

THE CONCEPT OF “HAPPINESS” IN WESTERN AND EASTERN LITERARY DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE COGNITIVE AND LINGUOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF J.LONDON’S “MARTIN EDEN” AND A.QODIRIY’S “O’TKAN KUNLAR”

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Abstract

This article examines the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive representations of the concept of “happiness” in Jack London’s “Martin Eden” and Abdulla Qodiriy’s “O’tkan kunlar”. The study shows how the idea of happiness is shaped differently within Western individualistic culture and Eastern collectivist traditions. Through comparative analysis, the research clarifies how personal freedom, intellectual growth, and self-realization dominate the Western model, while love, family unity, and spiritual harmony define the Eastern perspective.

Keywords

concept, happiness, cognitive linguistics, comparative analysis, cultural model.

The concept of “happiness” is one of the most ancient and multi-layered mental constructs of humankind, acquiring a distinctive semantic structure within language and culture⁵. Each nation imbues this notion with meaning through its spiritual experience, historical memory, and aesthetic worldview. From this perspective, the representation of “happiness” in J.London’s “Martin Eden” and A.Qodiriy’s “O’tkan kunlar” reflects two different cultural codes. While in Western literature happiness is primarily understood through personal achievement and freedom, in Eastern literature it is formed through family stability, love, and harmony with society.

The concept of “happiness” occupies a special place in contemporary cognitive and linguocultural studies. It is verbalized through various lexical units and expresses such processes as satisfaction with living and working conditions,

⁵ Lakoff, George. Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. University of Chicago Press, 1987. – P.1–614.

self-realization, achievement of goals, attainment of prosperity, and the experience of emotional uplift⁶. Furthermore, the concept of happiness is enriched through synonyms such as joy, delight, gaiety, felicity, bliss, and prosperity, representing a complex of emotions that arise when an individual perceives their life as satisfactory⁷. The formation of the feeling of happiness is also influenced by aesthetic taste and individual perception: the associative and figurative power of linguistic units activates positive emotional states in the human psyche, thereby expanding the emotion-based dimension of the concept. Thus, happiness is not merely an internal emotional experience but a complex mental construct closely connected with cultural values, worldview, and overall life satisfaction⁸. Concept theory has been extensively developed in the works of Z.Popova and I.Sternin, G.Lakoff, and A.Wierzbicka, where a concept is interpreted as a complex system of meanings stored in human consciousness. Although the term “concept” emerged in linguistics as early as the first half of the twentieth century, there is still no universally accepted definition. According to N.D.Arutyunova, a concept is a mental unit formed through accumulated knowledge and experience in the process of understanding the surrounding world. Each nation’s concepts differ depending on its customs, traditions, religion, values, and linguistic features⁹. Although the concept of happiness is universal, each culture shapes it based on its own experience. For example, in Western culture metaphors such as “happiness is freedom” and “happiness is success” are dominant, whereas in Eastern cultures semantic models like “happiness is harmony” and “happiness is loyalty” are prevalent¹⁰. In

“Martin Eden”, happiness is centered on individualistic values such as personal development, intellectual growth, and the realization of one’s potential. For Martin, happiness is primarily understood through “inner growth” and “self-affirmation¹¹.” For instance, when Ruth asks why he was not born wealthy, Martin responds: “I prefer to be healthy and intelligent. Income will come by itself.” He also expresses his thirst for knowledge metaphorically: “Just as a duck longs for water, I long for knowledge.” His meeting with Ruth forms a romantic ideal that

⁶ Popova, Z. D., & Sternin, I. A. Kognitiv lingvistika asoslari. Voronej: Istoki, 2006. – B.15-28.

⁷ Merriam-Webster Dictionary. (n.d.). Happiness. Retrieved February 14, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

⁸ Ejrnaes, A., & Greve, B. (2017). International Journal of Social Welfare, 26(3), 206-217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12233>

⁹ Askarovich, H.A., & Ulug‘bekovna, Y.M. (2024). The Expression of the Concept of “Soul” in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. International Multi-disciplinary Journal of Education, 2(11), 212-215.

