

Peripheral Concepts in Ulugbek Hamdam's Novel *Muvozanat*

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the peripheral conceptual layer of Ulugbek Hamdam's Uzbek novel Muvozanat through a corpus-assisted cognitive-semantic approach. Whereas existing readings generally foreground the novel's governing idea of balance and its social context, the present study asks how less salient but structurally consequential concepts contribute to that centre. A 72,856-word electronic text was searched for lexical families associated with "conscience," "fate," "love," "freedom," and "patience." All retrieved items were manually disambiguated, and twelve excerpts previously identified in a concept card index were checked against the 2007 edition. Quantitative distribution was combined with close contextual analysis, conceptual-feature modelling, and attention to metaphor, personification, evaluative polarity, and character perspective. The results show that "fate" has the highest lexical visibility, while "conscience," despite its lower frequency, possesses marked narrative agency through personification and the recurrent model conscience is an inner judge. "Love" is organised by a tension between spiritual attachment and material calculation; "freedom" is both emancipatory and morally ambivalent; "patience" moves from a communal virtue to a limited resource. These concepts are peripheral by relative textual salience, not by interpretive insignificance. Together they test, disturb, and eventually recalibrate the central "balance" schema. The study demonstrates that a radial model of the literary conceptsphere can explain how low- and medium-frequency concepts perform high-value structural functions in a novel.

Keywords: Cognitive semantics, literary concept, conceptosphere, peripheral concept, corpus-assisted analysis, Uzbek novel, Ulugbek Hamdam, *Muvozanat*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literary meaning is produced not only by plot and character but also by networks of recurrent conceptual structures. Cognitive linguistics treats language as part of general cognition and regards meaning as embodied, perspectival, and encyclopaedic rather than as an autonomous code (Croft & Cruse 2004; Evans & Green 2006). When applied to fiction, this view enables the researcher to connect lexical choice with knowledge structures, value systems, narrative viewpoint, and culturally available models.

Hamdam's *Muvozanat* is particularly suitable for such an inquiry. Written against the social and psychological transformations following Uzbek independence, the novel follows Yusuf's attempts to preserve an ethically defensible equilibrium among material need, intellectual vocation, family responsibility, faith, and personal desire. The title concept "balance" therefore operates as an organising centre. Yet a centre becomes analytically meaningful only in relation to the concepts that surround, support, contradict, or destabilise it. "conscience," "fate," "love," "freedom," and "patience" do not dominate the novel's explicit metalanguage, but they repeatedly intervene at decisive moments.

The term "peripheral" is used here in a radial rather than a dismissive sense. Prototype theory shows that categories exhibit graded membership: central and peripheral elements differ in salience and representativeness rather than in simple presence or absence (Rosch 1975). In linguocultural concept studies, a conceptosphere may similarly be modelled as an organised field containing dominant, basic, and peripheral zones (Karasik 2002; Popova & Sternin 2007). Literary texts make this organisation dynamic. A concept may be lexically infrequent yet narratively powerful if it appears at turning points, directs evaluation, or links several character arcs.

This distinction is important because frequency alone cannot establish conceptual status. “Fate” is frequently named in *Muvozanat*, while “conscience” occurs less often; nevertheless, personified conscience produces some of the novel’s most intense episodes of self-judgement. Likewise, “freedom” carries positive cultural associations but can become “evil freedom” when release from restraint means moral disintegration (Hamdam 2007: 196). Peripheral concepts thus function as diagnostic instruments: they expose the conditions under which balance is lost or restored.

