



THE LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF IMAGES OF NATURE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK FOLK SONGS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 24 th July 2026 Accepted: 20 th August 2026	This article compares the lexical, grammatical and poetic means through which images of nature are expressed in English and Uzbek folk songs. The illustrative corpus includes the Uzbek ritual song "Boychechak", references to "Binafsha" and stork-related songs, and the English traditional songs "The Cuckoo", "It's a Rosebud in June" and the harvest song "The Green Grass". The analysis groups words for flowers, birds, seasons, weather and landscape, and examines tense, imperative and optative forms, address, repetition and personification. The findings suggest that nature in these songs functions not only as scenery but also as a linguistic means of connecting seasonal change with ritual action, work and communal memory.
Keywords: folk song, image of nature, folklore language, comparative analysis, lexicon, grammar, metaphor, ritual	

INTRODUCTION

A folk song is a compact yet multilayered form of oral art. Nature in these songs is often more than a background external to human life: it is an active element connected with work, ritual, the seasonal calendar and emotion. The opening of a flower may announce the arrival of spring; a bird's song may signal a change of season; and references to rain or wind may reveal a community's relationship with nature. Such meanings arise not only from the subject matter but also from word choice, verb forms, syntactic patterns, repetition and the circumstances of performance. The scope of this comparison is deliberately limited. The Uzbek material consists of ritual songs associated with spring and the first flowers, as well as bird images found in seasonal repertoires. The English material includes "The Cuckoo" and "It's a Rosebud in June", recorded in Cecil Sharp's collection, and "The Green Grass", presented in an educational resource by the English Folk Dance and Song Society.^{1,2,3} These examples are not fully equivalent in genre, period or performance function. The article therefore does not claim to survey the folklore of either nation as a whole; it offers a qualitative analysis of the specified texts.

SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

The article draws on two kinds of sources: primary song texts or collections, and scholarly or educational sources describing folkloric traditions. The national inventory of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage describes the "Boychechak" ceremony in relation to the arrival of spring, the contrast between winter and

spring, and customary performance.⁴ Its "Ritual Songs" entry lists songs associated with the first flowers, snow, rain and other seasonal phenomena.⁵ The ICHCAP handbook on Uzbekistan's musical heritage identifies "Boychechak", "Binafsha", "Laylak keldi" and "Qaldirg'och" as calendar and ritual songs.⁶

The titles and placement of the English examples were checked against the 1916 edition of *One Hundred English Folksongs*, edited by Cecil J. Sharp; its contents list "The Cuckoo" and "It's a rosebud in June".¹ "The Green Grass" appears in an English Folk Dance and Song Society resource devoted to teaching harvest songs.³ Folk songs may have oral variants, so an individual word or line is attributed to a particular edition and is not treated as an invariant form across all performances.

The study uses descriptive, semantic grouping, linguopoetic and comparative methods. First, words naming natural phenomena and the grammatical units associated with them were identified in the texts. These units were then grouped into flowers and plants, birds and animals, seasons and weather, and landscape. For each group, the analysis considers the role of the words in the text: creating a scene, locating an event in time, addressing a listener, or prompting a ritual action. It then examines tense and mood, person markers, modifiers, repetition and syntactic parallelism. The analysis treats a folk text not merely as a written sequence but as oral verbal art repeated in performance.^{6,7} The comparison distinguishes between a "similar image" and an "identical meaning". A flower may signify spring in both traditions, but its ritual



function, lyrical tone or addressee need not be the same in a particular song. Accordingly, the article describes similarities at the level of language while accounting for genre and context when discussing differences.

