



LEXICAL GAPS IN EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND TURKMEN

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Abstract

The present research paper provides an extensive, multi-layered comparative, contrastive, and cognitive-linguistic analysis of lexical gaps—frequently conceptualized as lacunae—within the emotional vocabulary of the English and Turkmen languages. Drawing upon contemporary theoretical frameworks of cognitive semantics, cultural linguistics, lexical typology, and the revised hypothesis of linguistic relativity, this study explores how non-equivalent emotional states, internal affective experiences, and associated behavioral responses are conceptually organized, structurally mapped, and lexically bounded in both languages. Through a rigorous and exhaustive examination of authoritative lexicographic sources, bilingual dictionaries, and contextual textual data drawn from classical and contemporary literature, the author deconstructs specific emotional terms that lack direct single-word monolexemic equivalents in the respective target language. Special academic attention is dedicated to the semantic mapping of deeply rooted, culturally bound concepts, examining how intricate morphosyntactic mechanisms, derivational morphology, descriptive paraphrases, and highly expressive somatic-idiomatic expressions are systematically utilized by speakers to bridge these semantic voids. The findings illustrate the dynamic, non-linear interplay between language structures, cognitive processing, and affective conceptualization within differing socio-cultural landscapes.

Keywords: lexical gaps, emotional vocabulary, comparative linguistics, Turkmen language, English language, cognitive semantics, cultural lacunae, non-equivalence, somatic idioms, contrastive lexicology.

Introduction

In contemporary comparative linguistics, lexical typology, and cognitive semantics, the comprehensive exploration of emotional vocabulary remains one of the most challenging, multi-faceted, and cross-culturally significant fields of academic inquiry. Emotions, as psychological and physiological phenomena, undoubtedly represent a universal facet of the shared human experience; however, the precise modes by which different linguistic communities identify, demarcate, categorize, and lexically encode these internal affective states vary substantially across distinct geographic, historical, and sociological landscapes. Lexical gaps, or semantic lacunae, occur when a source language possesses a specific, highly differentiated, single-word lexical item to denote a precise emotional nuance, psychological state, or behavioral reaction, while the target language completely lacks a direct, structurally equivalent monolexemic counterpart. This architectural asymmetry forces speakers and translators to actively rely on complex analytical descriptions, multi-word paraphrases, contextual approximations, or shifted metaphorical frameworks to reconstruct the intended communicative value.

The systematic investigation of these lexical gaps between the English and Turkmen emotional lexicons is exceptionally relevant, as contemporary globalized communication, rapid developments in literary translation, and the evolution of cross-cultural pragmatics demand a more profound, non-reductionist understanding of non-equivalent semantic fields. Emotional vocabulary is inherently subjective, deeply experiential, and intrinsically rooted in the historical, social, and psychological developments of a speech community. Traditional bilingual dictionaries often inadvertently obscure these profound underlying discrepancies by providing superficial, mechanical, and highly reductionist translations that completely fail to capture the precise conceptual boundaries, emotional registers, and presuppositional requirements of specific affective states. By rigorously deconstructing these semantic asymmetries and identifying the exact coordinates where one language falls silent while the other speaks with highly specialized precision, researchers can uncover the unique ways in which English and Turkmen speakers mentally organize, evaluate, and navigate their affective universes, shedding light on the broader constraints of linguistic relativity and conceptual integration.

Furthermore, analyzing emotional lacunae provides invaluable, empirical insights into the inherent cognitive mechanisms of language adaptation and structural flexibility. When a language encounters an internal psychological state or an external socio-emotional scenario for which it lacks a pre-existing single-word label, it does not simply fail to express or perceive the phenomenon. Instead, the linguistic system dynamically deploys a wide array of morphosyntactic, derivational, and idiomatic strategies to successfully fill the communicative void and restore equilibrium to the discourse. Investigating these adaptive strategies between a Germanic language characterized by a

vast, historically hybridized, globalized lexicon and a Turkic language characterized by a highly systematic, productive agglutinative morphology and a profound pastoral-nomadic cultural heritage allows for a deeper, more comprehensive appreciation of the structural and functional potential of human language as an evolving cognitive instrument.

The interface between language and emotion also serves as an important site for testing the boundaries of translatability. The structural differences between English and Turkmen are not merely formal; they represent different historical trajectories of conceptualizing the self, the community, and the inner psychological landscape. In an era where intercultural dialogue is increasingly vital, a mechanical approach to emotional vocabulary can lead to profound pragmatic failures, where the deep cultural and moral values attached to an emotional expression are entirely lost. Therefore, this study aims to move beyond a simple list of word contrasts, seeking instead to map the broader cognitive schemas that govern emotional expression in both languages, providing a solid theoretical foundation for future lexicographical and translational practices.