The study addresses three questions. First, what is the relative lexical distribution of the five concepts in the electronic text? Second, which cognitive-semantic features and figurative models organise their contextual realisation? Third, how do these concepts interact with the central “balance” schema and with one another? By answering these questions, the article contributes a replicable small-corpus method to the cognitive study of Uzbek prose and offers an English-language account of a major contemporary Uzbek novel.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH GAP

Concepts in cognitive linguistics are not dictionary meanings copied into the mind. They are flexible knowledge structures activated in use. Langacker (1987) explains meaning through construal: speakers select, foreground, and relate aspects of a conceptual domain. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) demonstrate that abstract experience is systematically organised through conceptual metaphor, while Kövecses (2010) emphasises the contextual and cultural variability of metaphorical realisation. These insights are central to literary analysis because fiction deliberately manipulates perspective, salience, and figurative mapping.

Cognitive stylistics and cognitive poetics extend this framework to readers’ engagement with texts. Semino & Culpeper (2002) show that linguistic form guides the construction of characters, viewpoints, and fictional worlds; Stockwell (2020) describes literary reading as an interaction among textual cues, attentional patterns, and stored knowledge. A literary concept can therefore be reconstructed from direct

nominations, synonyms, metaphorical expressions, recurrent situations, evaluations, and intertextual associations. Safarov (2006), in the Uzbek tradition of cognitive linguistics, likewise stresses the inseparability of language, thought, and culturally mediated knowledge.

Previous discussions of *Muvozanat* have primarily emphasised independence, social transition, spirituality, materiality, and the general philosophical problem announced by the title. Such readings establish the thematic centre but leave its surrounding field under-described. The five concepts selected here have usually been treated as isolated motifs – for example, Yusuf’s remorse, Oygul’s exhausted patience, or the released bird – rather than as a coordinated peripheral system. The lack of corpus-supported evidence also makes it difficult to distinguish interpretive prominence from lexical recurrence.

The present study fills this gap in three ways. It combines a transparent lexical-family count with qualitative close reading; it treats peripherality as a relational property within the novel’s conceptosphere; and it compares the five concepts through shared analytic parameters: lexical visibility, evaluative polarity, figurative modelling, character distribution, and relation to “balance.” This design avoids two opposite reductions: equating concept with keyword frequency, and offering interpretations that cannot be traced to observable linguistic cues.

The working hypothesis is that peripheral concepts form an ethical-regulatory ring around “balance.” “Conscience” evaluates action after or before transgression; “fate” negotiates agency and necessity; “love” tests the relation between spiritual value and material pressure; “freedom” measures the quality of release; and “patience” measures the duration and limit of endurance. Their interaction transforms balance from a static midpoint into a contested process of moral self-regulation.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. *Corpus and sampling*

The primary source was the 2007 Sharq edition of *Muvozanat*, accessed as a 251-page searchable PDF. After recurring page

headers and repository labels were removed, the extracted text contained approximately 72,856 word tokens. The accompanying spreadsheet supplied twelve manually selected passages: five for “conscience,” five for “fate,” one for “love,” and one for “freedom.” “Patience” was added after a corpus search showed a coherent lexical and contextual pattern not represented in the initial card index.

3.2. *Retrieval and disambiguation*

Searches targeted Uzbek lexical families rather than English labels: *viydon* and *andisha* for “conscience”; *taqdir*, *qismat*, and *nasib* for “fate”; *muhabbat*, *sevgi*, and *ishq* for “love”; *ozod* and lower-case *erkin* for “freedom”; and *sabr*, *toqat*, *chid-*, and *bardosh* for “patience.” Every concordance was manually reviewed. False positives were excluded: *ishqilib* (“in any case”) and *ishqalangan* (“rubbed”) were removed from the “love” set; the personal name *Erkin* was excluded from “freedom”; and *taqdirlamoq* (“to reward”) was excluded from “fate.” Counts consequently represent contextually validated lexical-family hits, not unfiltered strings.

3.3. *Analytical procedure*

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, raw and normalised frequencies per 10,000 tokens were calculated. Second, each occurrence was coded for character or narrative voice, evaluative polarity, and immediate semantic domain. Third, recurrent conceptual features and figurative models were inferred from context, including personification, metaphor, metonymy, opposition, and intertextual framing. Fourth, the concepts were positioned in relation to “balance” by asking whether they regulate, explain, challenge, or restore equilibrium. Quantitative evidence was used to establish distribution; qualitative interpretation determined conceptual function.

