

Linguo-Cognitive Features of National-Cultural Concepts in Said Ahmad's Prose (Based on Short Stories and Novellas)

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Abstract: This article examines the linguo-cognitive features of short stories and novellas by the prominent Uzbek writer Said Ahmad, specifically focusing on the expression of national-cultural concepts in literary texts. The study reveals the cognitive interpretation and linguistic characteristics of concepts reflecting the national spirit, values, customs, and mentality in the writer's works. The author analyzes the formation of the conceptual space in the language of the literary work, as well as the role and aesthetic function of linguistic units in conveying conceptual content. The obtained results serve to be utilized in scientific research within the fields of the Uzbek literary language, linguoculturology, and cognitive linguistics.

Keywords: Linguo-cognitive features, national-cultural concept, short story, novella, literary text.

Introduction: In contemporary world linguistics, an anthropocentric approach holds a priority position, and studies aimed at investigating the interrelation between language and thought, language and culture, remain among the most urgent tasks. In particular, the linguo-cognitive direction arising at the intersection of cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology allows a literary text to be studied as a unique mirror of national-cultural memory, mentality, and national thinking. The immortal values, worldview, and national character of every nation are vividly manifested in its literary language, specifically within the system of concepts in literary works. Therefore, studying the creative heritage of the prominent representative of Uzbek literature, Said Ahmad, from a linguo-cognitive aspect is of both theoretical and practical significance.

METHODS

Since the concept is an abstract phenomenon, we evaluate it not as a tangible unit with a material manifestation, but as a collection of meanings generated through our consciousness and thinking. In

this regard, M. Rahmatova states: "As the knowledge accumulated in the course of human activity is reflected in their consciousness, such a mental representation is a reflection of national-cultural activity" [1: 13]. However, we must not forget that although the term "concept" can be placed alongside phenomena such as "meaning" and "notion", they are not identical, and it is necessary to distinguish their general and differing aspects. Addressing this issue, linguist Sh. Safarov notes: "To date, these questions have not received a complete answer, and its realization is doubtful. There are, of course, reasons for this doubt. First of all, it should be remembered that the concept is an extremely abstract phenomenon, and the 'mental structure' behind it has no material form, but rather represents a structure in imagination formed through mental cognitive processes. Moreover, the term 'concept' stands side by side with other mental phenomena such as 'notion', 'meaning', and 'content', which gives rise to the problem of determining their mutual relationship and separating their distinctive features" [2: 185–188]. Continuing his

thoughts, the scholar remarks: "Is it possible to use the term 'notion', which is the product of logical activity, and 'concept', which is widely used in cognitive linguistics, in the same sense? Undoubtedly, both phenomena manifest themselves as units of thought. The starting point for both is connected with the sensory perception and figurative conceptualization of an object or phenomenon in reality" [3: 13].

Cognitive linguistics is a science that studies the essence of a certain concept in the linguistic picture of the world and its connection with world realities. A concept is one of the main categories of cognitive linguistics, serving as an element establishing a connection between culture and humans. The term "concept" has been used in linguistics since the 1990s. The notion of a concept still lacks a single unified definition or interpretation. One of the most prominent scholars in the study of concepts is S. A. Askoldov, who defined a concept as: "A unit that reflects the process of thinking about one or another type of notions" [4: 251].

This study relies on the general scientific principles of analyzing a literary text from linguo-cognitive and linguoculturological perspectives. An anthropocentric approach is utilized to study language units in deep connection with human thought, national mentality, and worldview based on the "language – human – culture" triad. A linguoculturological approach serves as the basis for investigating the connection of linguistic units with national-cultural content, customs, values, and folk stereotypes. While the linguo-cognitive analysis method is used to determine the conceptual sphere (the system of concepts) of the author and the people through linguistic units in the language of the literary work and to elucidate the mechanisms of their formation and transformation, conceptual analysis serves to reveal the core supporting concepts in the text (kinship, conscience, loyalty, devotion) within the framework of their prototypical images, emotional-affective layers, and conceptual fields.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The "Kinship" concept: In 20th-century Uzbek literature, Said Ahmad, as a writer who deeply and artistically analyzed humanity, conscience, kinship ties, and socio-ethical changes in society, vividly revealed the peculiarities inherent in our national mentality. The

writer's short story "The Crows Left from Winter" is one of the sharp works built on the conflict of the Uzbek lifestyle, kinship relations, and human values.

