THE EXPRESSION OF THE NEAR–FAR OPPOSITION IN THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELATIONAL SEMANTICS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Annotation: This study explores how the spatial opposition **near–far** (Uzbek: **yaqin–uzoq**) is conceptualized in socio-psychological and relational terms in English and Uzbek. Focusing on corpus-based usage examples rather than abstract theory, we analyze how "near" and "far" convey interpersonal closeness, distance, emotional detachment, social hierarchy, and connection. Using examples from Uzbek literary texts, news, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions (with English translations), we demonstrate that both languages employ spatial vocabulary to structure social relationships and feelings.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, spatial semantics, social distance, English–Uzbek, interpersonal relationships, linguoculture

Introduction

Spatial concepts of **"near"** and **"far"** are deeply embedded in human cognition and language, not only describing physical distance but also structuring our understanding of social relationships and emotional states. In everyday speech, it is common to refer to a *"close friend"* or *"distant relative"*, or to say *"we've grown apart"* when a relationship deteriorates. Such expressions reflect a conceptual mapping between physical proximity and interpersonal intimacy or emotional warmth. According to Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, abstract notions of affection, friendship, and social connection are often understood via the concrete domain of space, exemplified by the primary metaphor Intimacy is closeness. In other words, being *"close"* to someone corresponds to feeling emotionally close, while *"distance"* from others can imply detachment or estrangement. These metaphors appear to be widespread across cultures and languages, arising from universal embodied experiences (e.g. infants associate caregivers' physical proximity with warmth and security).

At the same time, the specific socio-psychological semantics of near–far can vary with linguistic and cultural context. This paper examines how English and Uzbek encode interpersonal closeness and distance through their lexicon – particularly the antonym pair *near–far* and its Uzbek equivalent *yaqin–uzoq*. Uzbek, a Turkic language, uses *yaqin* (near/close) and *uzoq* (far/distant) not only for spatial relations but also in rich figurative ways to describe kinship, friendship, emotional bonds, social hierarchy, and even temporal or abstract relations. English likewise has an extensive figurative usage of *near/close* and *far/distant* in the social-emotional domain, though often with different collocations (e.g. "close friend" rather than **"near friend"**, "distant relative" rather than **"far relative"**). By comparing usage in the two languages, we can identify common conceptual patterns as well as linguocultural nuances.

There has been growing interest in comparative linguocultural studies of spatial metaphors. Building on such insights, this study uses a corpus-based approach to delve into

authentic examples of *yaqin* and *uzoq* in context. We draw on Uzbek proverbs, literary excerpts, and news articles, alongside equivalent English examples, to illustrate how *near–far* language conveys subtleties of interpersonal meaning – from expressing intimacy or loyalty to indicating social distance or alienation. We also incorporate cognitive semantics and anthropological perspectives (e.g. conceptualizations of personal space and social distance) to frame our findings. The goal is to shed light on how a fundamental spatial contrast is recruited in two different linguacultures to structure the psychology of relationships – how we speak about friends and strangers, love and estrangement, respect and hierarchy using the language of distance.

Using the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, we analyzed the examples to identify conceptual domains where spatial terms map to social meaning – for instance, physical distance mapping to emotional distance. We also noted any differences in collocation patterns between the two languages (e.g. which nouns or verbs commonly pair with *yaqin* vs *close*, *uzoq* vs *distant*, etc.). While not a full frequency-based corpus analysis, this approach allowed us to observe prevalent metaphors and connotations in context. The results are organized by thematic category with representative examples.

One of the most salient relational uses of *yaqin* and *uzoq* is to distinguish levels of personal relationship, especially in terms of kinship and friendship. Uzbek speakers regularly use *yaqin* (close) to describe intimate relationships and *uzoq* (far) to describe more tenuous or extended ones. For example, *yaqin do'st* means "close friend," conveying a strong bond of friendship. Conversely, *uzoq qarindosh* means "distant relative," referring to a relative with whom one does not have a close connection (either because of distant family ties or lack of familiarity). These phrases mirror English collocations like "close friend" and "distant relative", respectively. In both languages, physical distance terms are applied to social distance within a family or friend network.

