values of emotional authenticity and interpersonal connectedness. Emotional domain hierarchies: the frequency data reveal that the two languages assign different priorities to emotional domains. In Kyrgyz, the domains are ordered as follows in terms of metaphorical elaboration: fear and anxiety, emotional pain, love, anger, and recovery. In English, the order is: love and romance, general emotions, fear, anger, and recovery. This contrast suggests that Kyrgyz culture places particular emphasis on the precise

differentiation of negative emotional states, while English-speaking culture invests greater linguistic elaboration in the expression of positive and romantic emotions.

The corpus frequency data provide empirical support for several theoretical claims. As Z. Kövecses (2020) argued, basic metaphorical mappings such as “anger is heat” and “love is journey” appear across many languages, yet their frequency and degree of elaboration vary considerably, suggesting that universals operate at the level of basic conceptual structure while cultural differences manifest in intensity and detail. The frequency differences in heart metaphors further demonstrate that even deeply embodied conceptualisations are subject to cultural filtering – a finding that supports the view that cultural factors can modulate patterns that might otherwise appear to be universal. These results confirm the value of quantitative corpus methods for providing rigorous empirical grounding for claims about cross-cultural metaphorical variation (Fig. 2).

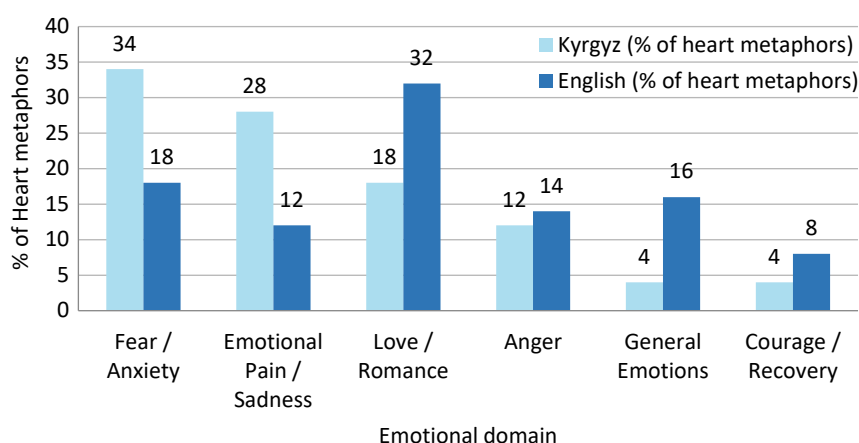


Figure 2. Cross-cultural frequency analysis

Source: authors' own data

The frequency analysis shows that even though basic metaphorical correspondences may be the same in all languages, their frequency, elaboration, and cultural importance vary a lot. The fact that Kyrgyz uses more heart metaphors for anger and heart metaphors in general, while English uses more movement metaphors for love, shows that different cultures organise their emotions in different ways. The above patterns show how cultural values, environment adaptations, and conceptual priorities may influence the way emotions are understood and expressed in language.

Conclusions

A study of verbal metaphors related to the heart in Kyrgyz and English shows how shared cognitive structures and specific cultural details shape emotional thinking. Both languages use the heart as a key metaphor for emotions, suggesting a common base for how humans understand feelings. At the same time, the analysis reveals substantial differences in the linguistic and cultural realisation of these metaphors. These findings support the idea that

conceptual metaphor theory's claims about universal patterns should also take into account cultural variations. Basic metaphorical patterns exist in many languages, but their frequency and details show deeper cultural values. Authors' recent research showed that cultural models deeply influence how metaphors are understood across languages. It is suggesting that metaphor comprehension involves not only linguistic knowledge but also culturally embedded cognitive frameworks between language and thought. Kyrgyz displays a more heart-centred, process-focused approach to emotions, particularly in describing internal emotional states and natural processes, while English uses more individualistic and control-focused metaphors, which emphasise personal action and a mechanical view of emotional experience.

Also, these different patterns suggest that metaphorical systems both reflect and strengthen the ways people in different cultures live their lives. Specifically, Kyrgyz metaphors show a humbly nomadic cultural background that is influenced by the environment. This is very different from English, which is influenced by technology and is



more individualistic. This means that emotional language is not only a way to express yourself, but also a way to pass on and strengthen cultural values. These cultural insights are important, but the results also help understand the link between language, cognition, and culture by showing that even though people may have similar physical experiences, the ways they think about and talk about them are very different in different cultures. Such differences shape not only how emotional states are expressed but also how people understand relationships, interpersonal responsibility, and the fundamental structure of emotional life. As cross-cultural contact intensifies, awareness of these differences becomes increasingly important for effective communication, translation, and psychological practice across cultural boundaries. Future research on this field will help to explore heart metaphors in other Turkic languages to form broader patterns across the

language family. Additionally, empirical studies investigating how metaphorical conceptualisations influence emotional processing and cross-cultural communication would provide important additions into the cognitive reality of these linguistic field. Comparative studies with non-related language families would further refine the boundary between universal and culture-specific aspects of emotional metaphorisation.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Эмоцияларды маданий концептуалдаштыруу: кыргыз жана англис тилдериндеги жүрөк метафоралары

