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The Lexical-Semantic Representation of Shame in English And Uzbek: A Cognitive and Linguocultural Perspective

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Abstract: This article examines the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek from the perspectives of cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics. The study treats shame not merely as a linguistic unit, but as a culturally embedded moral-emotional concept reflecting systems of value, social norms, and patterns of interpersonal evaluation. The research draws on componential analysis, contextual analysis, conceptual interpretation, and linguoculturological analysis to identify the semantic structure, phraseological realizations, metaphorical models, and pragmatic functions of shame-related lexemes in the two languages.

The findings indicate that English and Uzbek share a common conceptual core in representing shame as a negatively marked social emotion associated with moral transgression, social disapproval, and loss of esteem. At the same time, the two languages differ in the internal organization and cultural salience of the lexical-semantic field. In Uzbek, the field is more closely associated with collective values, family reputation, modesty, honor, and socially regulated conduct. In English, the field displays broader lexical differentiation across related emotional and ethical states such as shame, embarrassment, humiliation, and guilt, often foregrounding the individual's inner emotional and moral experience.

The study also demonstrates that shame is metaphorically represented in both languages through bodily, spatial, and evaluative imagery, although the cultural distribution and functional significance of these metaphors differ. These distinctions suggest that emotional concepts are shaped by both universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific patterns of meaning construction. The results contribute to comparative lexical semantics, intercultural communication, translation studies, and research in cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: Lexical-semantic field, shame, English, Uzbek, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, comparative semantics, emotional concepts.

Introduction: The study of lexical-semantic fields remains one of the productive approaches to understanding how language structures conceptual knowledge. In modern linguistics, especially within cognitive linguistics, semantics, and cultural linguistics, increasing attention has been paid to the verbalization of emotions and to the ways emotional concepts are differently structured across languages and cultures (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wierzbicka, 1999). Emotional vocabulary is particularly significant because it lies at the intersection of language, cognition, culture, and social practice.

Among moral-emotional concepts, shame occupies a special place due to its strong connection with normativity, public evaluation, and moral self-awareness. Shame may be understood both as an internal emotional experience and as a socially mediated response to actual or anticipated disapproval. For this reason, its linguistic realization provides valuable material for investigating the relationship between semantics and culture.

The relevance of the present study lies in the fact that

although the concept of shame is nearly universal as a human emotional experience, its lexical representation, semantic boundaries, and pragmatic functions vary across linguistic communities. A comparative analysis of English and Uzbek is especially meaningful because the two languages belong to different linguistic, historical, and cultural traditions and may therefore encode the emotional-moral domain in different ways.

The novelty of the study lies in its integrated analysis of the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek through the combined frameworks of lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, and cultural linguistics. Rather than focusing on a single lexeme, the article investigates a network of semantically related lexemes, phraseological expressions, and metaphorical models.

The aim of the study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the structural-semantic, cognitive, and pragmatic features of the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek and to identify both universal and culture-specific characteristics of this emotional concept.

The objectives of the study are:

1.   to identify the core and peripheral units of the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek;

2.   to analyze the semantic components of the principal lexemes related to shame in both languages;

3.   to compare phraseological units associated with shame;

4.   to identify major metaphorical models of shame in both languages;

5.   to examine the pragmatic functions of shame-related expressions in the two languages.

The material for the study includes explanatory and phraseological dictionaries of English and Uzbek, as well as examples of conventional language usage. In total, more than 350 lexical items and related units were examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The linguistic and cultural study of emotions has developed significantly over the past several decades. One of the foundational contributions in this field is the work of Wierzbicka (1999), who demonstrated that emotional concepts cannot be fully understood outside the cultural and semantic systems in which they are embedded. Her work shows that emotions, although universal in some respects, are lexicalized and conceptualized differently across languages.

The theory of cultural scripts, later elaborated by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2004), is particularly useful for the present study because it explains how language encodes culturally shared expectations about feeling, thinking, and behaving. From this perspective, emotional terms such as shame are not merely labels for inner states but indicators of broader cultural models.

Another important framework for the analysis of emotional vocabulary is conceptual metaphor theory. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that abstract concepts are often structured through metaphorical mappings grounded in bodily and spatial experience. This approach is especially relevant for understanding the metaphorical representation of shame through images of downward movement, bodily posture, weight, concealment, and exposure.