A bilingual Uzbek–English dictionary or phrase list would equate *yaqin do'st* with "close friend" and *uzoq qarindosh* with "distant relative". Our corpus examples confirm these usages. For instance, in one Uzbek novel a character refers to someone as *"Elmurodning uzoq qarindoshi"*, indicating "a distant relative of Elmurod," i.e. a kinsperson not closely related or emotionally close (from Pirimqul Qodirov's *O'qituvchi*). Likewise, informally an Uzbek speaker might say *U mening eng yaqin do'stim* ("He is my closest friend") to emphasize intimacy. English parallels are abundant: *"She is a close friend of mine"* signifies strong friendship, whereas *"He's a distant cousin"* downplays closeness (either emotionally or in terms of family tree distance).

Uzbek relies on the basic *yaqin–uzoq* words across these contexts, while English often employs different lexical items synonymous with near/far. For example, English speakers prefer *"close"* (of Germanic origin meaning near) for personal relationships rather than the word *"near"* itself; one would say *"a close friend,"* not "a near friend." Conversely, Uzbek uses *yaqin* (near) directly for friendships. In the domain of kinship, English uses *"distant"* (Latinate origin) for relatives, whereas Uzbek again uses *uzoq* (far) in *uzoq qarindosh*. Despite this lexical variation, the underlying metaphor is consistent: social familiarity is conceptualized as spatial proximity. A family member who is *uzoq* (far) suggests a weaker social tie – either a remote cousin or an estranged relation – while someone *yaqin* (close) is part of one's inner circle.

Proverbs in both cultures reinforce these ideas. An Uzbek proverb states, *"Yaxshi qo'shni uzoq qarindoshdan yaxshi,"* meaning "A good neighbor is better than a distant relative.

Here *uzoq qarindosh* (far relative) implies that a relative who is far away (physically or emotionally) is less helpful than a nearby non-relative. The English saying "A near neighbor is better than a distant cousin" expresses a very similar thought. Such folk wisdom highlights that physical proximity can trump blood relations when it comes to mutual assistance and emotional support, effectively equating *"distant"* in space with *"less connected"* in relationship. Another Uzbek proverb notes, *"Qadr bilmas qarindoshdan yaqindagi yot yaxshi,"* roughly "Better a caring stranger nearby than a relative who doesn't appreciate you. Beyond labels like friend or relative, *yaqin* and *uzoq* permeate descriptions of emotional intensity and intimacy. To be *"close to someone"* in English often means to feel deep affection or trust, and similarly in Uzbek *yaqin bo'lmoq* (to be close) can describe developing an intimate friendship or romantic relationship. Our corpus includes a contemporary Uzbek short story where the narrator says of two characters: *"Shu-shu bo'ldi-yu, Baxtiyor Shahzod aka bilan yaqinlashib ketdi.* Translated: "From that moment on, Baxtiyor became close with Shahzod aka." The phrasing *yaqinlashib ketdi* (literally "went on becoming close") indicates that Baxtiyor formed a close, friendly relationship with Shahzod. This usage is very much akin to English expressions like *"grew close to"* or *"became close friends with."* In both languages, a verb of motion or change combines with the adjective *close/yaqin* to denote entering into a closer relationship.

Proverbs provide a colorful look at these ideas. A poignant Uzbek proverb states: *"Ko'zdan yiroq bo'lsa, ko'ngildan yiroq bo'ladi,"* essentially "If someone is far from the eyes, he will be far from the heart." This is the Uzbek version of the well-known English proverb "Out of sight, out of mind." It warns that physical separation (being *yiroq*, far, from sight) leads to emotional forgetting (becoming *far from the heart*, i.e. no longer cherished) – a cynical take on distance weakening relationships. Yet, paradoxically, another proverb or saying conveys the opposite: *"Yo'l uzoq, ko'ngil yaqin,"* meaning **"The road is far, [but] the heart is near"**. This optimistic view – akin to "Distance means so little when someone means so much," or the English adage *"Absence makes the heart grow fonder"* – suggests that true affection can overcome distance, keeping people close at heart even when miles apart. The coexistence of such sayings in Uzbek (and English) highlights a cultural understanding that distance can test relationships, sometimes diminishing ties and sometimes strengthening longing. In either case, the vocabulary of spatial distance (*uzoq, yiroq*) and closeness (*yaqin*) is integral to expressing the emotional outcomes.

