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CONCEPTUAL SIMILARITIES OF THE FAMILY IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH CULTURES

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Annotation

The article is devoted to the comparative study of the concept of *family* in Uzbek and English linguocultures. Unlike most works in this field, which concentrate on the differences between a collectivist, extended-family-oriented society and an individualist, nuclear-family-oriented one, the present paper focuses on the common conceptual core shared by the two cultures. The material of the research includes kinship terminology, proverbs and set expressions, as well as data from ethnographic and linguocultural studies; the methods applied are comparative, descriptive and conceptual analysis. The author shows that, despite the well-known difference in the volume of the concepts *oila* and *family* and in the degree of detail of kinship terms, both cultures interpret the family as the basic unit of society, as the primary source of moral upbringing and as a system of mutual obligations. Both languages use kinship terms as a model of warm social relations towards non-relatives and apply the word *family* metaphorically to non-kin communities. The paper also traces tendencies of partial convergence caused by urbanisation, migration and economic factors. The results may be of practical use in teaching English in Uzbekistan and in intercultural communication.

Key words: concept, family, *oila*, linguoculturology, conceptual analysis, kinship terminology, proverbs, cultural values, extended family, nuclear family, intercultural communication, Uzbek and English cultures.

Introduction: Family is one of those words that seems simple until we try to define it. Every language has a word for it, and every culture builds a large part of its social life around it, but the content of the notion is never exactly the same in two societies. The present paper looks at the concept of family in Uzbek and English cultures, with the main attention paid to the features that the two cultures share rather than to what separates them.

The choice of these two cultures is not accidental. Uzbek and English speaking communities belong to different language families, different religious traditions and different historical experiences. Uzbek culture is usually described as collectivist, Muslim in its background and strongly oriented towards the extended family, while English culture, especially in Britain and the United States, is normally characterised as individualist and nuclear in its family

structure. Because of this contrast, researchers often concentrate on the differences and leave the similarities in the shadow. Yet a closer look shows that many basic ideas connected with family — protection, upbringing of children, respect for parents, moral responsibility of relatives to each other — are present in both cultures, though they are expressed in different forms and with different intensity.

The aim of the work is therefore to compare the concept of family in Uzbek and English cultures and to show which components of this concept are common for both. The material of the analysis includes kinship terminology, proverbs and set expressions, and observations described in ethnographic and linguocultural literature. The method used here is mainly comparative and descriptive, with some elements of conceptual analysis.

1. Family as a cultural concept

In modern linguistics and cultural studies, a concept is understood not simply as a dictionary meaning but as a mental unit that keeps in itself knowledge, evaluation and emotional attitude of a certain community towards a certain object (Wierzbicka, 1997). From this point of view the word family in English and the word oila in Uzbek are not full

equivalents, even if bilingual dictionaries present them as such. They cover different circles of people and they call up different associations.

For an English speaker the word family in its most usual, unmarked sense means parents and their children living in one household. Relatives outside this circle are usually named separately as relatives, the extended family, or simply my mother's side. The Uzbek oila in everyday speech may also mean a married couple with children, but the word is regularly extended to grandparents, uncles, aunts and their children who are considered as belonging to the same urug' or lineage. In many Uzbek families, particularly in rural areas, several generations live in one house or in one yard, and the youngest son traditionally stays with the parents and inherits the family home.

However, this well known difference should not hide the fact that the core of the concept is identical. In both cultures the family is presented as the smallest and the most important unit of society, as a place of safety, and as the main institution where a person receives his or her first moral education. English says charity begins at home and blood is thicker than water; Uzbek says Oila — jamiyatning kichik bo'lagi ("the family is a small part of society") and Qon tortadi ("blood pulls"). The idea behind these expressions is the same: relatives have obligations to each other which do not need to be explained or negotiated.

2. Kinship terminology

The system of kinship terms is one of the clearest ways of seeing how a culture organises family relations. English kinship terminology is comparatively economical. It distinguishes generation and gender but usually ignores relative age and the side of the family: brother, sister, uncle, aunt, cousin, grandfather. The word cousin is especially remarkable, because it covers a very large group of relatives without indicating their gender, age or line of descent.