3.4. *Translation and limitations*

All English translations of Uzbek excerpts are the author’s. Page references follow the electronic 2007 edition. Because Uzbek is morphologically rich and the PDF contains occasional spacing

artefacts, the numerical results are indicative rather than a fully lemmatised corpus inventory. The small corpus does not support broad claims about Uzbek fiction as a whole; it supports a controlled interpretation of one novel.

4. RESULTS

4.1. *Distribution and relative salience*

The validated search produced 150 lexical-family hits across the five concepts. “Fate” was the most visible, accounting for 56 hits and 37.3% of the selected conceptual lexicon. “Love” followed with 31 hits; “patience,” “freedom,” and “conscience” occurred less frequently. The ranking is informative but not identical to narrative importance.

Table 1.

Concept	Validated hits	Per 10,000 tokens	Share	Principal Uzbek markers
Fate	56	7.69	37.3%	<i>taqdir, qismat, nasib</i>
Love	31	4.25	20.7%	<i>muhabbat, sevgi, ishq</i>
Patience	29	3.98	19.3%	<i>sabr, toqat, chidam, bardosh</i>
Freedom	20	2.75	13.3%	<i>ozod, ozodlik, erkin</i>
Conscience	14	1.92	9.3%	<i>viydon, andisha</i>
Total	150	20.59	100%	–

“Fate’s” prominence reflects the novel’s repeated negotiation of historical change, social constraint, loss, and personal choice. However, the distribution also reveals why a qualitative stage is necessary. “Conscience” has the lowest frequency but is highly concentrated in morally charged scenes and often appears as an autonomous force. “Patience” has medium visibility and a clear narrative trajectory from blessing and endurance to exhaustion. “Freedom” is relatively sparse, yet its occurrences are strongly metaphorical. “Love” is dispersed across family affection, romantic attachment, mystical language, and cultural memory.

The five concepts also differ in polarity. “Conscience” and “patience” begin as culturally positive regulators but become

painful when delayed or overextended. “Fate” shifts between gratitude, resignation, accusation, and historical responsibility. “Love” is idealised in remembered cultural models but constrained by domestic and economic calculation. “Freedom” is positively valued in the bird-release scene yet negatively marked when Yusuf experiences an “evil freedom.” These polarity shifts connect all five concepts to the novel’s governing concern: a value becomes constructive only when it remains proportionate to responsibility.

4.2. *Conscience: The inner judge*

“Conscience” is structured primarily through the model “conscience is an inner judge.” Muhammadjon aka concludes that a person must periodically stop, review previous steps, and “answer before one’s conscience” in order to prevent future errors (Hamdam 2007: 19). The legal-accounting vocabulary of answering, reviewing, and error transforms inward reflection into a tribunal. The self is divided into acting subject and evaluating authority.

The concept becomes more forceful through personification. When Yusuf’s remorse emerges, he asks why the “cursed Conscience” raised its head only after the destructive event and had not stopped him earlier (Hamdam 2007: 225). Capitalisation in the passage, the verb “raise its head,” and direct interrogation grant conscience independent agency. Yet this agency is temporally problematic: conscience judges retrospectively, after desire has already altered relationships. The delayed judge is painful but still proves that moral humanity survives. Yusuf reasons that his suffering means he has not become entirely animal-like; pain is converted into evidence of remaining personhood.

A second feature is “conscience as consuming pain.” Zahro loses peace in movement, eating, and sleep; Gulshoda’s bodily illness weakens while thoughts that “gnaw at her heart” intensify (Hamdam 2007: 188). Somatic metaphors turn ethical conflict into an embodied condition. The opposition between bodily relief and moral deterioration shows that material comfort cannot by itself restore equilibrium.

