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REFLECTION AND NEGATION: A PHONOSEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SHARED ICONIC ROOTS IN TURKIC, SLAVIC, AND ENGLISH DEIXIS AND REFLEXIVITY MARKERS

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Abstract

This article applies the phonosemantic framework developed within Odam Tili theory, associated with Dr. Mahmudjon Kuchkarov, to a cluster of deictic, reflexive, and negational morphemes found in Turkic (Uzbek), Slavic (Russian), and English. We argue that a small inventory of articulatory-iconic primitives recurs across these languages with a consistent semantic profile: space, an object occupying space, and the reflection of that object, understood as an entity that occupies no space of its own. Central to the argument are negating consonants such as n, k, v and p acting on the open spatial vowel a, and a reflexive-image marker realised as ay, я, or I. We illustrate the framework through the Uzbek word yoziq and the Russian язык, the Uzbek darya and the Russian dative form даря, the Uzbek aynak and aynan, the historical hydronym Sayhun, the Russian меня against мен, and the object-marking particle на compared with the English indefinite article an. We do not claim genetic relatedness between Turkic, Slavic, and English in the sense used by historical linguistics; instead we propose that these forms are best understood as convergent phonosemantic iconicity, grounded in a shared embodied human experience of standing upright and seeing one's own reflection in still water. We situate the claim against Ferdinand de Saussure's arbitrariness principle and against the existing literature on sound symbolism, and we set out what would be needed to test it more rigorously.

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1. Introduction

Historical-comparative linguistics conventionally explains similarity between languages through two channels: inheritance from a common ancestor, established through regular and recurring sound correspondences, and contact-induced borrowing. Where a resemblance between languages cannot be traced through either channel, it is normally treated as coincidence. The phonosemantic programme associated with Odam Tili theory proposes a third channel, which can be called motivated iconicity: certain articulatory gestures are held to be non-arbitrarily linked to basic spatial and cognitive notions such as boundary, containment, negation, and reflection, because the physical act of producing the sound enacts or mimics the meaning it carries. On this view, recurring form-meaning pairings across languages that are not known to be related are not evidence of common descent, but evidence of an embodied phonetic iconicity available in principle to any human speaker, regardless of language family.

This is a direct challenge to the arbitrariness principle set out by Ferdinand de Saussure, who held that the bond between the sound-image of a word and the concept it names is unmotivated and fixed only by social convention within a given speech community. Our purpose here is not to overturn that principle wholesale, but to ask, in the spirit of the sound-symbolism literature that has grown up since Saussure, whether a bounded set of phonemes shows a statistically and semantically coherent pattern across otherwise unrelated languages. We develop the argument through two linked domains: reflexivity and self-reference, carried by the ay-class of forms such as the Uzbek aynak, the Russian я, and the English I; and spatial negation, carried by the consonants n, k, v and p acting on the open vowel a, as in the Russian на and the English an.

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2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Phonosemantic primitives

Following Odam Tili theory as set out by Kuchkarov and co-authors, human communication is modelled as built from a recurring triad: a physical articulatory shape, a natural phonetic sound, and a minimal core meaning, which together form a motivated unit rather than an arbitrary one. Within this model, particular phonemes are treated as carrying a stable, embodied semantic charge:

- The vowel a is an open, unobstructed gesture, associated with open space, a locus, or a container.
- The consonants n, k, v and p are produced with a closure or obstruction of the airstream, and are associated with boundary, blockage, or negation of the vowel's spatial value.
- The sibilant s is produced through a narrow, winding channel of airflow, and is associated with an elongated, sinuous form, as of a river or a serpent.
- The diphthong ay, and its counterparts я and I, are associated with the image of the erect human figure and its self-directed gaze, that is, with the reflexive or deictic self.

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2.2 From articulation to meaning: negation of negation

A central structural claim of the framework is that spatial negation can itself be negated, producing a second-order meaning by the same logic as multiplying a value by minus one twice. If a stands for space, and a closing consonant negates that space to produce на, an entity occupying space, that is, an object, then a second closure applied to that same form, as in nak or nan, negates the object's occupancy of space in turn. The result is a meaning close to an entity that occupies no space of its own: a reflection, an image, or a copy. This derivation is used below to unify several Uzbek forms that, on the surface, look unrelated.

3. Case studies

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3.1 Uzbek yoziq and Russian язык

Kuchkarov's account of the Russian язык, meaning tongue or language, derives it from a Turkic base close to the Uzbek yoziq, understood as that which is set down or spoken. The proposal is that Russian phonology, lacking a phoneme corresponding to the Turkic onset realised in yoziq, reshapes the initial cluster into the я onset that Russian pronunciation can accommodate. On this reading, the surface difference between yoziq and язык follows from ordinary phonotactic accommodation rather than counting against a connection between the two words.

3.2 Uzbek darya and the reflexive я

The Uzbek darya, meaning river, is parsed as dar plus ya, where ya is treated as the same reflexive-image element discussed throughout this article. The motivation offered is experiential: a person standing at the edge of still or slow-moving water, a ko'lmak or backwater, sees their own reflection there, and the element that names the self as seen becomes fixed into the word for the body of water itself. The correspondence with the Russian даря, built on the same final я, is treated as a parallel instance of the same reflexive morpheme, without any claim that Uzbek borrowed from Russian or vice versa.