The center of the story depicts how someone who suffered materially and spiritually during student years and received no help from close relatives, upon achieving a high official position years later, is suddenly sought out by those same "unforgettable" relatives who expect assistance and pursue personal interests. Through this plot, the writer brings to light deep national-cultural concepts in Uzbek society. In the Uzbek national mentality, the cognitive concepts of "kinship" and "clan affiliation" initially rely on stable associations (mental images) of primordial sacredness, mutual assistance, and the established maxim: "Blood relatives are together in both joy and disaster". Lexemes such as amma (paternal aunt), xola (maternal aunt), and tog'a (maternal uncle) in our language are not merely words denoting degrees of kinship, but linguocultural units expressing spiritual layers such as respect, kindness, and trust in the Uzbek consciousness.

However, in Said Ahmad's story, this concept undergoes inversion (its reverse state). By utilizing the words "clans" and "uncle" in a utilitarian (purely interest-driven) context, the writer generates an entire negative cognitive layer in the reader's consciousness. Specifically, the protagonist's attainment of a high position followed by the sudden appearance of relatives—who offered no help in the past—demanding that their son be placed in a job leads to a semantic shift of lexical units in the language. Phrases in the text such as "get me the Eski Shahar bazaar" [5: 130] allow the author to expose certain vices in Uzbek society—namely, the negative cognitive stereotypes of using kinship ties for personal gain. This serves as the linguistic manifestation of the deformation of sacred concepts in our national consciousness under the influence of material interests.

The metaphorical image introduced in the title of the story—the stamp of "crows left from winter" [5: 125]—possesses a sharp satirical coloring in the lexicon of the Uzbek language. This metaphor exposes the opportunistic stratum that disappears during the freezing winter of scarcity or hardship, but instantly reappears once spring arrives (i.e., when someone attains a position or opportunity). Here, cognitive

metonymia and metaphor combine to draw a psychological portrait of seasonal and opportunistic individuals in our national consciousness.

Furthermore, the pragmatic function of the proverb "Sulton suyagini xo'rlamas" (A ruler does not mistreat his own kin/bone) [5: 130] in the work is precisely aimed at revealing this vice from its very roots. Originally a noble folk principle meaning to support relatives in difficult times and be a pillar for one another, in the story this principle is transformed by soulless individuals into a mask—a means to justify nepotism, regionalism, and bribery. As a result, the sacred value is abused, and the concepts in circulation lose their original function.

Such semantic shifts arising in a literary text demonstrate that language units are not static; rather, they possess a dynamic character that changes under the influence of social environment, time, and personal interests. Through this satirical portrayal, the author uncovers negative cognitive stereotypes in Uzbek society—the exploitation of kinship ties for personal and material gain. This is the vivid linguistic and artistic expression of how sacred concepts in our national consciousness undergo negative transformation under the influence of conjunctural motives and pride.

The "Conscience" concept: In Said Ahmad's novella "The Trial", the concept of "conscience" forms the central philosophical and ethical axis of the work. In the Uzbek national mentality and linguistic consciousness, the concepts of "conscience" (vijdon) and "fairness/remorse" (insof) act as an internal spiritual regulator that stands higher than external legal laws, functioning as a specific internal court. Alongside the external formal trial, the conceptual field of the "internal trial" taking place in the protagonist's consciousness plays a leading role in the novella. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the experiences of the protagonist after committing a theft generate an internal moral conflict in his mind. In excerpts from the story such as, "Suddenly Satan entered my heart... With strange agility, I took the briefcase and ran at full speed toward the bedroom" [5: 6], action-denoting lexemes ("surrounded", "ran") vividly reflect the cognitive state of fear and haste in human consciousness.