“Conscience” is also dialogic. Zahro appears to soothe Yusuf but is actually searching for answers to her own conscience (Hamdam 2007: 227). Moral evaluation is distributed between self-perception and the imagined viewpoint of the injured Mirazim. This produces the conceptual feature “perspectival accountability”: an act cannot be evaluated solely from the lovers’ internal justification.

Thus, “conscience” occupies a low-frequency but high-impact position. It regulates “balance” by exposing discrepancies among desire, loyalty, and responsibility. Its delayed activation does not erase wrong doing; it prevents complete moral numbness and creates the possibility of recalibration.

4.3. *Fate: Constraint, explanation, and contested agency*

“Fate” is the most frequent peripheral concept and the most semantically heterogeneous. Its lexical field includes taqdir, qismat, and nasib, each contributing shades of ordained course, personal lot, and allotted share. The dominant spatial model is “fate is a path or current.” Muhammadjon aka’s destiny is said to turn into another channel when party work transforms his career (Hamdam 2007: 8). The watercourse metaphor represents biography as movement directed by historical forces.

A second model is “fate is a distributor.” Said’s advancement may be interpreted as his own fulfilment of a promise or as fate favouring him; the narrator immediately calls attention to “the game of fate” when Said, rather than Yusuf, participates in the very public project Yusuf had imagined (Hamdam 2007: 66). The vocabulary of favour and play produces ambiguity between merit, accident, and irony. Fate becomes a narrative device for comparing unrealised intellectual aspiration with successful institutional adaptation.

In scenes of bereavement and hardship, “fate” functions as a formula of consolation: “what is in fate” closes discussion and invites endurance (Hamdam 2007: 187). Gulshoda rejects this formula and demands that her family curse such a fate. The same concept therefore licenses both resignation and protest. This conflict is crucial. If fate is used to cancel agency, it may

preserve emotional stability at the cost of action; if it is rejected completely, suffering lacks an explanatory frame.

Poetic and intertextual discourse intensifies the concept through the collocation “separation written on the forehead,” a culturally conventional embodiment of predestination (Hamdam 2007: 167). Yet the novel’s final pedagogical discourse expands fate beyond the individual: every word addressed to students contains “the fate of tomorrow, the fate of balance, [and] the destiny of the whole universe” (p. 246). Here “fate” becomes collective responsibility rather than passive allotment.

The resulting structure contains four features: “historical course,” “allotted share,” “consolatory necessity,” and “responsibility for the future.” “Fate” destabilises “balance” when it excuses passivity, but supports balance when it reminds characters that individual acts enter larger historical consequences.

4.4. *Love: Spiritual attachment under material pressure*

“Love” is represented through muhabbat, sevgi, and ishq. These forms activate overlapping but non-identical frames: affection and attachment, romantic love, and intense or culturally elevated passion. The novel moves among parental, marital, romantic, literary, and quasi-mystical meanings, producing a concept with a wide emotional range.

One recurrent model is “love is a contained substance.” The long-suppressed affection between father and son is described as having hardened like a stone in their throats before being released in tears and confession (Hamdam 2007: 17). The bodily container integrates emotion, speech, and silence: love exists, but social distance prevents its verbal flow. Its eventual expression temporarily restores relational balance.

Romantic love is also framed through culturally prestigious intertexts. Muhammadjon aka invokes Layli and Majnun when imagining separation from his wife (Hamdam 2007: 87), while a later reflection juxtaposes Layli and Majnun with Romeo and Juliet. Such names compress large scripts of fidelity, suffering, and tragic intensity. Yet modern people reproduce these stories in books and films while hesitating to live their risks. “Love”

therefore appears as “cultural memory” opposed to pragmatic self-preservation.

The central tension is “love versus material calculation.” Yusuf wants to live ‘with love in his heart,’ but love requires honesty and modesty; within a predatory social environment, these qualities leave him defenceless and are associated with losses of family, child, and vocation (Hamdam 2007: 163). The text does not present love as a simple cure. Love without social and material support may deepen vulnerability, whereas material security without love empties inner life.

