

National-Cultural And Spiritual Characteristics Of The Concept “Ko’Z” In The Uzbek Language

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Abstract: The concept “ko’z” (eye) constitutes one of the fundamental and culturally salient units within the Uzbek linguistic worldview. Far exceeding its primary physiological function, ko’z operates as a multilayered cognitive construct that encodes perceptual, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual meanings. In Uzbek culture, the eye functions as a symbolic medium through which individuals interpret human character, express social relations, regulate communicative behaviour, and conceptualize moral-spiritual values. The present study offers a comprehensive examination of the semantic architecture and linguocultural specificity of the concept “ko’z” by drawing on key theoretical frameworks in cognitive linguistics and cultural semiotics, particularly the works of Popova and Sternin on conceptual structure, Karasik’s cultural discourse theory, and Lotman’s semiotic space.

Using data from Uzbek phraseology, proverbs, classical literature, folklore, and everyday communicative practices, the analysis demonstrates that ko’z represents a culturally encoded mechanism for modelling perception, moral evaluation, emotional transparency, social hierarchy, modesty norms, and spiritual insight. The findings reveal that the concept “ko’z” plays a central role in constructing the symbolic universe of the Uzbek people, reflecting deeply ingrained national mentality, collective memory, and value orientations. As such, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how culturally significant concepts structure linguistic consciousness and mediate the relationship between language, culture, and cognition in the Uzbek context.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics; concept “ko’z”; cultural semantics; linguoculture; national worldview; phraseology; semantic structure; spiritual symbolism.

Introduction: In contemporary cognitive linguistics, the notion of a *concept* is regarded as a fundamental mental formation that reflects culturally conditioned knowledge accumulated within the collective consciousness of a linguistic community. As Popova and Sternin emphasize, a concept represents “a basic unit of thought, culture, and cognition, possessing a complex, multilayered internal structure and functioning as a key element of a person’s mental lexicon” [1]. This theoretical understanding highlights the crucial role of concepts in mediating the relationship between language, cognition, and culture.

Within the Uzbek linguistic worldview, the concept “ko’z” (eye) occupies a particularly significant position due to its high semantic density, symbolic complexity, and cultural salience. Beyond its primary denotation as a physiological organ of vision, ko’z functions as a powerful cultural symbol that encapsulates diverse aspects of human experience, including perception, emotional expression, moral evaluation, interpersonal relations, and spiritual insight. Such a broad functional spectrum situates the concept within the core of the Uzbek conceptual sphere, making it an essential object of linguocultural and cognitive investigation.

The relevance of examining *ko'z* is further reinforced by its multifunctional semantic nature. In the Uzbek worldview, the eye metaphorically embodies processes of knowing and understanding, serves as an index of sincerity and emotional transparency, marks ethical orientation and moral integrity, and operates as a key symbol of modesty, respect, and inner purity. Moreover, in mystical and religious traditions—especially within Sufi epistemology—the “inner eye” (*ko'ngil ko'zi*) becomes a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment and intuitive cognition, indicating that the semantic structure of *ko'z* extends into the transcendental domain of human consciousness.

Thus, the study of the concept “*ko'z*” is not merely a linguistic inquiry; it represents an exploration of broader cultural paradigms that shape the Uzbek understanding of human nature and social behaviour. By investigating its semantic layers, phraseological representations, symbolic meanings, and cultural functions, this research provides deeper insight into how language encodes moral values, aesthetic ideals, social norms, and spiritual perceptions in Uzbek society. Consequently, the analysis of *ko'z* contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the national mentality and the culturally specific mechanisms through which meaning is constructed and communicated in the Uzbek linguistic and cognitive space.

METHOD

The concept “*ko'z*” possesses a complex internal organization shaped by perceptual, emotional, moral, and culturally symbolic layers. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, the eye functions not merely as a biological organ but as an epistemic and cultural lens through which individuals interpret and classify experience. The following sections analyse the principal semantic layers constituting the conceptual structure of *ko'z* in Uzbek linguoculture. Although the eye's primary function is visual perception, in Uzbek thinking visuality is inseparably intertwined with cognition, awareness, and understanding. Lakoff and Johnson argue that conceptual metaphors systematically map sensory experience onto mental domains, forming universal pathways for abstract reasoning [2]. In the Uzbek conceptual system, these metaphorical mappings are vividly reflected in idiomatic expressions where sight equates to comprehension, insight, or epistemic awakening. Typical examples include:

1. **ko'zi ochildi** — literally “his eye opened,” metaphorically meaning *he gained awareness / understood the truth*.

2. **ko'ziga ko'rinmoq** — “to appear before the eye,” indicating imagination, hallucination, or anticipatory perception.
3. **ko'z ilg'amas** — “the eye cannot catch,” referring to something extremely small, hidden, or subtle.

These expressions illustrate how *seeing* becomes a cognitive act: perception is treated as the foundational mechanism for acquiring knowledge. The metaphor *KNOWING IS SEEING* is deeply encoded in Uzbek, confirming that *ko'z* functions as a symbolic mediator of intellectual clarity, rational evaluation, and epistemic precision.

