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FUNCTIONAL-SEMANTIC STUDY OF THE KINSHIP TERM "WIFE" – "XOTIN"

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Abstract

This article examines the functional-semantic characteristics of the kinship term *wife – xotin* in English and Uzbek. The study analyzes the etymological origins, semantic structure, relational properties, and sociocultural meanings of the term in both languages. Particular attention is paid to semantic development, polysemy, derivational potential, and contextual usage. The findings reveal that while both terms denote a married female spouse, they differ in their semantic scope, pragmatic functions, and cultural connotations. The research contributes to the study of kinship terminology, lexical semantics, and comparative linguistics.

Keywords: kinship terms, wife, xotin, lexical semantics, functional-semantic analysis, comparative linguistics, English language, Uzbek language.

Introduction. The English term *wife* has deep Indo-European roots and demonstrates both semantic stability and historical polysemy. It derives from the Old English *wīf*, meaning "woman," without necessarily implying marriage. This term originates from the Proto-Germanic *wībą*, which likewise denoted "woman," and ultimately traces back to the Proto-Indo-European root *gʷībh-* or *gʷeib(h)-*, associated with femininity, reproduction, or living.

In Old English, *wīf* could refer to any adult woman, as reflected in the form *wīfmann*, literally meaning "woman person," which later evolved into *woman*. Over time, the term *wife* underwent semantic narrowing and came to denote specifically a married woman. This process is known as semantic specialization or semantic restriction. Interestingly, the term has remained morphologically simple throughout its historical development. At the same time, numerous compound and derivative forms, such as *housewife*, *midwife*, *fishwife*, *wifely*, and *wifehood*, reflect various conceptual correspondences and diachronic extensions of its meaning.

According to the Etymological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, the word *xotin* is defined as "woman" and "a married woman." Historical sources indicate that this noun was pronounced in Old Turkic as *qatun* and *xatun*. Various Turkic dictionaries and linguistic studies record different phonetic variants of the term, demonstrating its widespread use across Turkic languages. Based on the available linguistic evidence, the phonetic development of the word may be represented as *qatun* > *xatun* > *xotin*. As noted in the sources, the term originally referred to "the wife of a person of high status"; subsequently, through semantic development, it acquired the broader meaning of "the wife of any man" and later developed additional meanings.

From a semantic perspective, *xotin* is a relational noun characterized by the semantic features "human being," "adult," "female," and "spouse." It differs fundamentally from *er* ("husband"), with which it forms an important dyadic pair within the system of affinal kinship terms. The term presupposes a binary gender framework and the social or legal institution of marriage.

In terms of semantic structure, *xotin* functions not only as a status descriptor but also as an indexical term, referring to another individual within a marital relationship. Consequently, it is inherently dyadic, and this dyadic nature is grammatically encoded through possessive constructions such as *mening xotinim* ("my wife") and *uning xotini* ("his/her wife"), as well as through its syntactic dependence on context and subjectivity. The concept of *xotin* is semantically productive, generating additional kinship terms such as *qaynona* ("mother-in-law"). Thus, it occupies a central position within the architecture of affinal kinship systems.

In interlinguistic typology, the kinship term *wife – xotin* is frequently morphologically or semantically related to the more general term *woman – ayol*. Such a relationship is widespread across Indo-European, Turkic, and Afro-Asiatic languages.

"The customer's wife's a microbiologist and he wants to surprise her and her lab." [H. Yanagihara 2015: 127].

In Uzbek, *wife* corresponds to *xotin*, whereas *woman* corresponds to *ayol*, the broader generic designation. In linguistic systems where female identity is primarily defined through marital status, the term *wife – xotin* often overlaps with the broader category of "adult woman." Typologically, languages differ in the ways they encode spousal relationships lexically, morphologically, or socially. For example, in certain Austronesian and Bantu languages, marital relationships are expressed not through separate lexical items but through kinship-class markers or pronominal forms.

Xotin kishi shunday dadil qarorga kelganda erkaklarning bo'shanglik qilishi noqulay edi, tarqala boshladilar [A. Muxtor 2018: 183].