Theoretical Framework and Typology of Lexical Gaps

To conduct a rigorous, structurally sound analysis of the semantic asymmetries existing between the English and Turkmen emotional lexicons, it is theoretically imperative to establish a precise typological distinction between absolute and relative lexical gaps. An absolute lexical gap manifests when a specific emotional concept, psychological state, or nuanced behavioral response is entirely unlexicalized in the target language because the corresponding socio-cultural phenomenon, ethical evaluation, or psychological distinction does not occupy a recognized, prominent place in that community's collective consciousness or historical lifestyle. A relative lexical gap, conversely, occurs when the underlying psychological concept or emotional scenario is readily understood and cognitively accessible to speakers of both linguistic communities, but one language utilizes a single, highly dense, and specialized monolexemic unit, while the other language must rely on a descriptive, multilexemic phrase to convey the exact same semantic weight and emotional intensity.

The cognitive processing and linguistic production of emotional terms involves the simultaneous activation of intricate mental frames, cultural scripts, and experiential knowledge. In the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, these configurations are systematically mapped through idealized cognitive models, which dictate how an internal, visceral physiological sensation is causally connected to an external behavioral expression, an environmental trigger, or a specific social evaluation. When comparing English and Turkmen, the boundaries of these underlying models frequently overlap at the level of basic human emotions, but they rarely, if ever, coincide completely when moving into complex, socially constructed, or secondary emotional states. The structural divergence is further complicated and conditioned by the fundamental typological differences between the two language groups: English heavily favors lexical diversification, lexical borrowing, and semantic specialization through the generation or

adoption of separate, discrete root words, whereas Turkmen utilizes a highly systematic, exceptionally productive agglutinative morphological framework where complex, fine-grained emotional shades can be dynamically constructed on the spot via derivational suffixes, aspectual markers, and auxiliary verb combinations.

The complex mapping of emotional fields also necessitates a deep understanding of how abstract psychological states are metaphorically conceptualized and physically grounded through language. Both English and Turkmen frequently employ spatial and somatic metaphors, mapping internal emotions onto physical sensations or specific internal bodily organs, yet the precise anatomical loci and symbolic weight assigned to these organs vary significantly between the two cultures. While English emotional discourse and literary traditions traditionally center the affective, romantic, and moral life almost exclusively within the heart, Turkmen culture, worldview, and language historically attribute profound affective, spiritual, and structural significance to a wider array of internal loci, most notably the liver, the soul, and the inner breath:

Heart (English Model) <----> Liver / Soul / Breath (Turkmen Model)

This cognitive variance creates unique semantic shifts and conceptual displacements that manifest as deep relative or absolute lexical gaps when attempting a direct word-for-word translation between the two linguistic systems, as the semantic components are distributed across entirely different somatic and metaphorical networks.

Semantic Analysis of English Emotional Concepts and Turkmen Lacunae

A detailed, empirical, and contextual examination of the English emotional lexicon reveals several highly specialized terms that present significant relative or absolute lexical gaps when translated into the Turkmen language. Consider, for instance, the English noun *resentment*, which denotes a highly complex, durable mixture of localized anger, smoldering bitterness, and a profound, internalized sense of unfair treatment or moral injury experienced over an extended duration of time. While the Turkmen lexicon possesses numerous, highly expressive terms for anger, offense, or sorrow, such as *gah* (acute rage or temporary anger), *öýke* (personal offense or resentment occurring typically within a close interpersonal relationship), and *gussa* (grief, sorrow, or profound melancholy), none of these individual monolexic units fully encapsulates the specific semantic blend of *resentment*, which explicitly implies a chronic, deeply internalized, and unexpressed moral grievance against an injustice. To express this precise psychological state without losing its essential semantic features, Turkmen speakers must resort to descriptive compound phrases and active verbal metaphors such as *içiñde kine saklamak* (literally, to harbor a hidden, long-term grudge or malice deep within one's inner being), illustrating a distinct relative lexical gap where a single English abstract noun is systematically replaced by an active, metaphorical verb phrase that describes the psychological process of keeping the emotion alive.

