

FROM MEASURE TO MEANING: CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR AND FRAME-BASED INTERPRETATION OF MEASUREMENT-RELATED EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH-UZBEK TRANSLATION

Abstract. Measurement is usually associated with precision, numerical reference, and the objective description of physical properties. In natural language, however, expressions originating in the domain of measurement frequently move beyond their literal metric function and become instruments for conceptualizing abstract experience. This paper examines this transition from physical measure to cognitive meaning in English and Uzbek from the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Frame Semantics, with particular attention to its implications for translation. The study addresses expressions such as within an inch of failure, miles away from reality, a mountain of work, Uzbek bir qadam oldinda 'one step ahead', bir umr kutdim 'I waited a lifetime', and zarracha shubha yo'q 'there is not the slightest doubt'. A qualitative contrastive method is applied to identify the underlying source-target mappings, the knowledge structures activated by the expressions, and the translation decisions required when comparable metaphorical patterns are differently lexicalized in the two languages. The analysis demonstrates that measurement-related vocabulary functions as a cognitive scaling device for conceptualizing proximity, progress, duration, intensity, certainty, and evaluation. At the same time, Conceptual Metaphor Theory alone does not fully explain why a particular measurement expression is interpreted in a particular way in discourse. The interpretation also depends on culturally and situationally activated frames involving thresholds, goals, distances, expectations, and evaluative norms. The paper therefore proposes a two-stage model in which conceptual metaphor identifies the direction of cross-domain mapping, while frame-semantic analysis reconstructs the knowledge structure that makes the expression contextually meaningful. From a translation perspective, the findings suggest that metaphorical measurement expressions should not normally be treated as metrological problems. Once a unit loses its primary referential function, formal numerical conversion may become irrelevant or even distort the communicative effect. The translator's task is instead to preserve the cognitive-pragmatic value of the scale encoded by the source expression. The paper argues that cognitive-pragmatic equivalence, rather than formal measurement equivalence, should constitute the principal criterion for translating metaphorically motivated expressions of measure.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, measurement-related expressions, cognitive linguistics, Frame Semantics, English-Uzbek translation, cognitive equivalence, embodied cognition, translation studies

1. Introduction

The ability to measure is one of the most fundamental forms of human categorization. Physical experience constantly confronts individuals with differences in distance, size, weight, duration, quantity, intensity, and degree. Languages transform these perceptual distinctions into lexical and grammatical systems that make quantities communicable. Yet linguistic measurement is not restricted to statements such as three miles, five kilograms, or twenty minutes. Words associated with measurable magnitude routinely leave the domain of literal calculation and begin to structure judgments about situations that cannot be measured in any strict metrological sense.

This transformation is particularly important for cognitive approaches to translation because it demonstrates that a measurement expression may simultaneously possess a lexical form, an embodied conceptual motivation, a culturally conventionalized meaning, and a discourse-specific pragmatic function. A translator who attends only to the lexical surface of such an expression may therefore preserve its component words while losing its conceptual meaning.

The theoretical foundation for explaining this phenomenon was established by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, whose work changed the status of metaphor within linguistic theory. Rather than treating metaphor primarily as an ornamental rhetorical device, they argued that metaphor forms part of the ordinary conceptual organization of human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 3-6). Their central insight was methodological as much as linguistic: recurrent metaphorical expressions can reveal systematic relations between domains of experience.

This position was subsequently reinforced by embodied approaches to meaning. Johnson (1987) argued that conceptual organization grows out of recurrent patterns of bodily interaction with the environment, including such basic experiential structures as containment, path, balance, force, verticality, and scale. Abstract reasoning is therefore not detached from physical experience; it frequently reorganizes and extends structures already available through bodily perception.

Measurement-related expressions provide especially revealing evidence for this process. Spatial proximity may represent the imminence of an event, physical distance may encode conceptual disagreement, small quantity may express a minimal degree, and large physical extent may represent intensity. English expressions such as *within an inch of failure* and *miles away from reality* illustrate these shifts, while Uzbek provides comparable patterns in *bir qadam oldinda* 'one step ahead', *bir umr kutdim* 'I waited a lifetime', and *zarracha shubha yo'q* 'there is not the slightest doubt'.