THE LINGUISTIC STATUS OF NATURE IMAGES IN FOLK SONGS

A nature image is not a direct copy of a real plant or natural event. It is formed from signs selected within a text and given particular value through popular experience. A flower name may suggest colour, delicacy or renewal; a bird name may be associated with sound, flight or a season. These semantic layers cannot be derived from the dictionary meaning of a word alone. They also depend on the verb used with it, the person addressed and the line in which it is repeated. It is useful to distinguish three levels in the linguistic analysis of an image. The first is denotative: what words such as "flower", "snow", "bird" and "rain" refer to. The second is connotative: how these words are associated with spring, harvest, expectation, joy or concern. The third is pragmatic: who uses the image, to whom, in what circumstances, and what response is expected from the performer or listener. Descriptions of "Boychechak" being sung from house to house illustrate how these three levels can meet in one text.⁴

In songs, words for nature often combine with verbs, turning a static scene into an event: a flower opens, a bird arrives or sings, snow falls, the wind blows, and crops are reaped in the field. Action verbs animate the season and convey the sequence of events to the listener. Uzbek agglutinative suffixes explicitly mark person, tense and mood on the verb, whereas English often uses auxiliary verbs, pronouns or word order to express time and person. This typological difference does not imply a difference in meaning or artistic force; it shows that languages can use different grammatical means to perform similar functions.

LEXICAL LAYER: IMAGES OF FLOWERS AND PLANTS

In the Uzbek examples, flower names such as "boychechak" (snowdrop) and "binafsha" (violet) activate the seasonal calendar. The official folkloric description links the Boychechak ceremony to the appearance of the first flower and the arrival of spring; Binafsha is also listed among ritual songs.^{4,5} These names therefore serve not only as objects in a nature scene but also as lexical signals of time. Through a flower name, a song may express the transition from winter to spring, renewal and the community's recognition of a new season. In known variants of "Boychechak", verbs of direct address, taking or hanging the flower occur. Such verbs turn the plant from an object of observation into a sign that

participates in a ritual. The inclusion of "Binafsha" alongside first-flower ceremonies also shows that the plant vocabulary of these songs is not limited to one species. Words for colour, scent or flowering may occur in particular variants, but they should not be assumed to appear in every text.

In English songs, a "rosebud" is associated with spring or summer, growth and beauty. The contents of Sharp's collection list "It's a rosebud in June", linking the flower image to a specific time of year.¹ The title presents the rosebud not as a fully opened flower but as one just beginning to grow, which may strengthen associations with growth and renewal. This is a linguopoetic interpretation of the title and the text in the available edition, not a rule that applies to every performance variant.

An important similarity between flower names in the two traditions is their concise marking of seasonal time. The difference lies in the function of the selected materials: in "Boychechak", the flower is directly linked to ritual and collective practice, while "rosebud" is central to the lyrical nature imagery in the English song title. Translating "boychechak" simply as "flower" would therefore lose both the specific plant name and its ritual context. An annotated translation such as "snowdrop (boychechak)" preserves the meaning more accurately.

BIRDS AND ANIMAL IMAGERY

The image of a bird brings together the visible and audible aspects of nature in a song. In the Uzbek folkloric heritage inventory, "Laylak keldi" ("The Stork Has Arrived") and "Qaldirg'och" ("Swallow") are listed as calendar and ritual repertoire.⁶ The arrival or flight of birds can express seasonal change. In "Laylak keldi", the verb "keldi" ("came/has arrived") clearly marks direction and result: the bird comes from elsewhere and reaches the local setting. The past-tense verb presents its arrival as an event that has been observed and reported.

In the English example, "The Cuckoo", included in Sharp's collection, makes the bird's call a central subject.¹ The title names the bird, while the song associates its singing with signs of the season. The bird's name itself has an onomatopoeic quality: the phonetic similarity between English "cuckoo" and Uzbek "kuku" is striking. This should not be treated as evidence of historical kinship; it is more appropriately understood as a possible phonetic similarity arising from the imitation of a bird's call in different languages. In both sets of examples, birds can mark time in nature. Their precise genre functions, however, may differ. A title such as "Laylak keldi" has the structure of an event report and recalls a communal seasonal calendar, whereas "The Cuckoo" foregrounds the voice and lyrical quality of the singing bird. In neither case is the bird



merely a zoological object: its arrival or call activates seasonal knowledge familiar to listeners.