Apresyan (2006) emphasized the role of lexical systems in reflecting a language-specific worldview. His work supports the idea that lexical-semantic fields are culturally informative and that the internal organization of meaning can reveal socially significant conceptual distinctions. Similarly, Rosch's (1978) theory of categorization is relevant to the identification of central and peripheral members within semantic fields.

With regard to moral emotions, Benedict (1946) is often cited for her distinction between shame-oriented and guilt-oriented cultural models. Although this distinction has been debated and should not be treated as absolute, it remains important as an early attempt to connect emotional concepts with broader cultural structures.

In Uzbek linguistics, emotional and value-laden concepts have been discussed within broader studies of semantics, pragmatics, and the linguistic worldview. Mahmudov (2017), Mengliyev (2018), and Safarov (2013) provide useful theoretical perspectives on lexical meaning, discourse, and conceptual organization in Uzbek. However, direct comparative studies of the lexical-semantic field of uyat and its English equivalents remain relatively limited. This makes the present article a contribution to both comparative semantics and Uzbek-English linguocultural research.

METHODS

The research is based on a combination of descriptive, semantic, and interpretive methods.

Componential analysis was used to identify the semantic features constituting the meanings of the core and peripheral lexemes in the lexical-semantic field of shame.

Contextual analysis was employed to determine how shame-related lexemes function in discourse and how their meanings shift depending on communicative

context.

Conceptual analysis was applied in order to reconstruct the broader cognitive models underlying the lexical expression of shame.

Linguoculturological analysis made it possible to identify culturally marked meanings and to interpret the relation between emotional vocabulary and value systems in English- and Uzbek-speaking communities.

The theoretical basis of the study includes conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), cultural scripts theory (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004; Wierzbicka, 1999), the notion of the linguistic worldview (Apresyan, 2006), and prototype theory (Rosch, 1978). Taken together, these approaches allow shame to be analyzed not only as a lexical category but also as a culturally structured conceptual domain.

The empirical material of the article consists of explanatory and phraseological dictionaries of English and Uzbek, along with shame-related lexical and phraseological units selected for semantic comparison. More than 350 units were examined and grouped into core, near-core, and peripheral categories according to semantic proximity and functional relevance.

RESULTS

Structural organization of the lexical-semantic field

In English, the lexical-semantic field centered on shame includes the core lexeme shame and semantically adjacent items such as embarrassment, humiliation, mortification, disgrace, dishonor, ignominy, guilt, and remorse. Peripheral members include abashment, chagrin, compunction, contrition, degradation, discredit, infamy, and opprobrium.

In Uzbek, the lexical-semantic field centered on uyat includes the core lexeme uyat and such closely related units as nomus, or, sharm, hayo, ibo, and andisha. Peripheral members include sharmisorlik, isnod, or-nomus, nomussizlik, sharmandagarchilik, xijolat, gunoh, and pushaymon.

The comparison suggests that English lexicalizes a wider range of distinctions among neighboring emotional states, while Uzbek organizes shame-related meanings in a tighter network closely connected with moral decency, modesty, reputation, and communal evaluation. This should be understood as a difference in semantic distribution rather than as an indicator of lexical richness in an absolute sense.

Semantic components of the core lexemes

The componential analysis shows that the English lexeme shame typically contains the following semantic features:

• a negative emotion triggered by the violation

of social or moral norms;

• painful awareness of impropriety, inadequacy, or failure;

• loss of dignity, esteem, or self-respect;

• public exposure or social disapproval.

The Uzbek lexeme uyat includes related but somewhat differently weighted features:

• a negative emotion associated with the violation of social, moral, and in some contexts religious norms;

• concern about public judgment and social discredit;

• responsibility before family and community;

• a normative sense of modesty, decency, and self-restraint.

Thus, while the two lexemes overlap in their semantic core, uyat appears to retain a stronger regulative and socially prescriptive dimension than English shame.

Phraseological representation of shame

In English, phraseological expressions related to shame include:

• to put someone to shame;

• to hang one's head in shame;

• a crying shame;

• for shame!;

• to bring shame upon someone;

• shame on you!

In Uzbek, typical phraseological expressions include:

• uyatga qolmoq;

• yer yorilsa kirib ketgudek bo'lmoq;

• uyatdan yerga qaramoq;

• betiga qaray olmaslik;

• yuzini yerga qaratmoq.