A terminological qualification is necessary at this point. The present paper distinguishes measurement units in the strict sense from the broader category of measurement-related expressions. Inch and mile, for example, are conventional units of measurement, whereas *mountain*, *lifetime*, *step*, and *zarra* 'particle' may operate as culturally conventionalized scalar resources without functioning as standardized metrological units in the relevant expressions. Treating all of them indiscriminately as 'units of measurement' would obscure a significant semantic distinction. The broader category adopted here makes it possible to investigate the cognitive continuum from literal measurement to figurative scaling without collapsing metrology and metaphor into a single category.

The central argument of this paper is that Conceptual Metaphor Theory constitutes a necessary but insufficient first stage in explaining such expressions. It can identify a mapping such as PHYSICAL PROXIMITY -> IMMINENCE, but it does not by itself fully reconstruct the complex knowledge activated when a speaker understands that somebody is within an inch of failure. Interpretation additionally involves the concept of a threshold, movement toward an outcome, the undesirability of failure, and the speaker's evaluation of how close that outcome is.

For this reason, the paper integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory with Frame Semantics. Fillmore's approach views lexical meaning in relation to structured bodies of knowledge activated by linguistic units (Fillmore, 1982). Such integration is particularly productive for translation because the translator does not simply replace one metaphorical word with another. The translator reconstructs a conceptual situation and then selects a target-language expression capable of activating an adequately comparable interpretation.

The study consequently addresses three research questions: (1) How do English and Uzbek measurement-related expressions develop abstract scalar meanings through conceptual metaphor? (2) What aspects of their interpretation remain insufficiently explained by cross-domain mapping alone? (3) What translation principles follow from integrating conceptual metaphor with frame-semantic analysis?

The paper argues that the translation of metaphorical measure should be understood primarily as the transfer of cognitive scaling and pragmatic construal, rather than the transfer or conversion

of measurement units themselves.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative, contrastive cognitive-semantic methodology. It does not attempt to establish statistical frequencies of metaphorical measurement vocabulary. Instead, it examines a purposefully selected analytical sample representing recurrent types of conceptual transfer in English and Uzbek.

The English material consists of the expressions within an inch of failure/success, miles away from reality, and a mountain of work. The Uzbek material consists of *bir qadam oldinda* 'one step ahead', *bir umr kutdim* 'I waited a lifetime', and *zarracha shubha yo'q* 'there is not the slightest doubt'. These examples were selected because they represent different dimensions of measurement-related conceptualization: spatial proximity, spatial distance, magnitude, progress, duration, and minimal quantity.

The purpose of the analysis is therefore explanatory rather than frequency-based. No claims are made concerning the relative statistical productivity of these expressions in English or Uzbek.

2.2. Metaphor Identification

Metaphorical status was determined by comparing the contextual meaning of the relevant lexical item with its more basic physical or experiential meaning. This procedure is informed by the methodological principles of the Metaphor Identification Procedure developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) and its later elaboration in MIPVU (Steen et al., 2010).

For example, *inch* has a basic meaning as a conventional unit of length. In within an inch of failure, however, no physical inch separates an individual from an event called failure. The expression is therefore interpreted through a contrast between literal spatial measurement and abstract situational proximity.

A comparable relationship appears in Uzbek *bir qadam oldinda*. A *qadam* 'step' can denote a physical movement made by a person while walking, but in contexts of competition, achievement, knowledge, or strategy it may quantify abstract advantage rather than actual pedestrian movement.

2.3. Analytical Procedure

Each example was analysed at four levels. First, the basic measurement or scalar domain was identified. Second, the abstract target meaning was reconstructed. Third, the principal conceptual mapping was formulated. Fourth, the frame of knowledge necessary for contextual interpretation was described.