Zahro’s later hopes for her daughters – education, income, status, and suitable partners – are deliberately “earthly” (Hamdam 2007: 229). The passage relocates love inside parental responsibility and economic foresight. Consequently, “love” contributes to “balance” through integration rather than romantic absolutism. Its peripheral position enables the novel to test whether spiritual attachment can survive without ignoring material conditions.

4.5. Freedom: Flight, release, and moral ambivalence

“Freedom” has the smallest field after “conscience,” but it generates some of the novel’s most memorable imagery. Its prototypical realisation occurs when Muhammadjon aka releases a bird: “Fly now! Be free! Go wherever you wish... nothing equals freedom” (Hamdam 2007: 22). The mapping “freedom is flight” links open air, direction, and self-determined movement. The bird embodies a living being released from human possession, while the ruined gardens and mountains complicate the destination: freedom is necessary, but the world into which one flies has been environmentally and socially damaged.

The imperative sequence – go, fly, be free – creates acceleration, yet it is interrupted by the warning that freedom will not be easy. This yields the feature “freedom requires risk.” Release removes a visible boundary, but it does not guarantee safety or belonging. *Ulug’tog* functions as an imagined space of purity, distance, and alternative life; its value derives partly from contrast with the destroyed local landscape.

A darker model appears when Yusuf experiences “a certain evil freedom” after an inner restraint breaks (Hamdam 2007: 196). Two opposing forces had struggled within him; the defeat of one produces intoxicated release. Here “freedom is unrestrained impulse.” The adjective evil reverses the concept’s usual positive polarity and distinguishes liberty from ethical self-government. Freedom from conscience is not freedom toward responsible action.

Other contexts use release figuratively: Said arrives as joyfully as a prisoner set free (Hamdam 2007: 64), while Yusuf at one point surrenders the freedom of his thought to its own turbulent flow (p. 245). These instances foreground transition from constraint to movement, but their values depend on purpose. Institutional mobility may resemble liberation; uncontrolled cognition may resemble inspiration; erotic transgression may resemble emancipation. The same source-domain therefore produces divergent ethical outcomes.

“Freedom” relates to “balance” through the opposition between autonomy and restraint. The novel values liberation from coercion, stagnation, and confinement, but rejects release detached from accountability. The peripheral concept refines the centre: genuine balance is not static obedience, yet neither is it unrestricted desire.

4.6. *Patience: Virtue, resource, and threshold*

“Patience” is expressed by *sabr*, *toqat*, *chid-*, and *bardosh*. Its earliest positive framing occurs in a grandmother’s blessing that God may grant the family patience, paired with gratitude for enduring an elderly woman’s difficult behaviour (Hamdam 2007: 40). Patience is thus a divinely supported communal virtue that sustains kinship and care.

The concept changes when economic pressure accumulates. Yusuf tells Oygul to be patient, but she protests that patience must have a limit (Hamdam 2007: 74). Repetition makes *sabr* sound formulaic and insufficient; the limit metaphor conceptualises patience as a finite container or resource. Oygul’s response does not simply reject virtue. It exposes the unequal

burden created when an abstract moral demand substitutes for housing, income, and practical action.

In other scenes, *sabr-toqat* supports loyalty and continued contact, while the idiom “his patience overflowed” represents waiting as a container filled beyond capacity (Hamdam 2007: 88, 141). These opposing constructions generate patience is endurance and patience is a limited capacity.” The first protects relationships; the second marks a threshold after which endurance becomes psychologically destructive.

Table 2.