Another prominent and thoroughly documented example of a critical lexical gap is found in the English term *loneliness*, which must be carefully and scientifically distinguished from mere physical isolation or the objective state of being alone. The English language

maintains a strict, highly functional semantic opposition between *solitude* (the objective, neutral, or even peaceful and constructive state of being alone without external intrusion) and *loneliness* (the painful, subjective, and negative psychological feeling of isolation, disconnection, and a perceived lack of meaningful relationships). In the Turkmen language, this delicate, crucial psychological boundary is structurally conflated within a single root word, *ýalňyzlyk* or *tenhalyk*, which can denote both the objective physical state of being solitary and the intense emotional suffering associated with feeling lonely. To explicitly specify and isolate the emotional component of *loneliness* without any threat of contextual ambiguity, the Turkmen language requires the mandatory addition of specific adjectival modifiers or poetic, multi-layered constructions, such as *ruhy ýalňyzlyk* (spiritual or psychological loneliness) or *ýalňyzlyk duýgusy* (the explicit feeling of loneliness), demonstrating how relative gaps are bridged through the systematic implementation of conceptual specifiers.

English Term	Core Semantic Component	Turkmen Analytical Equivalent	Structural Strategy
Resentment	Internalized bitter moral grievance over an injustice	<i>Içiñde kine saklamak</i>	Metaphorical Verb Phrase
Loneliness	Subjective, painful emotional isolation and lack of connection	<i>Ruhy ýalňyzlyk / Ýalňyzlyk duýgusy</i>	Adjectival Specifier / Noun Compound
Grief	Intense, long-term, devastating sorrow over deep loss	<i>Hasrat / Uly gussa</i>	Intensified Abstract Noun
Anxiety	Chronic, unlocalized apprehension regarding the future	<i>Biynjalyklyk / Dowul duýgusy</i>	Derivative Noun / Emotional Compound

The meticulous cognitive processing of these structural gaps highlights the fact that the English lexicon frequently isolates and reifies the emotional state as an independent, static abstract entity through nominalization, whereas Turkmen structural and lexical patterns often prefer to embed the emotion within an ongoing action, a dynamic interpersonal relationship, or a vivid anatomical metaphor. This creates a recurring, highly predictable pattern where English abstract nouns find their closest, most natural semantic echoes in Turkmen verbal, adjectival, and idiomatic structures rather than equivalent nominal forms, changing the grammatical category while preserving the underlying affective message.

Turkmen Cultural Concepts and their English Lexical Lacunae

Conversely, the Turkmen language possesses a remarkably rich, historical, and nuanced array of culturally bound emotional and ethical concepts that completely lack direct monolexic equivalents in the English language, creating profound, multi-layered challenges for translation, lexicography, and cross-cultural interpretation. A central, indispensable concept in the Turkmen affective and social universe is encapsulated in the word *namys*, which is often superficially or inadequately translated in standard

bilingual dictionaries as "honor" or "shame," but actually represents a much more intricate, socially integrated, and psychologically active emotional state. *Namys* functions as a highly dynamic, internal psychological driving force that simultaneously combines absolute personal dignity, a profound sense of existential duty to the collective community, moral responsibility, self-respect, and an intense, highly sensitive vulnerability to social disgrace or perceived failure. When a Turkmen speaker experiences a threat to or a violation of their *namys*, it triggers a specific, highly charged emotional state of collective and individual responsibility that cannot be fully captured by the English word *honor* (which often carries external, historical, legalistic, or chivalric connotations) or *shame* (Environmental and psychological, which is fundamentally retrospective, passive, and entirely negative). *Namys* is both preventive and retrospective, acting as an emotional shield and an internal judge that dictates moral survival within the social matrix.

Another deep, structurally significant lexical gap is observed in the Turkmen term *göwün*, a word of profound cognitive and emotional significance that literally translates in basic contexts to "mind," "heart," "inclination," or "soul," but functions in reality as a unique, highly specialized locus of an entire sub-system of affective vocabulary. The Turkmen language builds an extensive, remarkably expressive semantic network of emotional states around this single root, creating terms like *göwnüne degmek* (to deeply touch, scratch, or bruise someone's delicate emotional essence—frequently translated simply as "to offend" or "to hurt feelings"), *göwnüni götermek* (to actively uplift someone's psychological state, restore their confidence, or comfort their sorrowing soul), and *göwünjeň* (a specific emotional disposition of being selective, highly sensitive, proud, or emotionally discerning). The English language possesses no single lexical item or stable root that can serve as the baseline for such an expansive, psychologically unified emotional framework, requiring English translators to constantly switch between completely different verbs, adjectives, and nouns depending on the specific contextual, relational, and emotional environment in which *göwün* appears.