The translation stage then considered whether an English-Uzbek or Uzbek-English rendering could preserve the same lexical measurement image, a different but conceptually comparable measurement image, or the underlying scalar meaning without retaining an explicit measurement expression.

The proposed translations in the analysis are not presented as corpus observations or prescriptive universal solutions. They are analytical alternatives intended to demonstrate how translation choices depend on context.

3. Results

3.1. Spatial Measurement as a Model of Abstract Proximity and Progress

The clearest pattern identified in the material involves the conceptualization of non-spatial situations through spatial distance.

Consider: He was within an inch of failure.

At the literal level, an inch is a small unit of length. In the metaphorical expression, however, it represents an extremely small conceptual distance separating the participant from an undesirable outcome.

The principal mapping can be formulated as: SMALL PHYSICAL DISTANCE -> HIGH DEGREE OF EVENT IMMINENCE. The measurement unit therefore performs a scaling function. The smaller the imagined distance, the more imminent the event is construed to be.

Yet the interpretation requires more than the mapping itself. The expression activates what may be described as a THRESHOLD/GOAL frame containing at least an experiencer or participant, a developing situation, a possible endpoint, a threshold separating the current state from the endpoint, and an evaluative relation to that endpoint. The meaning of inch consequently depends on its position inside a more complex conceptual scenario.

Uzbek bir qadam oldinda displays a related embodiment: U raqiblaridan bir qadam oldinda. 'He/She is one step ahead of the competitors.' Here physical movement along a path is mapped onto abstract progress or competitive advantage: FORWARD SPATIAL POSITION -> SUPERIOR PROGRESS / ADVANTAGE.

The comparison reveals a relatively high degree of conceptual symmetry between English and Uzbek because English also conventionally uses one step ahead. This is an important result. Cross-linguistic metaphor should not be described only in terms of difference. Shared bodily experience can generate closely comparable conceptual structures across languages, even when other metaphorical systems remain culturally variable.

3.2. Large Distance as Conceptual Separation

The English expression His explanation is miles away from reality does not refer to measurable geographical distance. Instead, the unit mile provides an imagined scale for evaluating the gap between a proposition and what the speaker regards as reality.

The mapping may be represented as: LARGE PHYSICAL DISTANCE -> LARGE CONCEPTUAL DISCREPANCY. The frame activated here differs from the previous example. The relevant structure involves two conceptual positions - the proposition and reality - and the speaker evaluates the distance between them.

A literal Uzbek translation involving mil would reproduce the lexical unit but would not necessarily reproduce the conventional conceptual effect. A natural translation may instead be Uning izohi haqiqatdan juda uzoq 'His explanation is very far from reality.' The crucial observation is that the translation does not need to preserve mile. It preserves distance as the conceptual scale.

This distinction leads to one of the central claims of the present study: When a measurement unit becomes metaphorically backgrounded, translation equivalence shifts from numerical equivalence to cognitive-scalar equivalence.

Replacing miles with a mathematically converted number of kilometres would be metrologically defensible but linguistically inappropriate. The metaphor is not asking the reader to calculate distance; it is asking the reader to conceptualize discrepancy as distance.

3.3. Magnitude as Intensity

The expression a mountain of work illustrates a somewhat different type of scaling. A mountain is not a standardized measurement unit. Nevertheless, its physical size motivates an interpretation of exceptionally large quantity. The underlying pattern is: LARGE PHYSICAL SIZE -> HIGH QUANTITY / INTENSITY.

This example demonstrates why the broader category measurement-related expression is methodologically useful. Human conceptualization of quantity does not depend exclusively on formal units such as metres, pounds, or litres. Natural objects, body-based measures, temporal spans, and culturally salient scales may all provide reference structures for evaluating magnitude.

