

Linguocultural Characteristics Of The “Bread” Cultureme In Uzbek National Traditions

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Abstract: This article explores the linguocultural features of the Uzbek people's national culture, customs, rituals, and traditions associated with the concept of “bread.” Preserved throughout centuries and functioning as a distinguishing marker of Uzbek ethnoculture, the “bread” cultureme emerges as a symbol, model, and stereotype within national customs and practices. The study demonstrates how this concept operates as a linguistic and cultural constant and reflects broader sociocultural values deeply embedded in collective consciousness.

Keywords: Custom, ritual, tradition, symbol, model, culture, cultureme, linguoculture.

Introduction: National traditions represent a system of inherited concepts, signs, values, behavioral practices, and characteristic features that are transmitted intergenerationally within a specific ethnocultural group. While rooted in universal human traditions, these practices attain unique expression within the cultural matrix of each nation. Through them, specific historical achievements in fields such as lifestyle, science, literature, and art are conveyed to future generations. Although practices such as hospitality are common across cultures, their expression in Uzbek society differs significantly from, for example, Russian, Georgian, or British customs.

Traditions serve a unifying function within a nation and act as vehicles for cultural continuity. Regardless of social origin, individuals participate in traditional practices, thereby reinforcing cultural identity. The erosion of traditions often signals broader cultural decline. Therefore, preserving traditions is vital for maintaining national identity and heritage.

Theoretical Background:

A tradition is defined as a culturally significant phenomenon shaped by historical evolution and socio-natural necessity. It is a set of collectively internalized norms and rules that influence the everyday life and worldview of a community. The notion of custom (urf-odat) encompasses a broader semantic field, including daily routines, rituals, superstitions, interpersonal etiquette, and ceremonial events. In contrast, ritual

(marosim) refers more narrowly to codified symbolic acts conducted for communal or individual purposes, often reflecting spiritual or material needs.

Central to many Uzbek customs and rituals is the cultural-linguistic concept (cultureme) of “bread” (non). As a cultural constant, it is consistently present in both language and tradition, symbolizing sustenance, sanctity, and social cohesion. Below are examples of how this cultureme is manifested across various contexts.

Empirical Observations:

Bread must not be placed on the ground.

If bread accidentally falls, it is promptly picked up, kissed, and touched to the forehead, indicating profound respect. In some regions, placing bread on the ground is viewed as a harbinger of misfortune.

Bread is traditionally broken, not cut.

In some areas, cutting bread with a knife is discouraged, as it symbolizes severing one's fortune. Breaking bread by hand is considered respectful, particularly when performed by the young with the permission of elders.

Fotiha Bread (Blessing Bread)

Prior to important social gatherings (e.g., weddings, circumcisions, memorials), it is customary to recite a prayer and break bread. This symbolic act, known as fotiha non, is meant to bless the event. The practice also plays a central role in engagement ceremonies,

representing mutual consent and hopes for marital harmony.

Invocational use of bread

In cases where a guest is delayed or someone departs for a journey, a piece of bread is used in a supplicatory ritual: "I place this on the bread, may they return safely." This reflects deeply ingrained values of hospitality and concern for loved ones.

Reverence for bread fragments

Even the smallest piece of bread is not discarded. Crumbs are either set aside respectfully or offered to birds, underscoring the sacredness attributed to bread.

Bread and salt offered to a bride

Upon entering her new household, a bride is given bread and salt as symbols of abundance, fidelity, and peace. In various regions, bread is placed under her feet or held above her head to invoke blessings.

Bread and travel

Bread may accompany travelers as a symbol of sustenance. In some regions, a traveler bites a loaf before departure, and the untouched loaf is preserved until their safe return, symbolizing a bond with home and continued fortune.

Bread and salt at the inaugural feast

When moving into a new home or hosting guests for the first time, bread and salt are placed at the table to signify prosperity and harmony.

Oaths sworn upon bread

In serious matters, people swear on bread, indicating the sanctity and unbreakability of their promise. The phrase "in the name of bread" (non haqqi) signifies the solemnity of the oath.

Results and Discussions

Bread in funerary and commemorative rites

Special bread, called ehson non, is distributed at funerals and memorial services. This act, often accompanied by sweeteners and dried fruits, is intended to honor the deceased and invoke blessings upon their soul.

Bread must not be placed upside down

Placing bread with its bottom facing upward is considered disrespectful. Additionally, no other food is placed atop bread. Bread is always positioned prominently and respectfully on the table.

No meal without bread

A table without bread is considered bereft of blessings. Bread is always presented with the face side up and in pairs, reflecting its centrality to the meal.

Bread must not be wasted

Discarding or playing with bread is deemed sinful. Leftover bread is preserved and never thrown away, reinforcing a cultural ethic of resourcefulness and gratitude.

Encountering bread on the street

If bread is found on the ground, it is picked up, cleaned, kissed, and placed in a high or safe location — a gesture of respect.

Child's first steps

When a child begins to walk, seven loaves are baked and placed along their walking path. These loaves, along with sweets, are distributed to seven neighboring households, symbolizing hopes for a prosperous and blessed life.

Births and symbolic ages

Upon the birth of a child or attainment of a symbolic age (e.g., 12, 24), seven loaves are baked and shared with relatives and neighbors. This ritual is performed to invoke longevity and communal respect for the individual.

CONCLUSION

The "bread" culture operates as a multidimensional cultural universal within Uzbek society, serving as a symbol, model, and stereotype across various social contexts. Its prevalence illustrates a unique national-psychological lacuna — a concept or practice inherent to one culture yet absent in another — highlighting the distinctiveness of Uzbek linguoculture. Adherence to cultural ecology — the safeguarding and intergenerational transmission of spiritual and material values — is a civic responsibility for ensuring the continuity of national identity.

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