Furthermore, the Turkmen word *mähir* represents an essential emotional state of warm, unconditional, almost sacred affection, kindness, empathy, and spiritual light radiating directly from one human being toward another or toward a living creature. While English words like *tenderness*, *affection*, *loving-kindness*, and *warmth* capture specific, localized facets of this concept, *mähir* implies an essential, holistic metaphysical virtue that defines the absolute baseline of healthy human relationships, family bonds, and traditional hospitality. The emotional opposite and negation of this state, *mähirsiz*, denotes a specific, highly descriptive psychological coldness that is perceived by the community not merely as a minor absence of politeness or social etiquette, but as a severe, fundamental structural defect in a person's underlying moral and human character. The exceptionally dense saturation of these specific terms within the daily, conversational discourse of Turkmen speakers demonstrates that their emotional vocabulary heavily prioritizes interpersonal harmony, mutual respect, empathetic resonance, and collective ethical alignment, creating rich, deeply textured semantic

fields that remain largely unlexicalized as single words in the highly individualized, commercially oriented, and compartmentalized English lexicon.

Morphosyntactic and Idiomatic Strategies for Overcoming Lacunae

When successfully navigating and resolving the absolute and relative lexical gaps that exist between the English and Turkmen emotional vocabularies, speakers, writers, and translators do not face an insurmountable, permanent cognitive barrier or a total failure of expression. Instead, they actively engage in highly creative, dynamic linguistic compensation by utilizing the unique morphosyntactic strengths, structural affordances, and stylistic resources of their respective languages. In the Turkmen language, the primary, most naturally occurring compensatory mechanism is the widespread use of analytical verb constructions, descriptive somatic idioms, and productive morphological compounding. Because Turkmen is a highly systematic agglutinative language, it can easily, with mathematical precision, append a series of derivational, reflexive, and aspectual suffixes to a single semantic root to modify its internal emotional intensity, its temporal duration, or its external directional orientation toward the self or the interlocutor. For instance, the attachment of the reflexive-derivational suffix *-enmek* can instantly transform a basic physical action or a neutral psychological verb into a delicate, highly nuanced expression of anxious emotional expectation, intuitive longing, or bittersweet premonition, providing an elegant structural means to close complex lexical gaps without the necessity of creating entirely new, independent root words.

Moreover, the Turkmen language frequently and systematically utilizes body-part or somatic metaphors to explicitly construct and externalize emotional states that English prefers to lexicalize through single, abstract Latinate or Germanic roots. These somatic constructions serve as immediate, highly vivid indices of internal states, grounding abstract psychology in physiological reality:

Gözüňi gypmak - Intentional emotional/behavioral signaling

Ýürege düşmek - The structural oppression of the heart (deep boredom / emotional exhaustion)

Başa barmak - To arrive at the head (the emotional satisfaction of fulfillment / success)

In these specific instances, the physical motion, the metaphorical organ interaction, or the somatic displacement serves as a direct, highly expressive, and culturally validated vehicle for the complex emotional meaning, ensuring that the absence of a single, abstract nominal label does not in any way restrict or truncate the speaker's expressive capacity or communicative precision.

The English language, when faced with the necessity of expressing Turkmen cultural lacunae and dense emotional concepts, primarily relies on the alternative strategies of structural modification, semantic extension, or the ad-hoc creation of complex adjective-noun compounds and descriptive phrases. Because English syntax relies heavily on external analytic modification and possesses a highly flexible lexical structure, it can

easily construct incredibly precise, multi-layered emotional descriptions by layering descriptive terms, qualifying adverbs, and psychological adjectives. However, this analytical layering, while cognitively complete, often lacks the compact, immediate, and resonant emotional force that is naturally carried by the original Turkmen monolexemic or highly integrated idiomatic unit. The sharp contrast between these two distinct linguistic approaches reveals that while English tends to expand its vast vocabulary horizontally by adopting external loanwords or inventing separate discrete terms to match new nuances, Turkmen expands its expressive power vertically and structurally, maximizing the semantic potential, metaphorical depth, and directional orientation of its existing historical roots through agglutination and vivid, highly unified idiomatic compounding.

Conclusion

The comprehensive, contrastive, and semantic analysis of lexical gaps within the emotional vocabulary of the English and Turkmen languages reveals that while basic affective experiences and core biological emotions are universally shared across humanity, their precise linguistic boundaries, structural encodings, metaphorical grounding, and socio-cultural evaluations are deeply and wonderfully divergent. The English language exhibits a high degree of nominal and analytical specialization, isolating complex, secondary psychological states into distinct, free-standing abstract nouns. Turkmen, conversely, embeds its extensive emotional lexicon within a highly interconnected, dynamic framework of somatic metaphors, deeply held interpersonal ethical concepts such as *namys*, and fluid verbal and morphological constructions systematically centered around the multi-faceted concept of *göwün*.

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