

Linguocultural and Linguopoetic Interpretations of the Concept of “Mother Tongue”

MUSABOYEVA ZULXUMOR
Namangan State University, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguocultural and linguopoetic interpretations of the concept of "mother tongue" in Uzbek discourse. The study aims to identify the principal linguistic, national-cultural, and artistic meanings associated with the concept. The analysis is based on Uzbek explanatory, terminological, and encyclopedic dictionaries, scholarly works, journalistic materials, aphorisms, proverbs, and literary and poetic texts. The results show that "mother tongue" is interpreted not only as the language acquired in childhood but also as a marker of national identity, cultural continuity, spiritual values, and personal dignity. The analysis further demonstrates that Uzbek poetry represents the mother tongue through recurrent figurative images, including the language, mirror, symbol, history, and spiritual heritage of the nation. The study also highlights the linguocultural significance of the concept in relation to national memory and the transmission of cultural values across generations. The findings indicate that the concept of "mother tongue" combines linguistic, cultural, philosophical, and poetic dimensions and therefore represents a significant object of linguocultural and linguopoetic analysis.

Keywords: Mother tongue, native language, linguocultural analysis, linguopoetic analysis, national identity, national-cultural value, Uzbek language, linguistic worldview

INTRODUCTION

A mother is the person dearest and most beloved to an individual. Accordingly, in Uzbek, only a limited number of things and phenomena are characterized by the word *ona* ("mother"), including *ona tuproq* ("native soil"), *ona Vatan/ona yurt* ("motherland"), *ona xalq* ("one's people"), and *ona tabiat* ("nature"). In this respect, the mother tongue is regarded as sacred and precious to an individual, just as the mother and the motherland are.

In Uzbek explanatory and terminological dictionaries, *ona tili* ("mother tongue") is defined both as a lexical item and as a linguistic term: "The language that a child learns from infancy by imitating adults; the native language (usually the language of the people to which the speaker belongs)" [1: 489].

Encyclopedic dictionaries provide a broader definition of the mother tongue: "The mother tongue is the language of a particular ethnic group, people, or nation. Its lexical composition primarily consists of words and concepts that express the way of life, culture, and traditions of the people to whom the language belongs. The development of the mother tongue is closely connected with the social development of every ethnic group, people, and nation" [2: 541].

The specific contribution of the present study lies in bringing these linguistic, national-cultural, and poetic dimensions into a single analytical framework. It identifies recurring semantic and figurative patterns through which "mother tongue" is conceptualized in Uzbek discourse, with particular attention to national identity, cultural memory, dignity, and spiritual continuity.

Every individual comes to understand the world, themselves, their ancestors, their history, and their homeland through their mother tongue. As President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has emphasized, "If we say that love and devotion to the motherland begin with love and devotion to the mother tongue, we will not be mistaken" [7].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employs descriptive, interpretive, linguocultural, and linguopoetic methods. The material consists of definitions from Uzbek explanatory and encyclopedic dictionaries, scholarly works on language and mother tongue, journalistic materials, aphorisms and proverbs, and poetic texts devoted to the Uzbek language.

The analysis focuses on the semantic meanings, cultural associations, evaluative connotations, and figurative representations attributed to the concept of "mother tongue." The selected materials were examined comparatively to identify recurring meanings and culturally significant conceptualizations. Quotations and ideas taken from the listed sources are identified by numbered in-text citations corresponding to the reference list.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The mother tongue is a shared national heritage. For every person who identifies as Uzbek, the Uzbek language constitutes their mother tongue. Therefore, the mother tongue constitutes a foundation of national spirituality, and loving, valuing, and honoring it is both a duty and a moral responsibility for every Uzbek.