Furthermore, the frequent use of *ko'z oldida gavdalanmoq* (“to appear clearly before one's eyes”) demonstrates the mental visualization process, highlighting the conceptual link between memory, imagination, and visual cognition. In Uzbek linguoculture, the eye represents the primary locus of emotional expression. This reflects Wierzbicka's assertion that bodily metaphors—especially those associated with the face and eyes—serve as universal cognitive tools for encoding emotions across languages [3]. The Uzbek conceptualization, however, exhibits culturally specific nuances that foreground sincerity (*samimiyat*), emotional openness, and the visibility of inner states. Emotionally loaded expressions include:

- **ko'zlari porladi** — sparkling eyes signify joy, excitement, or admiration;
- **ko'zi xiralashdi** — blurred or dim eyes symbolize grief, confusion, or emotional shock;
- **ko'z yosh to'kmoq** — shedding tears, associated with sadness, compassion, or deep emotional release;
- **ko'zida alam bor** — resentment or emotional pain visible “in one's eyes.”

These expressions reveal that the eye operates as an external indicator of internal emotional states, reinforcing the culturally held belief that emotions are transparent and morally relevant. In Uzbek sociocultural practice, sincere emotional expression through the eyes is often associated with honesty, purity of intention, and moral integrity.

Moreover, the idiom *ko'ngil ko'zi yumildi* (“the eye of the heart closed”) extends emotionality into the spiritual domain, showing how emotional perception participates in moral and metaphysical cognition.

The moral dimension of the concept *ko'z* reflects core ethical categories in Uzbek culture, particularly modesty (*hayo*), contentment (*qanoat*), humility, and spiritual cleanliness. The evaluative function of the eye is prominently reflected in idiomatic constructions that

communicate ethical judgments about individuals' character traits, intentions, and social behaviour.

Common examples include:

- **ko'zi to'q** — describing a person who is modest, content, emotionally balanced, and free from greed;
- **ko'zi och** — referring to someone who is greedy, overly ambitious, or morally insatiable;
- **ko'zi baland** — indicating a person with high standards, elevated aspirations, or refined taste;
- **ko'zini yerga qaratmoq** — to shame someone, to disgrace them publicly.

These idioms demonstrate that *ko'z* functions as a tool for moral categorization. As Karasik notes, cultural concepts encode “the system of social ethics and behavioural norms that form a community's moral fabric” [4]. This aligns with the Uzbek conceptualization, where the eye is not merely an organ but a symbolic evaluator of one's morality, intentions, and social worth.

Additionally, expressions such as *ko'ziga tik boqolmaslik* (“unable to look someone in the eye”) reflect interpersonal ethics, where gaze becomes a measure of honesty, respect, and moral courage.

Thus, within the moral-evaluative layer, *ko'z* simultaneously represents virtue, self-restraint, spiritual purity, and ethical transparency—qualities highly valued in Uzbek society.

The concept “*ko'z*” is deeply embedded in Uzbek cultural consciousness and functions as an important semiotic marker in shaping social interaction, moral behaviour, aesthetic perception, and spiritual understanding. Its national-cultural significance manifests through established social norms, traditional beliefs, artistic expressions, and ethical frameworks. In Uzbek society, the eye plays a crucial role in structuring interpersonal relationships, social hierarchy, and communicative etiquette. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory affirms that eye contact, gaze avoidance, and visual behaviour are culturally regulated strategies for expressing respect, modesty, and social distance [5]. In the Uzbek cultural context, these rules of visual conduct are particularly prominent.

Common cultural norms include:

- **Avoidance of direct gaze by young people toward elders** — a sign of deference, humility, and social propriety.
- **Newly married brides lowering their eyes** — symbolizing modesty (*hayo*), respect, and internal discipline.

- **Teachers, parents, and elders using “nazorat ko'zi” (a watchful or supervisory eye)** — expressing their moral authority and responsibility for guiding behaviour.

These practices reflect the collectivist nature of Uzbek society, in which visual behaviour becomes a social code that reinforces respect, hierarchical order, and communal harmony. The eye thus acts not only as a sensory organ but as a culturally encoded behavioural instrument.

The expression *ko'z-quloq bo'lmoq* (“to be someone's eyes and ears”) encapsulates the notion of collective responsibility and mutual vigilance. In Lotman's semiotic theory, cultural symbols arise from the need to stabilize and regulate social relations within the semiotic space of a community [6]. This idiom embodies Uzbek values of social cohesion, moral guardianship, and care for others.

