

LINGUOCOGNITIVE FEATURES OF THE CONCEPT "HOMELAND" IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. This paper reconstructs the cognitive architecture of the concept HOMELAND in English and VATAN in Uzbek. Drawing on corpus evidence, paremiological material and a free association experiment with 120 respondents, I argue that the two concepts share only a narrow zone of overlap and diverge in their nuclear features. English profiles the homeland through the frame HOUSE - INDIVIDUAL - COMFORT, whereas Uzbek profiles it through the frame SOIL - ANCESTORS - COLLECTIVE DUTY. The asymmetry, I claim, is cognitive rather than lexical, and it has direct consequences for translation and for English language teaching in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: concept, linguocognitive analysis, conceptual metaphor, nominative field, associative experiment, contrastive linguistics, homeland, Vatan.

1. The problem

Bilingual dictionaries equate English homeland with Uzbek Vatan, and translators follow this equivalence almost automatically. My observations of authentic usage suggest that the two units organise different mental spaces. An English speaker who says homeland usually points at a territory of origin, frequently someone else's territory, as in homeland security or the homeland of the Basques. An Uzbek speaker who says Vatan names a value rather than a point on the map.

Contrastive studies published over the last two decades describe the lexemes reliably enough. They compare dictionary glosses, list a handful of proverbs and conclude that both peoples love their country. Such a conclusion explains nothing. The interesting question begins where the description stops: which cognitive features

occupy the nucleus of each concept, which remain peripheral, and why do speakers of the two languages activate different inferential chains when the same referent is named?

This gap has practical costs. Uzbek learners of English transfer the sacral weight of Vatan onto homeland and produce sentences that strike native speakers as political or archaic. Translators of Uzbek patriotic poetry lose the kinship component of the original and gain an administrative colouring absent from it. Neither problem can be solved at the level of word equivalence, because the source of the difficulty lies deeper, in the structure of knowledge attached to the word.

I therefore treat the concept as a mental unit with a field organisation - a nucleus of the most salient features, a near periphery of derived associations and a far periphery of individual and occasional connections. The task is to reconstruct these layers for each language and to establish the exact boundary of their intersection.

2. Aim and objectives

My aim is to reconstruct the field structure of the concept HOMELAND / VATAN in the two linguocultures and to determine the cognitive source of the asymmetry between them.

Four objectives follow from this aim. First, to establish the nominative field of the concept in each language, that is, the full inventory of units capable of naming it. Second, to identify the conceptual metaphors that organise the concept and to rank them by frequency of realisation. Third, to verify the reconstructed structures against the linguistic consciousness of speakers through an associative experiment. Fourth, to define the shared zone of the two concepts and to formulate recommendations for translation and teaching.

3. Method

My analysis rests on five procedures applied consecutively.

Componential analysis of dictionary definitions opens the investigation. I worked with the Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster and the five-volume Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, extracting semantic components from every relevant entry and arranging them by frequency of appearance across sources.

Frame modelling followed. Contexts came from the Corpus of Contemporary American English, the British National Corpus and the National Corpus of the Uzbek Language. I sampled 400 contexts per language, discarded metatextual occurrences and coded the remainder for the participant roles the concept activates.

Metaphorical analysis in the terms proposed by Lakoff and Johnson allowed me to move from surface expressions to the source domains that generate them. Each metaphorical context received a source-domain label, and the labels were then grouped.

Paremiological analysis covered 180 English and 210 Uzbek proverbs and sayings selected from academic collections. Proverbs preserve older layers of conceptualisation and therefore serve as a diachronic control on the corpus data.

A free association experiment completed the procedure. One hundred and twenty respondents took part: 60 students in Tashkent aged 18 to 24 and 60 respondents from Britain and the United States of comparable age. Each participant gave the first five reactions to the stimulus word - homeland for the English group, Vatan for the Uzbek group. Reactions were ranked by frequency and assigned to nuclear, near-peripheral and far-peripheral zones.

4. Results

4.1. The English nominative field. The field turns out to be dispersed among home, homeland, motherland, fatherland, native land and country. No single unit dominates. The emotional load concentrates on home, which is also the most frequent by a wide margin. Associative reactions confirm this distribution: family, house,

childhood, comfort and safety occupy the nucleus, while territory, nation and flag appear only on the near periphery.