¹⁰ Haydarov, A.A., & Yodgorova, M.U. (2024). The Concept of “Happiness” in English is Expressed in Phraseological Units Mentioned in Jane Austin’s “Pride and Prejudice”. Scientific Reports of Bukhara Institute of Psychology and Foreign Languages, (8), 337-339.

¹¹ London, Jack. Martin Eden. The Macmillan Company, 1909. – P.57

motivates his aspirations. As Jack London depicts, Martin, despite his boundless passion for creativity and beauty, works primarily for Ruth: "He was working first of all for Ruth; he was in love, and everything else was subordinated to that love." However, the novel's ending demonstrates that individual achievement and social recognition fail to provide the protagonist with the expected spiritual fulfillment and happiness¹². Critically reflecting on his life, Martin concludes: "Had I not left my own environment, had I not pursued bookish knowledge and followed a society that placed itself above me, I would have been a thousand times happier." When his works are finally published and fame and wealth arrive, London exposes the injustice of this process: "When he starved for weeks, no one thought of inviting him to dinner; now, when he had enough money to feed a hundred thousand people – and no appetite – they began inviting him to banquets from all sides. Why? There was neither justice nor recognition of his labor in this." This reflects London's existential outlook and demonstrates the non-absolute nature of happiness.

In A.Qodiriy's "O'tkan kunlar", the meaning of happiness is shaped in accordance with Eastern mentality and is closely connected with family values, love, loyalty, and social harmony. In Otabek's life ideals, happiness is measured not by personal benefit but by responsibility to society, integrity, and devotion to the homeland. For example, despite having opportunities to gain dishonest wealth through trade, he preserves his moral purity and does not deviate from honesty. Throughout the novel, Otabek's sincere feelings for Kumush are interpreted as the main source of his emotional stability and happiness. This is vividly expressed by the author: "In every smile of Kumush, Otabek found the peace and bliss of his world"¹³. The relationship between Otabek and Kumush symbolizes "pure Eastern love," and their loyalty, self-sacrifice, and mutual respect enrich the moral and spiritual dimension of happiness. A.Qodiriy emphasizes this by writing: "Their love was born of purity of heart, a love capable of enduring any trial"¹⁴. Kumush's character also embodies Eastern ideals of fidelity and devotion: despite being aware of all dangers, she remains loyal to her husband, waits for him, and preserves the spiritual stability of their relationship. In the novel's dramatic ending, Kumush's tragic fate and Otabek's profound suffering after losing her reinforce the conceptual model common in Eastern thought that "the value of happiness is realized only when it is lost." The author conveys this emotional devastation in the line: "For Otabek, the meaning of life had faded; his star of happiness had gone out"¹⁵. Thus, the novel as a whole interprets happiness not as

¹² That source. – P.314

¹³ Qodiriy, Abdulla. O'tkan kunlar. – Toshkent, 1926. – B.92

¹⁴ That source. – B.140

¹⁵ That source. – B.230

external wealth but as an Eastern value manifested through spiritual harmony, honesty, and family unity. The differences between Western and Eastern concepts of happiness are clearly revealed in the two works. In Jack London's novel, happiness is centered on individualism, personal development, and intellectual growth; however, Martin's life experience shows that individual success and social recognition do not necessarily lead to spiritual fulfillment and often result in loneliness and inner emptiness. In A.Qodiriy's novel, happiness is closely linked to family values, loyalty, love, and social responsibility, and the moral-ethical essence of happiness is vividly portrayed through the relationship between Otabek and Kumush. Nevertheless, in both works happiness is associated with a tragic ending, emphasizing its unstable, relative, and ever-searching nature in human life¹⁶.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that although the concept of "happiness" occupies a central place in the poetics of both novels, its interpretation reveals strong intercultural differences. In the Western model, happiness is perceived as the pinnacle of personal development, whereas in the Eastern model it is defined by love, loyalty, and social harmony. Thus, alongside its universality, happiness acquires culturally specific forms shaped by distinct cultural contexts.

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