Within family and neighbourhood structures (*mahalla*), this expression signifies not mere surveillance but emotional involvement and moral responsibility. Hence, the eye symbolizes guardianship and protection, reinforcing the social expectation that individuals should look after one another. The aesthetic functions of the concept *ko'z* are most vividly realized in Uzbek classical literature and poetic discourse. Poets such as Alisher Navoiy, Bobur, Ogahiy, Furqat, and Cho'lpon frequently employ eye imagery to evoke beauty, longing, spirituality, and emotional intensity. The eye is often used as a metaphor for:

- **passionate, burning love** — “*Ko'zlaringdin o't ketar*”
- **delicate natural beauty** — *nargis ko'z* (“narcissus-like eye”)
- **innocence and tenderness** — *kiyik ko'z* (“doe-eyed”)

According to K. Yuldashev, poetic metaphors serve as crystallized cultural images that preserve ethnocultural ideals and aesthetic values inherited across generations [7]. In this sense, the eye in Uzbek poetry becomes not merely a physical attribute but a refined symbol expressing the ideals of beauty, emotional sensitivity, and spiritual depth. The belief in the “evil eye” (*ko'z tegishi*) is widespread throughout Central Asia and constitutes an important component of folk spirituality. It is believed that an envious or malevolent gaze can cause misfortune, illness, or emotional disturbance. Common protective practices include:

- **blue amulets** (*ko'z munchoq*) worn to repel harmful influence;
- **verbal protective formulas** such as *ko'z tegmasin* (“may the evil eye not affect you”) or *allaqanday*

ko'z bor unda ("there is something about his/her eye").

This belief system highlights the cultural understanding of the eye as a powerful conduit of energy, intention, and spiritual influence. In contrast to the evil eye, the concept of the **blessed eye** (*yorug' ko'z*) symbolizes benevolence, purity, and divine favour:

- *ko'zi yorug' bo'lsin* — a traditional blessing for newborns indicating hope for a bright future;
- *ota-onaning ko'zi* — parental blessing, approval, and moral authority.

In Sufi tradition, the "**inner eye**" (*ko'ngil ko'zi*) represents spiritual insight and intuitive understanding. Classical Sufi poets such as Ahmad Yassaviy and Navoiy describe this "inner vision" as the means for perceiving divine truth and achieving spiritual enlightenment. Thus, the eye becomes a bridge between the physical and the metaphysical realms.

Phraseological units containing the lexeme *ko'z* reflect the cultural conceptualization of sight as a vehicle of cognition, emotion, social evaluation, and moral judgment. These expressions serve as linguistic evidence of how the Uzbek society encodes meanings through embodied perception. These expressions illustrate the role of sight in mental processing and attention regulation:

- *ko'zdan kechirmoq* — to examine or inspect thoroughly;
- *ko'z uzmaslik* — to observe attentively and continuously;
- *ko'z ostiga olmoq* — to consider, evaluate, or monitor closely.

Such idioms conceptualize the eye as an epistemic instrument, validating visual perception as a primary method of assessment. The eye acts as a transparent channel of emotional display:

- *ko'z yoshi to'kmoq* — to cry (deep sadness or empathy);
- *ko'zi quvonchdan chaqnadi* — eyes shining with joy;
- *ko'zi xiralashdi* — eyes dimmed with sorrow or distress.

These expressions reinforce the cultural belief that genuine emotions become visible through the eyes, making them a moral indicator of sincerity.

Moral qualities and ethical behaviour are frequently described using eye-based idioms:

- *ko'zi to'q* — morally content and self-restrained;
- *ko'zi och* — greedy or morally uncontrolled;

- *ko'zi baland* — having refined taste or elevated aspirations.

These idioms encode a culturally grounded system of ethical evaluation. These expressions reflect social norms, interpersonal ethics, and culturally valued behaviour: *ko'z-ko'z qilmoq* — to show off; *ko'zini yerga qaratmoq* — to shame someone; *ko'z oldidan ketmaslik* — to remain unforgettable.

According to Mamatqulova, body-related idioms in Uzbek reflect "a deep interrelation between bodily imagery and moral worldview" [8], demonstrating how closely cultural ethics are tied to sensory metaphor. Proverbs are a crucial source for understanding culturally embedded conceptualizations. Uzbek paremiology preserves numerous expressions involving *ko'z*, each reflecting moral principles, social norms, and collective wisdom:

- "*Ko'r ko'zdan yiroq bo'lsa, ko'ngildan ham yiroq bo'ladi.*" — absence weakens emotional connection.
- "*Ko'zi yomonning ko'ziga qarama.*" — avoid the gaze of the envious or ill-intentioned.
- "*Ko'ngil ko'zi ochiqning yo'li oson.*" — spiritual insight illuminates one's path.

These proverbs demonstrate the cultural linkage between sight, morality, emotional memory, and spiritual awareness. As noted by Qosimov, such folk expressions serve as carriers of ethnocultural codes and collective ethical frameworks [9].

CONCLUSION

The concept "*ko'z*" in Uzbek linguoculture is a multidimensional symbolic construct that transcends its physiological basis and acquires cognitive, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual layers of meaning. Its extensive representation in folklore, classical literature, phraseology, religious discourse, and everyday communication indicates that *ko'z* is among the central conceptual units shaping the Uzbek worldview. It embodies cultural ideals of modesty, sincerity, moral clarity, spiritual insight, and social responsibility.

By analysing its semantic structure and cultural manifestations, this study highlights the integral role of *ko'z* in expressing national mentality, structuring interpersonal relations, and preserving cultural memory. Thus, the concept serves as a key to understanding how the Uzbek language encodes values, norms, and worldviews, reaffirming the interconnectedness of language, culture, and cognition in the formation of collective identity.

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