From the translator's perspective, the relevant question is therefore not 'Which Uzbek measurement unit corresponds to mountain?' but 'Which target-language construction reproduces

the interpretation of overwhelming quantity?' Possible Uzbek renderings may include bir dunyo ish 'a world of work / an enormous amount of work' or, depending on context, juda ko'p ish 'a great deal of work'. The former preserves figurative scalar imagery; the latter sacrifices the image while preserving propositional quantity. The choice is pragmatic rather than metrological.

3.4. Duration as Subjective Experience

Uzbek Bir umr kutdim. literally evokes the span of an entire lifetime. In ordinary discourse, however, it may function as an expressive intensifier meaning that the waiting seemed exceptionally long. The conceptual mapping may be formulated as: LIFETIME-LONG DURATION -> EXTREME SUBJECTIVE DURATION.

English provides a close conceptual equivalent: I waited a lifetime. This example is significant because it shows that duration metaphors can preserve both their conceptual mapping and their lexical image across languages. Nevertheless, identical mapping does not necessarily imply identical pragmatic force in every context. The translator must consider whether the expression is dramatic, humorous, ironic, emotionally sincere, or deliberately exaggerated. Thus the frame includes not only duration, but also an experiencer, expectation, emotional investment, and subjective evaluation.

3.5. Minimal Quantity as Minimal Degree

Uzbek Zarracha shubha yo'q. may literally be associated with an extremely small particle or trace. In context, however, the expression means that even the smallest possible degree of doubt is absent. The mapping can be represented as: MINIMAL PHYSICAL QUANTITY -> MINIMAL ABSTRACT DEGREE.

English has several possible renderings: There is not the slightest doubt. There is not a trace of doubt. and There is not a shred of doubt. A formally closer expression involving particle would generally be less idiomatic. Consequently, the target language may preserve the scalar structure while changing the material image. This is a clear case of conceptual correspondence accompanied by lexical asymmetry.

Expression	Source domain	Abstract target meaning	Dominant mapping	Translation implication
within an inch of failure	small spatial distance	imminence	SMALL DISTANCE -> IMMINENCE	preserve threshold proximity, not inch numerically
miles away from reality	large distance	conceptual discrepancy	DISTANCE -> DIFFERENCE	preserve conceptual remoteness
a mountain of work	physical magnitude	large quantity/intensity	SIZE -> QUANTITY	retain figurative magnitude or paraphrase
bir qadam oldinda	forward step	advantage/progress	FORWARD POSITION -> ADVANTAGE	close English equivalent: one step ahead
bir umr kutdim	lifetime duration	extreme subjective duration	LONG DURATION -> INTENSITY OF WAITING	metaphor can often be preserved
zarracha shubha yo'q	minimal particle	absence/minimal degree	SMALL QUANTITY -> SMALL DEGREE	scalar meaning normally more important than lexical image

4. Discussion

4.1. Conceptual Metaphor as the First Stage of Interpretation

The findings support the central insight of Conceptual Metaphor Theory: linguistic expressions referring to physical space, size, duration, and quantity can systematically structure abstract reasoning. Lakoff and Johnson's contribution was therefore not merely to broaden the definition of metaphor, but to establish metaphor as an instrument for investigating conceptual organization.

For measurement-related expressions, this approach explains why an inch can represent imminence, a mile can represent conceptual disagreement, a step can represent progress, and a particle can represent a minimal degree. However, the analysis also demonstrates why the conceptual mapping cannot constitute the final stage of interpretation.

The formula SMALL DISTANCE -> IMMINENCE does not independently explain everything understood in within an inch of failure. To interpret the utterance, the hearer must also know what counts as failure in the given context, who is approaching it, whether it is avoidable, what consequences are expected, and why the speaker presents the outcome as extremely close.

Conceptual metaphor identifies a relation between domains. Frame-based interpretation specifies the structured situation in which that relation becomes meaningful. This limitation of a purely mapping-based account is particularly important for translation. Translators do not translate abstract conceptual mappings in isolation. They translate mappings as they are instantiated within situations, genres, communicative purposes, cultural conventions, and speaker evaluations.

