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**COGNITIVE-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF NOUNS IN RUSSIAN
AND UZBEK: A TYPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE
CONCEPTUALIZATION OF OBJECTS, EVENTS, AND ABSTRACTIONS**

Normamatova Dilnoza Dilshod kizi,

Master's student at Karshi State University, specialty – Linguistics (Russian language)

Introduction

The linguistic study of the noun phrase occupies a central position within the field of cognitive semantics, as nouns serve as the primary cognitive anchors through which human perception segments the continuous, undifferentiated flow of sensory experience into discrete, stable entities. Within this framework, language is not merely a communicative tool but a structural interface between the human mind and the objective world.

While the strong form of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – suggesting that language strictly determines thought – has been largely superseded by more nuanced views, the perspective of Linguistic Relativity remains vital to modern cognitive science. This perspective asserts that the structural properties of a language direct a speaker's attentional focus toward specific facets of reality (Talmy, 2000).

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the Russian language, a fusional-inflectional Slavic language characterized by complex case government and gender agreement, and the Uzbek language, an agglutinative Turkic language defined by its systematic, morpheme-based construction. The primary objective is to determine how the starkly different morphological strategies of these two languages influence the conceptualization of three fundamental ontological categories: physical objects, dynamic events, and conceptual abstractions. By investigating these two typologically distant systems, we aim to uncover how grammatical structure functions as a cognitive "filter" that prioritizes specific dimensions of meaning – whether through classification (Russian) or relational positioning (Uzbek).

The cognitive categorization of objects in Russian is fundamentally mediated by the category of grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter). This structural requirement forces the speaker to assign every inanimate entity to a conceptual class that carries implicit, often metaphorical, connotations. Consequently, gendered nouns create a "conceptual halo" around objects, influencing how they are mentally represented beyond their dictionary definitions. For instance, the Russian word *книга* (book) is grammatically feminine, which, according to some cognitive linguistic theories, may subconsciously align the object with cultural tropes or semantic fields associated with the feminine gender, creating a distinct conceptual profile compared to the English *book* or its Uzbek equivalent *kitob*. "Grammatical gender is not merely a formal category; it creates a framework through which speakers assign ontological characteristics to inanimate objects, shaping the cognitive 'persona' of the noun" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 54).





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In direct contrast, the Uzbek language lacks grammatical gender, shifting the cognitive focus away from the "intrinsic persona" of an object toward its situational existence. Instead, Uzbek utilizes an intricate, highly productive system of possessive suffixes and nominal classification. This system requires that objects be situated within a social or spatial network relative to the speaker or another referent.

In Uzbek, an object is rarely conceptualized in isolation; rather, the grammatical requirement to define an object's relationship to a possessor (e.g., *kitob-im* – "my book," *kitob-i* – "his/her book") forces a perspective of relational ontology. This suggests that while Slavic systems – such as Russian – favor an *inherent property ontology*, where objects are categorized based on their perceived qualities and fixed linguistic gender, the Turkic cognitive model exemplified by Uzbek prioritizes the *connectivity* and *contextual placement* of an object within the speaker's lived environment. This typological distinction highlights a significant divergence in how "objecthood" is constructed across different linguistic cultures.

The conceptualization of dynamic events as static nouns – a process known as nominalization – reveals a profound typological divide in how Russian and Uzbek represent the flow of time within their respective morphosyntactic systems.

Russian (The Synthetic Approach): Russian exhibits a high degree of specialization in its deverbal noun system, where morphology often preserves the *aspectual* character of the underlying verb. The language provides distinct nominal forms to distinguish between the *telic* result of an action and the *atelic* duration of the process itself. For example, the contrast between *постройка* (the singular, completed result of the act of building) and *строительство* (the ongoing, institutionalized process of construction) demonstrates how Russian nominalizations encode temporal dynamics. In this system, nouns function as "frozen processes," capturing the transition from verb to noun while retaining the semantic trace of perfective or imperfective aspect.

Uzbek (The Agglutinative Approach): In contrast, Uzbek employs a highly productive system of *masdars* (verbal nouns), primarily formed through suffixes such as *-sh* or *-v*. These structures are remarkably flexible and permit the granular preservation of internal participant roles, such as the agent and the patient, within the nominalized phrase. Unlike the Russian approach, which often shifts the noun into a fixed lexical category, the Uzbek *masdar* remains functionally closer to the verbal root. This allows for a modular aggregation of meanings, enabling the speaker to define an event with high precision by simply appending the necessary morphemes.