The torment of conscience being stronger than physical punishments is revealed through the following

conceptual layers in the language:

- **Conceptual spatial constriction (loss of peace):** For a person tormented by conscience, the external world shrinks, and they find no place to hide even in their own home, feeling like a stranger. Through the nightmare episode in the novella ("threw it out the window... it turned out to be a briefcase full of money"), the materialization of subconscious images through language is observed.

- **Conceptual division of roles (self-trial):** Unlike an external trial, in the court of conscience the human mind simultaneously performs three cognitive roles (prosecutor, judge, defendant). Questions such as "Who am I really? What am I? Am I even a human being?" [5: 27] demonstrate the process of the protagonist's re-evaluation of his "Ego", i.e., the crisis of the linguistic personality.

Additionally, the natural landscape in Said Ahmad's novella—the "scorching heat of July"—does not merely serve as a background, but functions as a cognitive metaphor. The extreme high temperature in the external environment becomes the linguistic and artistic equivalent of the psychological overheating, torment, and fire of conscience in the protagonist's mind. While one can escape from the midday heat in nature by finding shade, the linguistic and figurative mastery of the work shows that a human being can never escape from their inner voice—the concept of conscience.

The "Loyalty" concept: The concept of "loyalty" in Said Ahmad's short story "Qorako'z Majnun" (Qorako'z the Mad/Devoted) possesses deep and specific dichotomous features in Uzbek linguoculturology and cognitive linguistics. From a cognitive standpoint, any concept encompasses the prototypical image, emotional-affective layer, and evaluative components of a given notion in our consciousness. The center of the story features Saodat momo's dog named Qorako'z. The dog is so deeply attached to its owner and her memory that it remains loyal even in a situation where everyone else has abandoned or forgotten her. "Qorako'z whimpered as if hearing the voice of its beloved person whom it had lost for nearly two months... It barked and barked toward the upper floor... The voice of the old woman was coming from the cassette player." [6] Through this image, the writer

demonstrates what a powerful force true loyalty is. Because Qorako'z's loyalty and devotion to its owner reached the level of symbolic "madness" (*majnunlik*), the story is titled accordingly. From a *linguo-cognitive* perspective, the writer portrays ultimate loyalty not in a human, but precisely in the image of an animal.

The lexeme "Qorako'z" in the context of the work does not merely denote an animal's name, but transforms into a cognitive metaphor for "absolute loyalty", "fidelity", and "painful loyalty". Through companionship with the lonely old woman and its behavior following her death, the semantic volume of the concept of "faithfulness" expands further. "When I was in the hospital, this very dog lay by the window in the yard, pressing its chest against the snow." [6] In the story, the concept of "loyalty" is revealed through the method of inversion (polarity/reversal). As the antipode of the concept of loyalty, one can take the old woman's son, Bo'rixon. He embodies the cognitive image of disloyalty in the story. Through the image of a child who has forgotten his native language, soil, faith, and mother, the concepts of alienation, unworthiness, and disloyalty—alien to the Uzbek consciousness—are formed. This change occurring in language and behavior demonstrates the fracturing of primordial values in the consciousness. "After completing his military service, Bo'rixon did not return home... In the late autumn of 1970, a Muslim child apostatized from his faith." [6] In cognitive linguistics, concepts always possess emotional evaluation. In Said Ahmad's story, the concepts of "loyalty" and "disloyalty" evoke strong feelings of pity, anger, and empathy in the reader. Where the stereotype of "filial obligation to a mother" in the Uzbek consciousness is violated, the acute tragic facet of the concept is revealed through linguistic units (for example, the metaphorical application of the word "*majnun*" to a dog). While "*majnun*" denotes one who has lost their mind in love and devotion, here Qorako'z being called by this name due to its infinite love and loyalty to its owner further intensifies the conceptual semantics.

The "Devotion" concept: Said Ahmad's short story "O'rik Domla" (Teacher O'rik) is a rich *linguo-cognitive* source revealing the national mentality, customs, professional devotion, and character traits of the Uzbek people. Every image and detail in the story forms a distinctive conceptual field in the Uzbek linguistic

consciousness.

In the Uzbek linguistic consciousness, the concept of "devotion" or "love for one's profession" is generally characterized by dedicating one's entire being to work and seeking spiritual satisfaction rather than material gain from it. In the image of Teacher O'rik in the story, this concept reaches its absolute peak.