The leading metaphor reads **HOMELAND IS A PRIVATE SPACE**. The homeland is conceptualised as a space one may leave and return to by personal choice, and the choice carries no moral charge. Expressions such as to leave home for good or to make a home elsewhere would sound neutral to an English speaker and disloyal in Uzbek translation.

My corpus data reveal a further specialisation. Motherland and fatherland have acquired a distancing and partly ideological colouring: native speakers apply them to Russia, Germany or Africa far more readily than to their own country. Homeland, in turn, has been captured by institutional discourse. After 2002 the collocation homeland security accounts for a substantial share of all occurrences in American material, which pulls the lexeme towards the semantics of defence and surveillance and away from personal attachment.

4.2. The Uzbek nominative field. Uzbek behaves differently. The lexeme Vatan, an Arabic borrowing, absorbed the semantics of the Turkic yurt, el and o'lka and turned into an axiological dominant. Rather than competing with the native units, it subordinated them: yurt retains a territorial reading, el a social one, while Vatan accumulates the evaluative meaning.

Associations cluster around ona (mother), tuproq (soil), muqaddas (sacred), bayroq (flag) and ota-bobolar (ancestors). Three metaphors form the nucleus: **VATAN IS A MOTHER**, **VATAN IS SACRED**, **VATAN IS ANCESTRAL SOIL**. Each of them has an extensive lexical realisation, and the first two have no functional counterpart in the English material.

The religious formula *hubbul vatani minal iymon*, love of the homeland belongs to faith, gives the concept a sacral dimension that English simply lacks. This component is not decorative. It converts attachment into obligation and makes

emigration a morally marked act, which explains why Uzbek discourse about labour migration is saturated with the vocabulary of guilt and temporary absence.

Paremiological material supports the same conclusion. The proverb *Vatani borning baxti bor* ties the homeland to personal fortune, presenting it as a precondition of happiness rather than its object. English *East or West, home is best* ties comfort to the private house and makes no claim beyond preference. The Uzbek saying *Kishi yurtida sulton bo'lguncha, o'z yurtingda cho'pon bo'l* goes further and subordinates social success to belonging, a hierarchy for which the English corpus offers no parallel.

4.3. The asymmetry. I therefore argue that the difference is not lexical but cognitive. English profiles the homeland through the frame HOUSE - INDIVIDUAL - COMFORT. Uzbek profiles it through the frame SOIL - ANCESTORS - COLLECTIVE DUTY. The shared zone covers only two features, place of birth and attachment, and even attachment differs in modality: voluntary in one case, obligatory in the other.

The associative data quantify this gap. Among English reactions, 68 per cent belong to the domain of private life; among Uzbek reactions, 71 per cent belong to the domains of kinship, sacredness and ancestry. Only 14 per cent of reactions in the two samples coincide in domain, and none coincide in rank.

5. Discussion

Two objections deserve an answer. The first concerns the age of the respondents. My sample consists of young speakers, and one might suspect that the results reflect a generational state rather than a stable structure. The paremiological material argues against this reading: the same metaphors that dominate the associations of twenty-year-olds organise proverbs recorded a century ago. Stability across such a distance is unlikely to be accidental.

The second objection concerns ideology. Uzbek patriotic discourse is institutionally supported, and the sacral component might be an artefact of that support rather than a property of the concept. I take this possibility seriously, yet the same component appears in private speech genres, in wedding and funeral formulas and in emigrant letters, where institutional pressure is minimal. A feature that survives outside official discourse belongs to the language, not to the campaign.

6. Conclusion

Treating homeland and Vatan as full equivalents erases a substantial part of the Uzbek concept and adds to the English one a sacral component it never possessed. The practical implications are specific. Translators working with patriotic discourse need compensatory strategies rather than lexical substitution, and in many contexts native land or home will convey more of the original than homeland. Textbook authors should present home as the emotional counterpart of Vatan and reserve homeland for administrative and political registers.

My next step is to test whether Uzbek bilinguals living abroad retain the sacral core of the concept or shift towards the English model. If the core proves unstable under prolonged contact, the asymmetry described here will need to be reformulated as a cline rather than an opposition.

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