As Croft (2003) argues, these typological differences are rooted in the fundamental strategies languages use to "package" information into discrete grammatical units:

"Typological distinction lies in the density of the information packaging; agglutinative systems allow for a granular decomposition of events, whereas inflectional systems force a holistic categorization based on case and agreement" (Croft, 2003, p. 182). This suggests that while Russian forces a categorical "packaging" of an event based on its temporal phase,





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Uzbek favors a "decompositional" approach, where the event remains an open structure, modular and easily reconfigured.

In the framework of cognitive semantics, abstract concepts – which lack direct physical referents – are conceptualized through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). By mapping concrete source domains onto abstract target domains, speakers navigate complex notions such as *time*, *love*, or *justice*. While both Russian and Uzbek frequently utilize "Space" as a source domain to understand "Time," the specific mapping vectors diverge, reflecting distinct cultural-cognitive histories.

In Uzbek, the conceptualization of abstract phenomena is deeply intertwined with metaphors of the "path" (*yo'l*) and verticality (*baland/past* – high/low), which resonate with the historical nomadic ethos where orientation, movement across vast landscapes, and hierarchy were fundamental to survival. These metaphors frame abstract progress as a trajectory along a path or a movement toward an elevated state. Russian, conversely, frequently employs "container" or "substance" metaphors for abstract entities – viewing a process or emotion as something that can be contained, filled, or emptied. This tendency may reflect an older, deeper influence of abstract philosophical and religious terminology in Slavic history, which prioritized the interiority of the concept over its outward trajectory. "Metaphor is not just a device of the poetic imagination but a fundamental tool for defining abstract concepts through concrete bodily experience" (Kovecses, 2002, p. 18).

The divergence is clearly visible in the conceptualization of "Life." In the Russian tradition, life is often mapped onto the metaphor of a *journey* – a linear path with obstacles and a distant destination (e.g., "the long road of life"). In the Uzbek tradition, life is more frequently conceptualized as a *season* or a *process of growth and harvest* – an organic, cyclical unfolding that emphasizes the interdependence of the individual with the rhythm of nature and community. This difference in mapping suggests that while the abstract "target" is universal, the "source" domain – and thus the cognitive understanding of life is culturally contingent, shaped by the distinct environmental and historical experiences of the speech community.

The comparative analysis of Russian and Uzbek reveals a fundamental dichotomy in linguistic strategy, offering a compelling case study for how distinct morphological systems serve as cognitive architectural frameworks. This divergence can be conceptualized through the lens of "centripetal" versus "centrifugal" information processing.

Russian (The Centripetal Strategy): Russian relies on a highly integrated, centripetal mechanism, where the noun functions as a nexus within a dense grammatical web. Through a rigorous system of case, gender, and number agreement, the noun must strictly harmonize with its modifiers (adjectives, pronouns, and verbs). This creates a rigid, highly structured conceptual environment where the object's "identity" is defined by its grammatical position and categorical classification. The speaker is required to categorize each noun within a fixed taxonomic space, reinforcing a cognitive focus on *state* and *inherent properties*.





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Uzbek (The Centrifugal Strategy): Conversely, Uzbek employs a centrifugal strategy, where the nominal core acts as a stable base to which a series of additive, agglutinative suffixes are attached. These suffixes expand the semantic range of the concept outwards, adding layers of meaning – such as possession, spatial relation, or plurality – without imposing rigid, a priori categorical constraints like grammatical gender. This allows for a more fluid and flexible semantic construction, where the speaker is guided to emphasize the *relational* context of the entity rather than its taxonomic classification.

In conclusion, this cognitive-semantic investigation suggests that while the underlying human experience of perceiving "objects, events, and abstractions" is universal, the specific linguistic "tools" provided by the Russian and Uzbek languages function as distinct cognitive filters. Russian linguistic structures incentivize a focus on classification, boundary-setting, and state, fostering a worldview that prioritizes structural stability. In contrast, Uzbek structures incentivize an emphasis on relationality, transition, and process, fostering a cognitive model that prioritizes the interconnectedness of entities within a dynamic, unfolding context.

Future research into this typological contrast should aim to bridge these findings with parallel corpora analysis, specifically investigating how these distinct morphological preferences manifest in contemporary socio-political discourse and cross-cultural translation, further illuminating how language continues to shape the conceptual landscapes of its speakers.

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