As Hero of Uzbekistan and poet Erkin Vohidov observed, "The mother tongue is a symbol of identity." A person who does not love their mother tongue and neither knows nor takes an interest in the history embedded in it cannot be regarded as fully accomplished. One's language is as dear as one's homeland and as sacred as one's mother [5: 7]

During the former Soviet period, the artificial notion of a "second mother tongue" emerged. In this way, attempts were made to elevate the dominant language. Reflecting on this issue, N. Mahmudov writes that during the period of political repression, efforts were made to undermine the essence of the concept of "mother tongue" and that the term "second mother tongue" was introduced into usage [4: 12-13]

The person who gives birth to, nourishes, raises, and nurtures an individual is one – the mother. Therefore, “There can be only one mother tongue!” This idea is also reflected in Mahmudov’s work devoted to the concept of a single mother tongue [3].

No matter how many languages a person knows, there is only one language that is fully and completely their own, and that is, naturally, their mother tongue. Only this language is transmitted directly from the mother, together with all its mysteries and with the pattern of national thought embodied in it. Every other language is learned through this mother tongue” [4: 12-13].

The mother tongue instills in an individual a sense of pride and dignity. For a person, there is no language in the world richer, more beautiful, more precious, or more exalted than their own. This is also confirmed by Erkin Vohidov’s statement: “I do not know how Uzbek is perceived by others, but for me it is the richest, most beautiful, and most perfect language in the world. I learned to speak in Uzbek, I wrote in Uzbek when I first took up a pen, and I put the joys and sufferings of my heart onto paper in Uzbek” [5: 116].

Uzbek proverbs likewise emphasize the exalted status of the mother tongue, equating it with life and the heart: “My mother tongue is my life and my soul” [10].

The mother tongue is a central pillar and enduring foundation of the national and spiritual world. Completely forgetting one’s mother tongue leads to a rupture with ethnocultural and national-spiritual roots and undermines the preservation and appreciation of national-spiritual values embedded in human consciousness and character [4; 6; 10].

The mother tongue is the heart, spirit, and principal mirror of a nation. Great writers and thinkers have left numerous enduring aphorisms and wise sayings concerning the grandeur, value, and richness of the mother tongue [8].

The renowned Russian educator Konstantin Ushinsky attached great importance to the role of the mother-tongue lesson in school education. Reflecting on the profound educational and spiritual power of the mother tongue, he wrote: “The mother tongue is the finest educator of the people and its richest spiritual source.” These observations underscore the role of the mother

tongue in learning about and understanding the culture and values of a nation [12: 541-556].

A collection of language-related aphorisms attributes to Leo Tolstoy the view that language is the living bond of a people's life, the heritage of ancestors, and the trust of future generations. The same collection also presents the idea that, when a person wishes to speak from the heart, a French or English word does not spontaneously come to mind [8].

A collection of language-related aphorisms similarly attributes to Jean-Jacques Rousseau the idea that every language expresses a distinctive worldview and that losing one's mother tongue means losing one's identity. Thus, the mother tongue can be interpreted as a fundamental basis of identity in the broadest sense [8].

Alikhontora Soguni also emphasizes that the mother tongue is a matter of survival for every nation, arguing that when a nation's mother tongue can no longer meet its needs and is defeated by foreign languages, the nation's historical and social existence is endangered [9: 14].

The mother tongue is a fundamental basis of a nation's existence and continuity. Without a mother tongue, a nation cannot exist or endure. In other words, the mother tongue is the cornerstone of a nation. These ideas are also consistent with Mukhtar Auezov's statement, as reproduced in a collection of language-related aphorisms, that a person who does not respect their mother tongue and literature cannot be regarded as cultured [8].

The mother tongue is regarded as a principal guarantee of the existence and continuity of every nation. When a language disappears, the people's past, culture, and spiritual heritage are also threatened with disappearance. The mother tongue is a great mirror that reflects a person's national identity and indicates the community to which they belong [8; 10].

Love for the mother tongue is instilled in a child through the lullaby. N. Mahmudov describes the unconscious pleasure experienced by an infant from a lullaby in the mother tongue, its melody, and the words that convey the mother's hopes and dreams [4: 9].