Its possessive and anaphoric uses are particularly prominent in discourse: *uning xotini* ("his wife"), *mening sobiq xotinim* ("my ex-wife"), and similar constructions. These usages reflect its inherently relational semantics. The term can also be modified by adjectives such as *sodiq xotin* ("faithful wife"), *yosh xotin* ("young wife"), and *sobiq xotin* ("former wife"), contributing to its pragmatic flexibility.

Derived expressions such as *uy bekasi* ("housewife") and *doya* ("midwife") reflect historically established gender-role assignments. Their semantic domains encompass occupation, social status, and domestic responsibilities. These compounds have become lexically fixed and often convey idiomatic meanings beyond the simple sum of their constituent parts.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the term *wife/xotin* has undergone significant changes in perception and interpretation. Within feminist discourse, the term is sometimes criticized because of its historical association with patriarchal structures, particularly considering its traditional legal and religious applications. Nevertheless, it remains a normative term in many cultural and legal contexts. The growing use of gender-neutral alternatives such as *spouse* and *partner* in legal and administrative registers reflects a gradual movement away from binary and gender-specific kinship systems. However, in many heterosexual contexts, the category of *wife* continues to function as the default designation.

This prototypical schema reflects and reinforces cultural scripts concerning gender, division of labor, and emotional relationships. Furthermore, the concept of *wife* participates in image schemas of union, complementarity, and mutual support, which are culturally situated and vary across languages.

Key functional-semantic realizations of the English term *wife* include:

- *Legal wife* – a wife recognized by law (legal status);
- *Housewife* – a woman responsible for household duties (social role);
- *Ex-wife* – a former wife after divorce (post-marital status);
- *Trophy wife* – a young and attractive spouse associated with social prestige (evaluative and connotative meaning);
- *Wife material* – a woman considered suitable for marriage (subjective/evaluative meaning).

The term *wife* also combines with other kinship and social roles:

- *wife + husband = spouses*;
- *wife + child = motherly role*;
- *wife + ex = past identity*.

My wife, my first wife, was cool and self-contained [H. Yanagihara 2015: 171].

In Uzbek, the term *xotin* is used in a clear and central sense to mean "a man's marital wife." Unlike its English counterpart, it is not highly polysemous; however, separate lexical units or descriptive expressions are employed to convey different contextual meanings:

- *sobiq xotin* → *former spouse* (sometimes simply expressed as "ajrashgan ayol" – divorced woman);
- *qonuniy xotin* → a woman legally married through an officially recognized marriage;
- *uy bekasi* → a woman engaged in household management and domestic responsibilities;
- evaluative meanings are generally expressed through descriptive phrases such as *xotinlikka yaroqli ayol* ("a woman suitable for marriage") or *sadoqatli turmush o'rtoq* ("a faithful spouse").

Matniyoz sakrab turib, qo'lidagi papirosini fortochkadan uloqtirdi-da, xotinini quchdi [A. Muxtor 2018: 188].

In English, the term *wife* exhibits a polysemous character and may acquire various connotations depending on the context. It participates in numerous functional-semantic microsystems that express different social, emotional, and interpersonal roles. By contrast, the Uzbek term *xotin* possesses a more specific and stable meaning, while additional meanings, connotations, and social roles are conveyed through separate lexical units or explanatory expressions.

The principal distinction between the two languages lies in the fact that English allows a single lexical item to express multiple social functions and semantic nuances, whereas Uzbek tends to employ distinct lexical or descriptive means for each contextual meaning. This difference demonstrates the greater reliance of English on polysemy and contextual interpretation, while Uzbek more frequently depends on lexical differentiation and explicit semantic specification.

Conclusion. The functional-semantic analysis of the kinship term *wife – xotin* reveals both universal and language-specific features in the conceptualization of marital relationships. Although both terms primarily denote a married female spouse, they differ significantly in their semantic scope, derivational productivity, and sociocultural associations. The English term *wife* demonstrates a higher degree of polysemy and contextual flexibility, whereas the Uzbek term *xotin* tends to preserve a more specific and stable semantic core. Both terms function as relational kinship nouns that encode marital status and interpersonal relations within the family structure. Their historical development, semantic extensions, and pragmatic uses reflect broader cultural attitudes toward gender, marriage, and family organization. Consequently, the comparative study of *wife – xotin* contributes to a deeper understanding of kinship terminology, lexical semantics, and cross-cultural conceptualizations of family relationships.

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