3.3 The hydronym Sayhun and English say, I

The historical Central Asian hydronym Sayhun, an older name for the Syr Darya, is broken down as say plus hun. Here the sibilant s is read as an iconic marker of the winding course of a river, while ay again carries the reflexive value. The same ay element is proposed to appear in English as the pronoun I, which in many varieties is pronounced ai. Under this analysis, English I and the ay inside Sayhun instantiate the same iconic primitive: the upright human figure recognising itself when it looks into water. The Uzbek aynak, meaning mirror, literally a device of reflection, is cited as a modern, technological lexicalisation of the same root.

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3.4 Uzbek aynan, Russian меня and мен, and the nak/nan pattern

The Uzbek aynan, meaning exactly or precisely, is segmented as ay plus nan, where nan, like nak in aynak, is read through the negation-of-negation derivation set out in section 2.2: an image that duplicates its source exactly while occupying no independent space of its own. This is offered as a semantic motivation for why aynan comes to mean precisely or identically, since a reflection is by definition an exact, space-free duplicate of what it reflects.

The Russian oblique first-person form меня, meaning me, is parsed as мен plus я, where мен is aligned with the Uzbek men, I, denoting the upright, physically present speaker, while я denotes that speaker's mirror image. The proposed contrast is between two designations of self, one occupying space and one reflecting it without occupying it.

3.5 Russian на and English an: the object-marking particle

The Russian на, as in на столе яблоко, there is an apple on the table, and the English indefinite article an are analysed as parallel applications of the same derivation: a, space, closed off by a negating nasal n, to produce an entity that carves out and occupies a bounded portion of space, that is, a countable object. This is treated as the first-order derivation that nak and nan, discussed above, subsequently negate a second time to produce reflection rather than object.

4. Discussion

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4.1 What kind of claim is this

It is worth separating two claims that can be drawn from the material above, since they call for different kinds of evidence. The first and more defensible claim is that certain phonemes carry recurrent iconic associations across languages, an obstruent standing for boundary or negation, an open vowel for space, a sibilant for elongated or winding form, a front diphthong for self-reference, and that these associations can independently motivate similar-sounding morphemes in unrelated languages without implying common ancestry. This claim sits comfortably within the existing literature on sound symbolism and iconicity in the lexicon. The second, stronger claim is that specific words such as язык, darya, Sayhun, I, меня, на and an are historically connected through these primitives. As stated, this does not follow the comparative method that historical linguistics requires to establish relatedness, namely regular sound correspondences recurring across a full paradigm and checked against independently reconstructed proto-forms, and Turkic, Slavic, and English belong to families with no demonstrated common ancestor within any accepted time depth.

For submission to an accessible, peer-reviewed linguistics or cognitive-science journal, the first claim is the one that is currently publishable and testable. The second, read as an etymological or genetic proposal, would need to be reframed explicitly as a synchronic phonosemantic hypothesis, that these forms independently instantiate a shared iconic pattern, rather than as a diachronic etymological claim, that these forms derive from one another or from a common source. Keeping the two apart is the clearest way to avoid the objection that a reviewer trained in the comparative method would otherwise raise.

4.2 Relation to Saussure and to the existing iconicity literature

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Saussure's arbitrariness principle remains the default assumption in mainstream linguistics: for Saussure, the link between a sound-image and the concept it evokes is fixed by convention within a speech community rather than motivated by any natural resemblance. Odam Tili theory positions itself explicitly against this default, and the case studies above are best read as a contribution to the substantial body of sound-symbolism research that has qualified Saussure's principle since his own time, rather than as a wholesale refutation of it. Work in this tradition, including studies in the bouba-kiki paradigm and cross-linguistic studies of size and shape iconicity, offers a methodological model worth following here: rating studies, forced-choice tasks, and large-scale lexical-database analyses that test whether a phoneme class predicts a semantic class above chance, across a sample of languages that are not known to be related. Strengthening the present manuscript along these lines would mean stating the iconicity hypothesis independently of any specific etymology, testing it against a systematically sampled word list rather than hand-picked examples, and reporting effect sizes rather than illustrative cases alone.

4.3 Limitations

The case studies presented here were selected because they fit the hypothesis, and they do not constitute a systematic sample. No control comparison is offered, for instance a matched set of semantically unrelated words that happen to share the same phonemes. The historical phonology of the Turkic forms discussed, including the reconstructed onset of yoziq, would need independent philological support beyond what is attempted in this article.

5. Conclusion

This article has set out a phonosemantic account in which a small set of articulatory primitives, a spatial vowel, negating consonants, a sibilant iconic of winding form, and a reflexive diphthong, recur productively across Uzbek, Russian, and English in the domains of reflexivity and spatial negation. Read as a claim about

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convergent iconicity rather than genetic etymology, the account connects to an active and publishable line of research on sound symbolism, positioned in direct dialogue with Saussure's arbitrariness principle, and it generates testable predictions for future corpus and experimental work.

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