Other kinds of animal vocabulary also connect nature and work in folk songs. Uzbek folklore includes work songs that mention livestock, sheep, oxen or horses, but such songs are not central to the corpus examined here. They are mentioned only to clarify the limits of the comparison. The aim is not to equate bird and flower images artificially with work animals, but to note that words for nature perform different functions in different genres.

LEXICON OF SEASONS, WEATHER AND LANDSCAPE

Season names may remain implicit while being conveyed through images of nature. The recognition of boychechak as the first flower of spring signals the transition from winter to spring through a plant name. The heritage inventory highlights the traditional interpretation of the ceremony as a contrast between winter and spring.⁴ This contrast is more than a simple listing of two seasons: it is presented as the departure of one and the arrival of the other. In expressions such as "Bahorimdan kechmayman" ("I will not give up my spring"), found in some variants, grammatical possession and negation can also express a personal relationship with the season.

Weather phenomena—snow, rain and wind—are specifically represented in the classification of Uzbek ritual songs, which includes songs for calling rain and wind and songs associated with snow.⁵ In these cases, the natural event is not merely described; it is addressed through a speech act or invoked as part of a ritual. The verb "to call" makes the ritual's illocutionary purpose explicit: singing stages the traditional belief that language can influence nature. This should be understood as a folkloric worldview, not as a modern meteorological claim.

In English harvest songs, landscape and plants are often linked to the cycle of work. The EFDSS resource "The Green Grass" places the song within the harvest theme and notes the presence of agricultural and reaping songs in English folk tradition.³ The phrase "green grass" combines a colour adjective with a plant name: "green" may suggest growth, freshness or abundance. In the context of harvest songs, however, green grass has more than an aesthetic meaning; it also relates to pasture, livestock and the annual farming cycle.

Landscape vocabulary appears to different degrees in the English and Uzbek materials. In the selected Uzbek spring songs, a flower or bird may be central; in the English harvest song, grass, fields and crops create an active scene of work. This difference does not mean that the two languages represent nature in

fundamentally different ways. It should be explained by the genres and topics of the examples selected. Within each folk tradition, lyrical, ritual, seasonal and work songs may choose different words for nature.

GRAMMATICAL MEANS AND THE DYNAMICS OF IMAGES

The grammatical expression of nature images is seen first of all in tense and mood. In Uzbek "Laylak keldi", the past-tense verb presents the bird's arrival as a completed event. A present-tense form such as "The cuckoo sings" in English may describe the bird's call as habitual or ongoing. When analysing a particular song line, the tense must be interpreted in relation to the text as a whole: in folklore, the present tense can express a general truth, a repeated action or a scene enacted during performance. Uzbek person-number and mood markers attached to verbs can express participants concisely. Forms such as "keling" ("come"), "ayting" ("say") and "yog'dir" ("let it rain/bring down") may function as commands, requests or ritual calls, depending on context. English imperatives such as "come", "sing" and "bring" are often expressed with the base form of the verb; the addressed person does not have to be stated explicitly with a pronoun. In both languages, an imperative addressed to a nature image can serve personification and direct address.

Desiderative and optative forms can also turn a natural event into an expected outcome. Uzbek ritual songs for calling rain or wind illustrate this function: the imperative-optative form grammatically casts nature as the party being addressed.⁵ English nature songs may also address a bird or flower directly, using a vocative, a second-person pronoun or an imperative. Because the materials in this article are not fully parallel, no quantitative claim is made about the frequency of particular forms. Adjectives and modifiers add perceptible detail to nature images. English words such as "green" and "rose", as well as Uzbek colour terms such as "white", "red" and "deep blue", can bring flowers, grass and the sky to life through the senses. Repeated adjectives or intensifying forms may aid memorability and fit the melody in oral performance. The symbolic meaning of a colour is not the same in every text; it depends on genre, song variant and neighbouring words.