In revealing the teacher's character, the author uses fixed expressions and phraseological units such as "knows nothing besides apricots" [5: 38], "apricot fanatic" [5: 39], "wouldn't spare even his own father when it comes to apricots". The lexeme "apricot" moves beyond a simple fruit name in the story to become a cognitive metaphor for "fascination, idea, meaning of life". His collection of apricot stones from abroad and his state of shock upon discovering that his daughter-in-law cracked and ate a bag of those stones are linguistic expressions of the excessively devoted (sometimes exaggerated) attitude toward one's work in the Uzbek consciousness.

In Uzbek oral folk art and national character, there exists the stereotype of viewing individuals who are deeply engrossed in their work—yet whose passions might appear somewhat "eccentric" or "talkative" to others—with warm humor. The teacher's language and speech activity are revealed through linguistic details such as "speaks for two hours without drinking water", "The homeland of Qantak apricot is Rishton..." [5: 42]. Rather than carrying a negative meaning, the word "talkativeness" (*ezmalik*) acquires an emotional-expressive layer denoting a devoted person's infinite immersion in their beloved work.

In the consciousness of the Uzbek people, the concepts of "land", "water", and "creating a garden" have long been associated with immense religious merit (*savob*), prosperity, and the philosophy of life. In the figures of the Desert Eagle and Teacher O'rik, this concept manifests in the spirit of the new era—reclaiming the desert and breathing life into it during the Soviet period.

In the passages depicting desert landscapes ("No snow is visible on the flat-as-the-palm lands... an elderly man of about sixty wearing glasses rode up on a bicycle") [6: 40–41], the concepts of movement and time intertwine. The teacher's description of saplings as being in a "deep sleep" and his treatment of nature as

a living creature represent a unique manifestation of the concept of living in harmony with nature in our linguistic consciousness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the short stories and novellas of the prominent Uzbek writer Said Ahmad serve as a rich linguo-cognitive source uncovering the specific facets of the national mentality, ethico-aesthetic values, and linguistic consciousness of the Uzbek people. The analysis of the writer's works in minor epic genres demonstrates that a literary text is not merely a narration of events, but a field of formation, transformation, and aesthetic manifestation of a system of national-cultural concepts.

The linguo-cognitive features of national-cultural concepts such as "kinship", "conscience", "loyalty", and "devotion" examined within the scope of the study allowed for the following important conclusions:

- Said Ahmad revealed national-cultural concepts not only in their traditional, positive sense, but also deeply through their reverse (inverted) states. Specifically, the abuse of the "kinship" concept for utilitarian (purely self-interested) purposes (exemplified in the story "The Crows Left from Winter") served to expose vices and negative cognitive stereotypes in society. This confirms that language units possess a dynamic, changeable character under the influence of the social environment.
- The "conscience" concept (in the novella "The Trial") was illuminated through internal trial, moral crisis, and spatial-psychological constriction processes in the human mind rather than external legal norms. The writer linguistically substantiated that the torment of conscience is stronger than physical punishments through the use of metaphorical images, movement, and natural landscapes (the scorching heat of July).
- Through the concepts of "loyalty" and its antipode "disloyalty" (in the story "Qorako'z Majnun"), the study revealed the pinnacle of loyalty in human-nature (animal) relations, as well as the tragedy of alienation sometimes occurring in human relations. The emotional-expressive coloring of linguistic units (the metaphorical application of the word "majnun" to a dog) evokes strong empathy and emotional impact in the reader.
- The concepts of "devotion" and "love for one's

profession" manifested in the story "O'rik Domla" demonstrate the boundless dedication of the Uzbek people to the land, nature, and their work. Phraseological units and folk expressions appear as linguocultural units vividly reflecting character traits inherent in the national mentality.

Overall, investigating Said Ahmad's prose from a linguo-cognitive aspect demonstrated how rich and diverse the writer's conceptual sphere is. The obtained scientific results and analyses will serve as an important theoretical and methodological basis for future research in the fields of the Uzbek literary language, linguoculturology, cognitive linguistics, and the theory of literary translation.

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