More recent extensions of Conceptual Metaphor Theory have likewise emphasized the importance of context, levels of conceptual organization, and the dynamic interaction between conceptual structures and actual language use (Kövecses, 2020). The present study therefore proposes a two-stage analytical sequence: Stage 1 - Metaphorical mapping: identify how measurement experience structures an abstract target domain; Stage 2 - Frame activation: reconstruct the structured body of knowledge required to interpret the expression in discourse. The two stages should not be regarded as competing explanations. They address different levels of the same interpretive process.

4.2. From Measurement Equivalence to Cognitive Equivalence

The findings are especially relevant to Translation Studies. Traditional discussion of metaphor translation has often centred on whether the metaphor should be retained, replaced by another metaphor, paraphrased, or omitted. Schäffner (2004) demonstrated that metaphor presents translation difficulties precisely because linguistic and cultural differences may prevent direct transfer. Cognitive approaches extend this problem from words to conceptual structures.

Measurement-related metaphors reveal this issue particularly clearly because their lexical form may misleadingly suggest numerical precision. Consider again within an inch of failure. If inch were functioning literally, translation into a metric-language context could legitimately involve conversion into centimetres where communicatively required. In the metaphorical construction, however, this operation would misunderstand the semantic function of the unit.

An inch no longer communicates a physical quantity. It communicates extreme closeness to a threshold. Therefore, literal measurement may require numerical conversion, whereas metaphorical measurement requires cognitive-pragmatic reconstruction. This distinction should be treated as a fundamental translation principle. The translator must first determine whether the unit is informationally foregrounded as a measure or cognitively backgrounded as part of a conventional metaphor. Only after this decision can an adequate translation strategy be selected.

4.3. Three Patterns of Cross-Linguistic Correspondence

Type I: Cognitive and lexical symmetry. In this pattern, both languages employ very similar

experiential structures and lexical images. Uzbek bir qadam oldinda corresponds closely to English one step ahead; similarly, bir umr kutdim can correspond to I waited a lifetime. In such cases, the translator can preserve both mapping and imagery.

Type II: Cognitive symmetry with lexical asymmetry. Here the source and target languages conceptualize the abstract phenomenon through a comparable scale, but conventionalize the image differently. Uzbek zarracha shubha yo'q is naturally translated as not the slightest doubt rather than through a literal equivalent of zarracha. The underlying concept of MINIMAL QUANTITY -> MINIMAL DEGREE remains, while the lexical vehicle changes.

Type III: Functional equivalence without preservation of measurement imagery. In some contexts, the most natural translation may remove explicit measurement vocabulary entirely. English within an inch of failure may become Uzbek muvaffaqiyatsizlikka sal qolganda 'when failure was very close' or muvaffaqiyatsizlik yoqasida 'on the verge of failure'. Here the target expression preserves threshold imminence without preserving a discrete unit. Such transformations should not automatically be interpreted as metaphor loss. If the relevant cognitive and pragmatic effect remains accessible, the translation may achieve a higher degree of functional adequacy than a formally literal version.

4.4. Embodiment and Cultural Conventionalization

The comparison also requires a balanced account of universality and culture. It would be overly simplistic to claim that English metaphor is primarily 'imperial' while Uzbek metaphor is primarily 'traditional' or body-based. Both languages possess complex historical layers of standardized, borrowed, body-based, conventional, and figurative measurement vocabulary.

At the same time, particular lexicalizations can retain traces of historically and culturally familiar systems. Expressions with inch and mile remain conventional in English even in communicative settings where metric measurement is otherwise common. Their persistence demonstrates that metaphorical language does not necessarily change at the same rate as systems of technical measurement.

Uzbek qadam 'step', umr 'lifetime', and zarra 'particle' similarly show how embodied, temporal, and scalar experience can become conventionalized without requiring formal quantification. This leads to an important theoretical point: the universality of embodied experience does not guarantee uniformity of linguistic realization. Human beings across linguistic communities experience distance, movement, duration, size, and minimal quantity. Yet languages select, conventionalize, and culturally elaborate different portions of that experience. The translator operates precisely at the interface between these two dimensions: shared embodiment and language-specific conventionalization.