Possessive and demonstrative forms bring nature closer to human experience. In Uzbek, the possessive suffix in "bahorim" ("my spring") presents the season as belonging to the speaker or as emotionally close. English phrases such as "my spring" and "this flower" also use possessives and demonstratives to express distance or proximity. These forms help personalise nature and show that it is not merely an external scene but a subject to which the lyrical speaker relates.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The lexical groups in the selected texts show both shared and distinctive features. In both traditions, plant and bird names can be central words for conveying change in nature. A flower opening or a bird's call marks seasonal time. The appearance of names such as "Boychechak", "Binafsha", "Laylak keldi" and "Qaldirg'och" in Uzbek calendar and ritual repertoires shows the close connection between nature vocabulary and genre.^{5,6} The cuckoo and June rosebud in Sharp's collection, and the green grass in the EFDSS harvest resource, present nature in lyrical and agricultural contexts.^{1,3} Grammatically, action verbs make natural events dynamic in both languages. The main difference lies in the structure of the grammatical means: Uzbek suffixes can combine tense, person and mood in a single verb form, while English relies more on auxiliary words, pronouns and word order. Uzbek "keldi" conveys arrival with one verb; English "came" conveys the same past event, but its form generally does not change with grammatical person. This difference calls for attention to grammatical correspondence in translation, but it does not determine artistic function.

In some Uzbek ritual songs, the song itself forms part of a communal practice. Sung from house to house, "Boychechak" combines showing the flower, announcing spring and addressing householders.⁴ The selected English songs are recorded as music and text in Sharp's printed collection, while "The Green Grass" is presented in an educational resource as material for singing about harvest.^{1,3} The difference between the Uzbek and English materials should not be reduced to a simplistic opposition between "ritual" and "non-ritual". English harvest songs may also be connected with communal work and seasonal customs; the sources and the selected texts simply present them in different ways.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The analysis identifies three functions of nature images. The first is descriptive: flowers, birds, grass or weather create a scene in the listener's imagination. The second is calendrical: natural events mark a season or period of work. The third is social and speech-related: through address, wishes, calls or repetition, a song becomes part of a particular communal activity. A single word can perform several functions at once. Boychechak, for example, can simultaneously name a plant, signal spring and refer to an object carried in a ritual. Several directions are promising for further research: comparing the frequency of season names and colour adjectives in Uzbek and English; phonetic and translational analysis of words imitating bird calls; studying how refrains and repetition affect syntax in live

performance; and examining how flower names form different semantic fields in ritual, lyrical and work songs. Such research can analyse the multiple meanings of nature images without reducing them to a single interpretation.

CONCLUSION

Nature images in English and Uzbek folk songs emerge through the combined effect of lexical names, grammatical forms and poetic devices. Words for flowers, birds, seasons, weather and landscape do more than list objects; they express seasonal change and human and communal experience. In the Uzbek "Boychechak" ceremony, the first flower is linked to the transition from winter to spring, singing from house to house and the communal announcement of the new season. In titles such as "Laylak keldi", the verb presents the bird's arrival as a specific event. Among the English examples, "The Cuckoo" foregrounds the bird's call, "It's a Rosebud in June" links a plant with a season, and "The Green Grass" brings together green grass and the harvest theme. The grammatical analysis shows how tense, imperative and optative forms, person markers, possessives and modifiers animate nature or bring it closer to the lyrical speaker. Uzbek and English use different grammatical means to perform these functions; typological differences should not be treated as differences in artistic value. The comparison also shows that translation and analysis should go beyond giving a lexical equivalent for a nature word. The image's seasonal, genre-related, ritual or work-related function should also be explained. These conclusions are limited to the selected texts and can be tested further against a wider oral corpus and recordings of performances.

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World Bulletin of Social Sciences (WBSS)

Available Online at: <https://www.scholarexpress.net>

Vol. 63, October 2026

ISSN: 2749-361X

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