

Semantic, Cognitive, And Linguocultural Aspects Of The “Child” Concept In Uzbek And English

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Abstract: This article analyzes the concept of “child” from semantic, cognitive, and linguocultural perspectives. It explores the conceptual structure, cultural-symbolic meanings, and comparative differences between Uzbek and English. Special attention is given to cultural values, metaphorical mappings, and mental representations associated with the concept.

Keywords: Child concept, semantics, cognitive linguistics, linguocultural analysis, cultural codes, metaphorical mapping, mental models, family values, cultural cognition, conceptual structure, national mentality, conceptual domains, associative imagery, prototype theory, social perception of a child.

Introduction: The concept of “child” is one of the oldest, most complex, and broadest meaning systems in human thought. It functions not only as a linguistic unit but also as a complex cognitive structure reflecting a society’s worldview, values, educational traditions, social experience, and cultural memory. The notion of “child” is expressed uniquely in every language while simultaneously preserving universal human essence. Its semantic layers evolve with the development of language and expand under the influence of socio-cultural processes. In particular, in Uzbek and other Turkic cultures, the child is highly valued as the foundation of society, the heir to the future, and the bearer of family memory.

In linguistics, the concept does not only represent meaning but also includes moral and cultural content, cognitive models, associative representations, stereotypes, and linguocultural knowledge. The semantic layer of the “child” concept primarily points to the biological and social aspects of the younger generation. On the cognitive level, it encompasses complex psychological and socio-associative representations such as affection, protection, purity, innocence, growth, development, and hope. Thus, the word “child” is not merely a nominative unit but an integral part of social consciousness. In Uzbek, synonyms such as farzand (offspring), yosh bola (young

child), go’dak (baby), nabira (grandchild), and avlod (generation) indicate the semantic richness of the concept, each carrying specific connotative meanings.

From a linguocultural standpoint, the child concept is a central element of national values. Centuries-old Uzbek traditions, oral literature, and rituals reveal a value system associated with the child. For example, proverbs and sayings like “Bola – uyga baraka” (A child brings blessings to the home), “Bola – yurak quvonchi” (A child is the joy of the heart), and “Bola – ota-onaning ko’zgusi” (A child is the mirror of parents) reflect the high regard for children in public consciousness. These expressions convey not only semantic meaning but also the emotional-cognitive composition of the national mentality. In Uzbek culture, a child is considered not only a continuation of the family but also a crucial link in the kinship system, making the concept a key indicator of social structure. From a cognitive-linguistic viewpoint, the child concept functions as a multi-layered mental model. This model includes the child’s physiological development, psychological characteristics, social status, future-oriented expectations, and educational values in a sequential structure. The concept is often understood through prototypes: for example, innocent child, timid child, troubled child, clever child, mischievous child—these prototypes emerge from societal experience and shape the mental image of a child.

Additionally, cognitive frames enrich the concept: a child is a being in need of protection, a child is the object of education, a child is the future bearer. These frames actively operate in linguocognitive processes. As noted by Lakoff and Johnson, concepts are mental structures that organize human knowledge about the world and are formed through metaphors, symbols, and associative fields. The child concept is associated with several fundamental conceptual domains:

Life and Continuity – The child represents biological and social continuity. In Uzbek culture, sayings like “Bola – davlat” (A child is the state) and “Bola – uyga baraka” emphasize this idea.

Protection and Needs – The child is conceptualized as a vulnerable being, hence many metaphors are related to weakness, tenderness, and innocence.

Future and Hope – The child embodies society’s tomorrow. In English, the phrase “children are the future of the nation” reflects this idea.

Innocence and Purity – The child is perceived as morally pure. In English, the expression childlike innocence is widely used.

These mental domains expand the semantic structure of the concept and shape its national and linguocultural specificities. Semantically, the word child is polysemous. It can refer to a younger generation literally and metaphorically: e.g., child of science, child of modern technologies, child of mother tongue—these metaphorical uses reflect initiative, innovation, future orientation, and development.

Linguoculturally, the child concept is closely tied to social life, moral norms, the stability of the family institution, and national values. In Uzbek culture, the birth of a child is a great joy, and traditional ceremonies such as the cradle celebration (*beshik to’yi*) and circumcision (*sunnat to’yi*) are important parts of the linguocultural landscape. In these contexts, the concept is expressed through modal units, blessings, prayers, praise, and comparisons. Idiomatic expressions such as “*ko’ngilning yayrog’i*” (the apple of one’s eye), “*ko’zning qarog’i*” (the pupil of the eye), and “*qo’ldan tutib yurguvchi avlod*” (generation guided by hand) reflect the emotional-expressive layer of the concept.

The child concept, as a key marker of national mentality, is valuable for comparative research across languages. In English, words like child, kid, infant, offspring, minor represent various semantic positions of the child concept. In English culture, the child is viewed more as an individual, independent person, emphasizing independence in psychological development and education. In Uzbek linguoculture,

however, the child is interpreted as an integral part of the family and the continuation of generations. Thus, while biologically universal, cultural cognition shapes the concept differently in each language.

In Uzbek, the child concept is associated with blessings (continuity of life), delicacy (need for protection), purity (moral integrity), and joy (bringing happiness to the household). In English, symbolic meanings include innocence, purity, vulnerability, and growth. While the Uzbek concept focuses more on socio-cultural aspects, the English concept is defined biologically, legally, and psychologically. For instance, “my child” refers to a biological child, “three children” to a group of children, and child protection carries legal significance.

In Uzbek, the child concept carries emotional, subjective, and culturally colored meanings. Phrases like *mening bolam* (my child) convey affection, *bola-chaqa* indicates multiple children with a warm family context, and *bola degan nozik bo’ladi* (a child is delicate) implies moral-emotional evaluation.

Comparative cognitive analysis shows similarities and differences. In English, the child is often treated as an independent subject, while in Uzbek, the child is primarily viewed as the center of family values. Uzbek traditions emphasize family as central, strong kinship ties, and socially regulated roles for children. While biologically universal, semantic layers, mental mapping, and linguocultural forms of the child concept differ significantly between Uzbek and English. In Uzbek, the child represents family blessing, continuity, and moral standards. In English, the child is evaluated as an independent person, with rights, development, and protection forming the main axes of the concept.

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