THE EXPRESSION OF SEMANTIC PRIMES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: UNIVERSAL AND LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC FEATURES

Muborak Murodhojayevna Norhojayeva
Senior Lecturer, Department of Foreign Languages
University of Journalism and Mass
Communications of Uzbekistan
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3807-1949
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24273753

Abstract: This article compares the expression of selected semantic primes in English and Uzbek within the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework. In this framework, semantic primes are understood as basic meanings that cannot be broken down into simpler meanings and are assumed to be expressible across languages. The analysis examines the semantic equivalence and grammatical expression of selected forms, including I – men, someone – kimdir, know – bilmoq, want – xohlamoq, and good – yaxshi. For example, in I know – bilaman, first-person singular reference is expressed by an independent pronoun in English and by a personal ending on the verb in Uzbek. The comparison identifies shared meanings and shows how they are expressed through language-specific lexical and grammatical resources.

Keywords: *Semantic primes, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, semantic universals, lexical equivalence, grammatical expression, contrastive semantics, English, Uzbek.*

Introduction

Words such as *know*, *want*, and *good* express meanings that speakers use to describe knowledge, wishes, and evaluations. In the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework developed by Anna Wierzbicka, Cliff Goddard, and their collaborators, these meanings are treated as semantic primes. A semantic prime is understood as an elementary meaning that cannot be defined in simpler semantic terms. The framework proposes that such meanings are expressible across languages and uses the term *exponent* for the linguistic form that expresses a prime in a particular language. The English inventory includes I, SOMEONE, KNOW, WANT, and GOOD.

The distinction between a meaning and its linguistic exponent guides the comparison of English and Uzbek. Once a shared meaning has been identified in context, the analysis can examine how each language expresses it through vocabulary, inflection, and sentence structure. For instance, the speaker is identified by the pronoun *I* in *I know this*. In the Uzbek counterpart *Buni bilaman*, the ending *-man* on *bilaman* identifies the speaker.

This article compares five proposed semantic primes in selected English and Uzbek sentence pairs. It examines how the pairs express speaker reference, reference to an unspecified person, knowledge, desire, and evaluation. The comparison uses constructed examples to illustrate the grammatical environments in which the proposed equivalents occur.

Main part: Speaker reference and reference to an unspecified person. The prime I refers to the speaker. In *I know this – Men buni bilaman*, English *I* and Uzbek *men* have the same referential function. Uzbek also permits *Buni bilaman*, where first-person singular reference is recoverable from the verbal ending *-man*. Comparing the two Uzbek versions shows that speaker reference can be expressed with an overt pronoun and verbal marking together, or with verbal marking alone in this context.

The prime SOMEONE is illustrated by *Someone came – Kimdir keldi*. Both sentences refer to an unspecified person. In Uzbek, *kimdir* contains the interrogative base *kim* ‘who’ and the element *-dir*, which contributes to the indefinite interpretation. The two forms perform a comparable function in the example, while their internal structure reflects the lexical resources of each language.

© 2026 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Applications . All Rights Reserved.

The proposed correspondence KNOW – bilmoq can be examined in *I know this – Men buni bilaman*. In this pair, both predicates take a demonstrative object. The same meaning can also be examined with a proposition in *I know that she came – Men uning kelganini bilaman*. English introduces the content of the knowledge with a finite *that*-clause. Uzbek expresses that content through the nominalized construction *uning kelganini*. The comparison shows how a similar relation between the person who knows and the content of that knowledge is organized differently in the two sentences.

The prime WANT is illustrated by *I want to go – Men borishni xohlayman*. Both sentences describe the speaker's desire to perform an action. In English, the desired action is expressed by the infinitival construction *to go*. In Uzbek, it is expressed by *borishni*, an accusative-marked verbal noun. This example supports the proposed correspondence between *want* and *xohlamoq* in the context of a desired action. Further contexts would be needed to establish the range of that correspondence.

The prime GOOD is illustrated by *This is good – Bu yaxshi*. Both sentences express a positive evaluation of what the demonstrative refers to. English uses the copula *is*, while Uzbek permits *yaxshi* to serve as the predicate without an overt copula in this sentence. The pair illustrates how a comparable evaluative meaning can be expressed through different predicative structures.

These examples also clarify how semantic equivalence is assessed. For each pair, the analysis identifies the meaning expressed and examines the grammatical construction that supports it. This procedure gives a more precise account of equivalence than a list of dictionary pairings because it shows where a proposed correspondence holds and how it is realized in an actual sentence pattern.

Conclusion

The comparison illustrates how five meanings identified as semantic primes in the NSM framework can be expressed in selected English and Uzbek contexts. The clearest correspondences occur when the sentence pairs are compared by function. *Someone came* and *Kimdir keldi* both refer to an unspecified person, while *This is good* and *Bu yaxshi* both express a positive evaluation. Differences become visible in the way the languages mark speaker reference and construct the complements of verbs such as *know* and *want*.

Within the scope of the examples, the proposed universal dimension concerns the meanings shared by the sentence pairs. The language-specific dimension concerns the lexical and grammatical forms used to express those meanings. The study therefore supports a contextual approach to evaluating proposed equivalents. Further research using authentic English and Uzbek texts could test whether the correspondences observed here extend to a wider range of constructions and communicative settings.

REFERENCES

1. Маслова, В. А. Лингвокультурология: учебное пособие / В.А.Маслова. – Москва: Академия, 2001. – 208 с.
2. Wierzbicka, A. Understanding cultures through their key words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese / A. Wierzbicka. – New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. – DOI 10.1093/oso/9780195088359.001.0001.
3. Murodhojayevna N. M. EFFECTIVE METHODS TO MAKE TEACHING PHRASAL VERBS FUN AND INTERESTING //Вестник науки и образования. – 2020. – №. 23-3 (101). – С. 33-35.
4. Murodhojayevna N. M. The role of the family in education of humanity //Вестник науки и образования. – 2020. – №. 7-2 (85). – С. 86-88.
5. Juraev I. et al. Location-Based Philological Research: Securing Context-Aware Apps for Linguistic Fieldwork //J. Internet Serv. Inf. Secur. – 2025. – Т. 15. – №. 2. – С. 578-589.
6. Murodhojayevna N. M. Preparing students to write accurately //Проблемы педагогики. – 2019. – №. 6 (45). – С. 100-101.
7. Evans, V. How words mean : lexical concepts, cognitive models, and meaning construction / V. Evans. – Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2009. – DOI 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199234660.001.0001.

© 2026 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Applications . All Rights Reserved.

8. Botirova, Dilafruz Bozorovna, Markhabo Raxmonkulovna Abdullayeva, Ilkhom Yusupovich Khaydarov, R. N. A. Khaydarova, and Shaxnoza Sharofovna Sharofova. "Social Psychological Features of the Process of Professional Stress in Pedagogical Activity." *Journal Power System Technology ISSN* 10003673 (2024).
9. Tashmukhamedova, Dildora Azizqizi, Malika Bakhtoyorovna Abdullayeva, Markhabo Raxmonkulovna Abdullayeva, Tamilla Dilshodkizi Annazarova, and Selma Ozan Yujel. "THE LINGUISTIC FOUNDATIONS OF NATURAL LANGUAGE PROCESSING (NLP): A THEORETICAL AND APPLIED PERSPECTIVE." (2026).
10. Abdujabarova K. IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS THROUGH INCREASING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE //Ethiopian International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research. – 2025. – Т. 12. – №. 05. – С. 492-495.

© 2026 International Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Applications . All Rights Reserved.