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Аннотация. Ар кандай тилдердеги эмоцияларды билдирген жүрөккө байланыштуу вербалдык метафораларды изилдөө заманбап когнитивдик лингвистиканын актуалдуу багыттарынын бири бойдон калууда. Бул өзгөчө ар түрдүү маданияттарды түшүнүү жана натыйжалуу маданият аралык коммуникацияны камсыз кылуу зарылдыгы менен байланыштуу. Бул изилдөөнүн максаты кыргыз жана англис тилдериндеги жүрөккө байланыштуу вербалдык метафораларды изилдөө жана талдоо болуп саналат. Методологиялык негиз катары 3. Дербишеванын когнитивдик-концептуалдык модели жана метафораларды аныктоо процедурасы колдонулду. Изилдөөдө Британ улуттук корпусу жана Manas-UdS кыргыз корпусу пайдаланылды. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыктары эки тилде тең жүрөккө байланыштуу метафоралардын олуттуу саны бар экенин көрсөтүп, эмоцияларды концептуалдаштырууда жүрөктүн маанилүү ролун тастыктады. Кыргыз тилинде коркуу жана эмоционалдык ооруну чагылдырган метафоралар өзгөчө өнүккөнү аныкталды. Метафоралык система табиятка байланышкан образдар, өткөрүмдүү контейнерлер жана органикалык процесстер аркылуу көчмөн салттын күчтүү таасирин көрсөттү. Англис тилинде метафоралык моделдер механисттик жана индивидуалисттик мүнөзгө ээ болуп, көзөмөл жана чектөө метафораларын камтыйт. Ошондой эле айрым метафоралык шайкештиктер универсалдуу болгону менен, алардын өнүгүшү ар башка тилдерде олуттуу айырмаланары аныкталды. Метафоралык системалар маданий дүйнө таанымды гана чагылдырбастан, аны калыптандырышы көрсөтүлдү. Алынган жыйынтыктар лингвисттер, котормочулар жана маданият аралык коммуникация адистери тарабынан теориялык изилдөөлөрдө, котормо практикасында жана маданият аралык компетенттүүлүктү өнүктүрүү программаларын түзүүдө колдонулушу мүмкүн. Муну менен бул изилдөө когнитивдик лингвистика менен маданият аралык изилдөөлөрдүн өнүгүшүнө салым кошот.

Негизги сөздөр: жүрөккө байланыштуу вербалдык метафоралар; когнитивдик лингвистика; тил аралык салыштыруу; соматикалык метафора; концептуалдык метафора теориясы; көчмөн дүйнө тааным



Культурные концептуализации эмоций: метафоры сердца в кыргызском и английском языках

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Аннотация. Исследование вербальных метафор, связанных с сердцем и выражающих эмоции в различных языках, остается актуальным направлением современной когнитивной лингвистики. Это особенно важно в условиях необходимости понимания различных культур и эффективной межкультурной коммуникации. Целью данной работы являлось исследование и анализ вербальных метафор, связанных с сердцем, в кыргызском и английском языках. В качестве методологической основы были использованы когнитивно-концептуальная модель З. Дербишевой и процедура идентификации метафор. В исследовании применялись Британский национальный корпус и Кыргызский корпус Manas-UdS. В ходе исследования было выявлено значительное количество метафор, связанных с сердцем, в обоих языках, что свидетельствует о важной роли сердца в концептуализации эмоций. Установлено, что в кыргызском языке особенно развиты метафоры, связанные со страхом и эмоциональной болью. Метафорическая картина демонстрировала сильное влияние кочевой традиции через образы природы, проницаемых контейнеров и органических процессов. В английском языке метафорические модели характеризуются механистичностью и индивидуалистической направленностью, включая метафоры контроля и сдерживания. Также установлено, что, хотя некоторые метафорические соответствия являются универсальными, их развитие существенно различается в разных языках. Показано, что метафорические системы не только отражают культурную картину мира, но и формируют ее. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы лингвистами, переводчиками и специалистами в области межкультурной коммуникации в теоретических исследованиях, переводческой практике и разработке программ формирования межкультурной компетентности. Тем самым данное исследование вносит вклад в развитие когнитивной лингвистики и межкультурных исследований

Ключевые слова: вербальные метафоры, связанные с сердцем; когнитивная лингвистика; межъязыковое сопоставление; соматическая метафора; теория концептуальной метафоры; кочевая картина мира