In the scholar's interpretation, "The mother tongue possesses such a magical and divine power that the analytical capacity of the human mind is incapable of fully revealing the mysteries concealed within its essence" [4: 9]

An individual comprehends existence, the world, and themselves through their mother tongue. Japanese Professor Tadanobu Tsunoda similarly argues that the mother tongue differentiates how people perceive, sense, assimilate, and understand surrounding sounds, and that it is connected with the development of emotional mechanisms in the brain. He also links the mother tongue acquired in childhood with the formation of the distinctive culture and spiritual world of each ethnic group [4: 11].

The mother tongue is described as a factor that shapes the national spirit, continually strengthens it, and enables it to be carefully preserved and cherished [4: 9]

In classical and contemporary Uzbek poetry, poems devoted to language and the mother tongue occupy a distinctive place. To date, more than 500 poems on the theme of the mother tongue have reportedly been written by poets ranging from renowned figures to young authors at the beginning of their creative careers. These poems have been collected and published in anthologies. Some poets have even created cycles of poems devoted to the mother tongue and published them as separate collections [10; 11; 13].

Across these poems, the Uzbek language – the mother tongue – is interpreted and characterized in figurative and artistic terms as the language of the nation, the mirror of the nation, a symbol of the nation, the nation's encyclopedia, the history and future of the people; as the best, richest, most beautiful, mother-like, dear, sacred, exalted, and unique language; as a symbol of the homeland, a symbol of national independence, an expression of personal identity, a means of understanding the world and oneself, and a symbol of honor, dignity, and faith [10; 11; 13].

This is also confirmed by the titles of poems devoted to the mother tongue, including 'My Mother Tongue' (Mirtemir, Shuhrat), 'My Mother Tongue Will Not Die' (E. Vohidov), 'A Symbol of the Nation' (J. Ismoilov), 'The Language of the Heart'

(Nodir Jonuzoq), 'My Own Language' (D. Haydarova), 'My Mother Tongue – My Pride' (Muammad Ismoil), 'You Are the Nation's Property' (Barot Yarash), 'The Language of My Epic' (Boqiy Mirzo), 'My Identity Is My Language' (Jamoliddin Muslim), 'My Beloved Mother Tongue' (Sh. Salimova), 'Sweet Speech' (O. Tojiboyeva), 'My Uzbek Language, My State Language' (Ja'far Muhammad), 'My Mother Tongue – My Lifeblood' (M. Botirov), 'My Homeland Is the Uzbek Language' (Z. Ochilova), 'Language Is the Nation's Encyclopedia' (N. Jumayeva), 'The Uzbek Language – Eternal and Living' (Guli Murod), 'My Eternal Language' (F. Ne'matullayeva), and 'The Language of the Nation' (I. Narzullayev) [10; 11; 13].

In poets' works, the image of the mother tongue is portrayed as the wealth and entirety of the people, their honor and dignity, the pattern engraved on their hearts, and the remedy for the people's suffering [10; 11; 13].

CONCLUSIONS

The mother tongue has scientific, national-cultural, and folk interpretations. From a linguistic perspective, the mother tongue is the language an individual learns from childhood within the family – from parents, siblings, and other close relatives - and uses throughout life. From a logical-philosophical perspective, a person has one mother tongue. The mother tongue is a symbol of honor, dignity, faith, and conviction. For an individual, it is the dearest, most sacred, exalted, and precious language; it is a means of understanding, studying, and knowing the world, oneself, and existence, as well as a spiritual and educational treasure. The mother tongue is as precious as the homeland and nature [1: 489; 2: 541; 3; 4].

From a national-cultural perspective, the mother tongue constitutes the basis of the ethnic existence of a particular nation or people and serves as the language that sustains that existence. It is a foundation for the formation and continuity of an ethnic community as a nation. These aspects of the mother tongue are represented in poetry as a distinctive artistic image [2: 541; 10; 11].

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MUSABOYEVA ZULXUMOR

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER,

DEPARTMENT OF UZBEK LANGUAGE,

NAMANGAN STATE UNIVERSITY,

NAMANGAN, UZBEKISTAN.

E-MAIL: <MUSABAYEVAZULXUMOR@GMAIL.COM>