Concept	Core model	Dominant function	Relation to balance
Conscience	Inner judge / consuming pain	Retrospective ethical control	Reveals moral disequilibrium
Fate	Path / distributor	Explains constraint and consequence	Negotiates agency and necessity
Love	Substance / cultural script	Connects persons and values	Tests spirit–matter integration
Freedom	Flight /release	Opens or removes constraint	Requires responsible autonomy
Patience	Endurance / limited resource	Sustains or exhausts the self	Marks the temporal limit of strain

Table 2 shows that the five concepts are functionally integrated. Each measures a different dimension of equilibrium: ethical, causal, relational, volitional, or temporal. **Patience** completes this system by asking how long imbalance can be endured before accommodation becomes complicity or collapse.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings support a radial model of Muvozanat’s conceptsphere. “Balance” remains the dominant conceptual centre because it is named by the title, repeatedly discussed, and used to interpret both individual and social life. The five peripheral concepts do not compete for that status. Instead, they

operate as specialised tests of the centre. Their peripherality is relative lexical and thematic salience combined with distinctive regulatory work.

The quantitative ranking and qualitative ranking are not identical. “Fate” is lexically dominant within the peripheral set, yet its functions are distributed across many situations. “Conscience” is least frequent but more concentrated and agentive. This confirms a methodological point: corpus counts identify patterns of visibility, whereas narrative function requires contextual reading (McEnery & Hardie 2012). In literary semantics, a low-frequency expression can be foregrounded by position, figurative density, character crisis, or evaluative intensity.

The results also reveal a shared pattern of polarity reversal. Conscience is a necessary moral faculty but becomes torment when belated; fate offers consolation but may legitimate passivity; love humanises but can expose the honest subject to social injury; freedom liberates but can become “evil” when detached from conscience; patience sustains but becomes intolerable when endlessly demanded. None of the concepts carries a fixed positive or negative value. Their evaluation is relational and proportional – precisely the semantic logic of balance.

A second integrative finding concerns agency. “Fate” and “patience” often reduce immediate action by framing hardship as allotted or endurable. “Freedom” pushes toward action by removing restraint. “Conscience” interrupts action through evaluation, and “love” motivates action through attachment. Yusuf’s crisis emerges because these systems do not align: love encourages intimacy, conscience foregrounds betrayal, freedom names release, fate explains loss, and patience delays resolution. “Balance” is therefore a meta-schema coordinating competing motivational frames.

Culturally, the novel combines Uzbek lexical and ethical traditions with wider literary memory. *Taqdir*, *qismat*, *nasib*, *sabr*, and *viydon* activate religious and communal models, while Layli-Majnun and Romeo-Juliet broaden “love” through Eastern and Western precedents. The bird and Ulug‘tog‘ connect

“freedom” to landscape and ecological loss. These links confirm that literary concepts are encyclopaedic structures shaped by language, culture, intertext, and narrative viewpoint rather than isolated lexical definitions.

The study’s main contribution is thus both interpretive and methodological. It gives peripheral concepts a defined place in the novel’s architecture and demonstrates a workable sequence for small literary corpora: lexical-family retrieval, manual disambiguation, normalised distribution, close reading, and conceptual modelling. Future research may compare Hamdam’s other novels, use a morphologically annotated Uzbek corpus, or test whether readers perceive the same centre – periphery relations.

6. CONCLUSION

The peripheral conceptual layer of *Muvozanat* is not ornamental. “conscience,” “fate,” “love,” “freedom,” and “patience” form an ethical-regulatory ring around “balance.” “Fate” has the greatest lexical visibility, but frequency does not determine narrative force: the less frequent “conscience” and “freedom” concepts produce especially concentrated moments of moral and symbolic meaning. Across the five domains, figurative models convert abstract values into judges, paths, substances, flights, containers, and thresholds.

The decisive common feature is evaluative flexibility. Each concept becomes constructive or destructive according to its relation to responsibility, material conditions, and proportion. This explains why the novel’s balance is neither passive moderation nor a compromise between equal alternatives. It is an ongoing cognitive and ethical achievement in which the self must coordinate competing pressures. A corpus-assisted cognitive-semantic approach makes this architecture visible while retaining the contextual complexity of literary interpretation.

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