4.5. The Human Factor in Metaphor Translation

This issue is particularly relevant to the human dimension of translation. The interpretation of metaphorical measurement requires decisions that cannot be reduced to dictionary substitution. A translator must judge whether the source expression is literal or figurative, determine which part of its image contributes to meaning, assess its level of conventionality, reconstruct the relevant frame, and select a target expression appropriate to genre and communicative purpose.

Consider miles away from reality. A purely lexical procedure may search for an equivalent of mile. A metrological procedure may convert miles into kilometres. A cognitively informed translator recognizes that neither operation addresses the actual translation problem. The real problem is the conceptualization: DISAGREEMENT WITH REALITY IS DISTANCE FROM REALITY. The translator then asks how this conceptual distance is conventionally expressed in the target language.

Translation competence therefore includes a capacity for conceptual diagnosis before linguistic

reformulation. This capacity is also important for translator education. Students trained to identify whether measurement is literal, scalar, metaphorical, idiomatic, or culturally framed may become less dependent on word-for-word equivalence and more attentive to communicative meaning.

Cognitive research on metaphor translation has increasingly emphasized the value of combining metaphor studies with translation-process research rather than treating the two fields separately (Schäffner & Shuttleworth, 2013). The present analysis supports this interdisciplinary direction: measurement-related metaphor provides a particularly transparent environment in which conceptual structure, lexical choice, cultural convention, and translation decision-making can be studied together.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the cognitive and translation-related behaviour of selected measurement-related expressions in English and Uzbek. The analysis confirms that measurement vocabulary frequently moves beyond literal quantification and becomes a productive instrument for structuring abstract experience.

Spatial proximity can conceptualize imminence; large distance can express conceptual discrepancy; physical magnitude can represent intensity; forward movement can encode progress; lifetime duration can intensify subjective temporal experience; and minimal physical quantity can represent minimal abstract degree.

The findings also demonstrate that Conceptual Metaphor Theory should not be treated as a complete model of interpretation. Its principal explanatory strength lies in identifying cross-domain conceptual correspondences. It shows why a physical scale can structure an abstract one. It does not, by itself, fully explain the structured contextual knowledge through which a particular metaphorical utterance becomes meaningful.

Frame Semantics provides the necessary second level by reconstructing knowledge about goals, thresholds, participants, evaluations, expectations, and situational relations.

The theoretical contribution of the paper can therefore be formulated as a two-stage model: MEASUREMENT EXPERIENCE -> CONCEPTUAL METAPHORICAL MAPPING -> FRAME-BASED CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION. Its translation-oriented extension is: SOURCE EXPRESSION -> COGNITIVE MAPPING -> FRAME RECONSTRUCTION -> TARGET-LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTION.

This model makes it possible to distinguish two fundamentally different translation situations. When measurement remains literal and referential, equivalence may require numerical accuracy and, where appropriate, unit conversion. When measurement becomes metaphorical, numerical conversion may cease to be relevant. The translator must instead reproduce proximity, intensity, duration, discrepancy, progress, certainty, or another scalar relation encoded by the source expression.

The principal conclusion of the study is therefore that the adequate translation of metaphorical measurement is primarily a problem of cognitive-pragmatic equivalence rather than metrological equivalence.

This distinction has wider implications for English-Uzbek translation research. It suggests that comparative studies of measurement should not be restricted to lists of metric, imperial, and traditional units. A fuller account must investigate what happens after those units enter discourse: how they acquire evaluative functions, how physical scales become conceptual scales, how culture conventionalizes particular images, and how translators reconstruct these meanings across languages.

From this perspective, measurement represents more than a lexical-semantic field. It constitutes

one of the cognitive interfaces through which bodily experience is transformed into abstract meaning and subsequently renegotiated in intercultural communication.

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