The phraseological evidence indicates that both languages employ bodily and social imagery, but Uzbek expressions more often emphasize public exposure, social relations, and one's visible moral standing before others.

Metaphorical models of shame

The material reveals several recurrent metaphorical models shared by both languages.

First, shame is conceptualized as a burden or weight, something difficult to carry. Second, it is represented through downward spatial orientation, as seen in expressions involving lowered gaze or symbolic descent. Third, shame is connected with bodily imagery, especially the face, eyes, and head.

At the same time, Uzbek appears to preserve stronger links between shame and social visibility, face, communal reputation, and moral appearance. English metaphorical patterns more often foreground internal discomfort, self-evaluation, and personal moral injury.

Pragmatic functions of shame-related expressions

In English, shame-related expressions frequently function as markers of subjective emotional experience or moral judgment. Examples such as I feel ashamed, he has no shame, and shame on you may express regret, blame, censure, or awareness of moral failure.

In Uzbek, expressions containing uyat often function as mechanisms of social regulation. Phrases such as Uyat bo'ladi, Uyat emasmi?, and Uyaling! are widely used not only to name an emotion but also to discipline behavior, transmit norms, and evaluate conduct from the standpoint of the group.

This suggests that shame-related vocabulary in Uzbek has a particularly strong pedagogical and normative-pragmatic function.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirm that the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek includes both universal and culture-specific components. In both languages, shame is represented as a negatively evaluated social emotion connected with norm violation, diminished esteem, and moral or interpersonal evaluation. This shared core supports the view that shame is a broadly universal emotional category, although its lexical and discursive realization is culture-dependent (Wierzbicka, 1999).

The comparison also demonstrates meaningful differences in the internal organization of the field. English differentiates more explicitly among related states such as embarrassment, humiliation, guilt, and remorse, whereas Uzbek places uyat in a closer semantic relationship with nomus, or, hayo, and ibo, thereby integrating shame into a broader moral-cultural system. This finding is consistent with linguoculturological approaches that treat lexical meaning as culturally structured (Apresyan, 2006; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004).

The phraseological and pragmatic material further shows that shame in Uzbek is more overtly tied to family reputation, social observation, and communal discipline. In English, shame can likewise have a strong public and moral dimension, but it more frequently foregrounds inner emotional experience and personal self-assessment. This difference may be interpreted in light of broader distinctions between more collectively oriented and more individual-centered discourse traditions, though such generalizations must be made cautiously.

The metaphorical evidence supports the cognitive linguistic view that emotions are conceptualized through embodied and spatially structured schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). At the same time, the specific distribution of metaphors reflects language-specific priorities. In Uzbek, shame-related metaphorics appear to preserve stronger ties to visibility, face, modesty, and social positioning. In English, there is greater semantic differentiation between emotional discomfort, moral blame, and damaged dignity.

Overall, the findings show that lexical-semantic fields are not simply sets of synonyms but structured conceptual systems that embody cultural knowledge. The lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek reflects two distinct, though overlapping, ways of organizing emotional-moral experience.

CONCLUSION

The present study has shown that the lexical-semantic field of shame in English and Uzbek contains both universal and nationally specific features.

First, both languages conceptualize shame as a negative emotion related to social norms, moral transgression, and evaluation by others. This constitutes the shared semantic core of the field.

Second, the Uzbek lexical-semantic field centered on uyat is more strongly linked to collective values, modesty, family reputation, and communal expectations, whereas the English field centered on shame demonstrates greater lexical differentiation among adjacent emotional and ethical states.

Third, the phraseological and metaphorical evidence indicates that both languages conceptualize shame through bodily, spatial, and evaluative imagery, but the cultural weighting of these models differs.

Fourth, shame-related expressions in Uzbek perform especially salient pragmatic functions in social regulation and pedagogical discourse, while English shame expressions more often highlight personal feeling, moral introspection, and subjective experience.

Thus, the study confirms that emotional concepts are formed through the interaction of universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific models of meaning. This makes the comparative study of shame valuable not only for lexical semantics, but also for translation studies, intercultural communication, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis.

The practical significance of the research lies in the possible application of its findings to bilingual lexicography, foreign language teaching, translation practice, and the development of intercultural

communicative competence. Future research may extend this approach to other emotional concepts, such as joy, fear, and anger, in English, Uzbek, and other languages.

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