Uzbek terminology is much more detailed. It obligatorily marks relative age: aka (elder brother) and uka (younger brother), opa (elder sister) and singil (younger sister). It also marks the paternal and maternal line: amaki (father's brother) and tog'a (mother's brother), amma (father's sister) and xola (mother's sister), bobo and buvi with further specification when needed. Terms such as kelin (daughter-in-law), kuyov (son-in-law), qaynona and qaynota are used very actively in everyday communication, and they carry clear social roles, not only a designation of relationship.

At first sight the two systems look completely opposite. Nevertheless, several important similarities can be observed. First, both systems are built on the same basic oppositions: generation, gender, and the line of descent, even if English leaves the last one

unexpressed in many cases. Second, both languages have a group of address forms which are used towards non-relatives: an Uzbek speaker calls an older stranger aka, opa, amaki or buvi, and English speakers use auntie, uncle, nan or granddad for close family friends and neighbours. This means that in both cultures kinship terms serve as a model of warm and respectful social relations in general. Third, both languages use the word family metaphorically for nonkin groups: a team, a company or a religious community can be described as one big family in English, and the Uzbek expression bir oiladek is used in exactly the same way.

3. Shared values connected with the family

The most convincing evidence of similarity is found on the level of values.

Respect for parents. In Uzbek culture respect for parents has a religious basis and is expressed in numerous proverbs, for example Ota rozi — Xudo rozi ("if the father is pleased,

God is pleased"). English culture has moved in a more secular direction, but the commandment honour thy father and thy mother is a part of its cultural memory too, and expressions like she's been a wonderful mother to them show that parenthood is still highly evaluated. In both cultures

neglecting one's parents is considered shameful, though the practical understanding of care may differ: in England placing an elderly parent in a care home is normal, in Uzbekistan it is still perceived by most people as a failure of the children.

Hospitality and the family home. Both cultures connect the family with the house and both give the house a symbolic meaning. An Englishman's home is his castle stresses privacy and independence, while the Uzbek tradition of mehmondo'stlik stresses openness to guests. These look like opposite ideas, but they have one common element — the home is a moral space which the family owns and controls, and behaviour inside it reflects the honour of the whole family.

Upbringing of children. In both cultures parents are held responsible for the moral qualities of their children. English says like father, like son and the apple doesn't fall far from the tree; Uzbek says Olma daraxtidan uzoqqa tushmaydi, which is practically a word for word equivalent. Such coincidences are not the result of borrowing but of a similar way of thinking about heredity and family influence.

Marriage as a family matter. Even here, where the difference seems strongest, there is common ground. Uzbek marriage traditionally involves the participation of both families, matchmaking (sovchilik), and a large

wedding (to'y) which demonstrates the status of the family in the mahalla. In English culture marriage is presented as an individual choice, but the wedding ceremony still unites two families, the parents of the bride and the groom have symbolic roles, and the approval of the family is emotionally important for most couples. The degree of family involvement differs; the fact of involvement does not.

4. Tendencies of change

It should be added that both cultures are changing, and that the changes bring them closer to each other in some respects. Urbanisation, female employment, labour migration and the influence of the media have led to a growth of nuclear families in Uzbekistan, especially in Tashkent and other big cities. Young couples more often live separately from the husband's parents, and the average number of children per family has decreased in comparison with the Soviet period. In Britain, on the contrary, the economic situation of the last decades has made young people stay longer in the parental home, and grandparents have become an important source of childcare. This partial convergence shows that family structure depends not only on tradition but also on economy and demography.

Conclusion: The comparison carried out in this paper allows us to make several conclusions. The concepts oila and family differ in their volume: the Uzbek concept normally includes the extended family, while the English one is centred on the nuclear household. They also differ in the degree of detail of their kinship terminology, Uzbek being far more specific in marking age and line of descent.

At the same time the two concepts have a common conceptual core. In both cultures the family is understood as the basic unit of society, as the source of moral education, as a system of mutual obligations and as a value that stands above individual convenience. Both cultures use kinship terms as a model for friendly social relations and both employ the word family metaphorically for non-kin communities. Many proverbs about parents and children in the two languages are almost identical in meaning.

For students of English in Uzbekistan such similarities are practically useful, because they show that intercultural understanding does not always require the learning of something completely unfamiliar. The differences are mostly quantitative — how wide the circle of relatives is, how strong the obligations are — rather than qualitative. Further research could

usefully be based on questionnaires among Uzbek and British respondents, which would allow the results of the linguistic analysis to be checked against actual attitudes.

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