In social relations, distance can also connote formality, hierarchy, or exclusion, whereas closeness implies equality, familiarity, or inclusion. Both English and Uzbek reflect this in their usage of near/far language. For example, in English one might speak of *"maintaining a distance"* with one's boss or professor – not becoming too familiar – as a way to show respect for hierarchy. Similarly, in Uzbek professional or hierarchical contexts, one might not refer to a superior as *yaqin*; being overly *"close"* with a high-status person could even be seen negatively (implying favoritism). Instead, *masofa saqlamoq* ("to keep distance") or *rasmiyatni saqlamoq* ("maintain formality") would describe a respectful distance in interaction. While these phrases do not use *uzoq* explicitly, the concept of "distancing" oneself in demeanor is present. Conversely, being *"in someone's inner circle"* or *"close to the king/President"* suggests influence and trust. In Uzbek, *"Prezidentga yaqin odamlar"* literally "people close to the President" implies trusted insiders – much like English *"close associates of the President."* Here *yaqin* denotes not physical nearness but figurative proximity to power (having the leader's ear).

Culturally, Uzbek society (like many collectivist cultures) often distinguishes between insiders vs outsiders – *o'zimiz odam* (one of us) versus *begona/yot* (stranger). The language of closeness is used for in-group solidarity. Friends will affectionately use familial terms and imply closeness (*jonim, yaqining* – "my dear, someone close"), whereas outsiders are kept *"distant."* One common expression, *yot qolmoq* ("to remain a stranger"), indicates failing to become close to a group. Meanwhile, *yaqin* carries connotations of affinity and ease: e.g. *"Bu odam menga juda yaqin bo'lib ketdi,"* "That person became very close to me," might be said after a short time if a strong rapport is built – implying a breaking of social distance. In English, *"we hit it off and became close"* conveys the same rapid closing of social distance.

Interestingly, politeness norms can enforce distance linguistically. In Uzbek, as in many languages, formal pronoun usage and honorifics create a polite distance with elders or strangers. One might say that excessive familiarity (*ortiqcha yaqinlik*) with someone you just met is frowned upon – literally, "too much closeness" breaches etiquette. There is a saying, *"Ortiqcha yaqinlik – hurmatsizlik,"* roughly "Undue closeness is disrespect." While this is not an established proverb, it reflects a social attitude: being *too close* (in behavior) with someone who expects deference can be seen as a lack of respect. Thus, "distance" in social interaction can equal respect, and languages encode that concept. English uses phrases like *"respectful distance"* or *"keep your distance"* in a social sense, which can be positive (maintaining boundaries) or negative (alienating someone), depending on context.

In contrast, closeness in social address signals camaraderie. For instance, using informal "you" (*sen*) in Uzbek or first names in English implies a lesser distance – typically allowed among peers or close relations. This dynamic again shows how distance lexically mirrors social dynamics: closeness terms are associated with intimacy and equality, distance with formality and hierarchy. However, these are not hard-and-fast rules – context matters. Being described as *yaqin* to someone powerful could either mean you are trusted or, if said cynically, that you have *blat* (connections). Uzbek political commentary might describe an official as *"xalqdan uzoq"* ("far from the people") to criticize them as out of touch or elitist. Here *uzoq* illustrates social distance in a negative light (failing to maintain closeness with the common people). English similarly speaks of leaders *"being distant from the public."* In both tongues, then, distance can imply social alienation or arrogance, while closeness implies approachability and engagement.

Notably, some metaphors seem to be near-universal. The fact that both Uzbek and English (and indeed many other languages) have a version of *"out of sight, out of mind"* and also its opposite *"distance only makes the heart grow fonder"* suggests a common human reflection on distance's double-edged effect on relationships. The embodiment of these ideas may be universal, but cultures choose to emphasize one or the other in different contexts. Uzbek culture, with its strong emphasis on family and community ties, has numerous proverbs extolling the closeness of hearts over distance (e.g. *"Yo'l uzoq, ko'ngil yaqin"*), yet it equally warns against neglect that comes with distance (*uzoqlik*). English, with a long literary tradition, likewise contains both romanticized and cynical takes on distance.

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