

Semantic features of function words in English and Uzbek languages

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Annotation: This article presents a comparative semantic analysis of function words—specifically conjunctions and prepositions—in English and Uzbek. The study is grounded in a corpus-based and contrastive linguistic methodology, aiming to uncover how these grammatical units differ and align across the two languages. English, as an analytic language, relies on fixed word order and discrete function words like “and,” “but,” and “in” to express logical, temporal, and spatial relationships. Uzbek, being an agglutinative language, often embeds these meanings morphologically through suffixes, such as *-da* or *-ga*. The findings demonstrate that while function words serve similar purposes in both languages, their forms, frequency, and contextual dependency vary significantly. Semantic overlap exists for words like *and – va* and *because – chunki*, but others like *under* or *onto* require nuanced equivalents in Uzbek. The study also reveals the pragmatic flexibility of Uzbek, where meaning can often be inferred contextually. The paper emphasizes the importance of understanding these differences in language learning, translation, and bilingual education.

Keywords: function words, conjunctions, prepositions, semantic features, English language, Uzbek language, grammatical comparison, translation equivalence, morphology, syntax

Семантические особенности служебных слов в английском и узбекском языках

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Аннотация: Данная статья представляет собой сравнительный семантический анализ служебных слов – в частности, союзов и предлогов – в английском и узбекском языках. Исследование основано на корпусной лингвистике и методе контрастивного анализа, целью которого является выявление различий и сходств в употреблении функциональных слов в двух типологически различных языках. Английский язык как аналитический использует фиксированный порядок слов и отдельные служебные единицы (например, “and”, “but”, “in”) для выражения логических и пространственно-временных отношений. Узбекский язык, напротив, является агглютинативным и выражает аналогичные значения посредством морфем, таких как *-да*, *-га*. Несмотря на общую функциональную направленность, слова различаются по форме, частотности и контекстуальному применению. Некоторые английские служебные слова не имеют прямых эквивалентов в узбекском, что создаёт трудности при переводе. Работа подчеркивает важность изучения этих различий при обучении и переводе.

Ключевые слова: служебные слова, союзы, предлоги, семантика, английский язык, узбекский язык, морфология, синтаксис, лингвистический анализ, эквивалентность перевода

Ingliz va o‘zbek tillaridagi funksional so‘zlarning semantik xususiyatlari

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillaridagi funksional so'zlarning – xususan, bog'lovchi va ko'makchilarning – semantik xususiyatlari taqqoslab o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot korpusga asoslangan va kontrastiv tahlil metodlari orqali olib borilgan bo'lib, ingliz va o'zbek tillari o'rtasidagi grammatik birliklarning o'xshash va farqli jihatlarini ochib beradi. Ingliz tili analitik til bo'lib, mustahkam so'z tartibi va alohida funksional birliklar orqali grammatik ma'nolarni ifoda etadi (masalan, “and”, “but”, “in”). O'zbek tili esa agglutinativ bo'lib, bu ma'nolarni ko'pincha otlarga qo'shimcha qo'shish orqali ifodalaydi (masalan, -da, -ga). Tahlillar shuni ko'rsatadiki, ba'zi funksional so'zlar (masalan, va – and, chunki – because) mazmunga ko'ra mos tushadi, ammo boshqalari (masalan, under, onto) o'zbek tilida murakkab ifoda talab etadi. Maqola natijalari tarjima, chet tilini o'rganish va ikki tilli ta'lim uchun muhim nazariy asos bo'lib xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: funksional so'zlar, bog'lovchilar, ko'makchilar, semantika, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, morfologiya, sintaksis, tarjima, tilshunoslik

Introduction

Function words—such as conjunctions and prepositions—play a pivotal role in the syntactic and semantic structure of any language. Despite their seemingly minor presence compared to content words, they serve as the cohesive elements that bind phrases, clauses, and entire texts together. This study focuses on the comparative semantic features of such function words in English and Uzbek, with specific attention to conjunctions and prepositions (in Uzbek, *bo'g'lovchilar* and *ko'makchilar*). These word classes are critical for expressing logical, temporal, spatial, causal, and adversative relations between ideas. English, as a predominantly analytic language, relies on rigid syntactic structures and an extensive inventory of function words to convey grammatical relationships. Prepositions such as *in*, *on*, *under*, and *because of*, as well as conjunctions like *and*, *but*, *although*, play well-defined roles in determining meaning and sentence cohesion. Conversely, Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, frequently incorporates these relational meanings morphologically through case markers and suffixes. This results in syntactic and semantic compactness, where a single word in Uzbek can often convey what would require multiple words in English. The main objective of this study is to examine how function words in both languages semantically align or diverge, and how these differences are manifested in structure and usage. By analyzing corpus data, grammatical constructions, and contextual usage, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-linguistic variation in functional grammar. Additionally, this study highlights practical implications for translation studies, bilingual education, and second language acquisition, where accurate comprehension of function words is essential for syntactic correctness and semantic precision. This paper is particularly relevant for linguists, language educators, translators, and students engaged in comparative language studies, as it sheds light on the deeper layers of grammar that often go unnoticed but are essential for fluent and accurate communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of function words, also referred to as grammatical or closed-class words, has long been a critical component of linguistic analysis, particularly in comparative and contrastive linguistics. Function words—such as conjunctions, prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs, modal words, and particles—play essential roles in establishing grammatical relationships, coherence, and the syntactic structure of sentences. Unlike content words, their primary function lies not in lexical meaning but in grammatical structuring. In the context of English, scholars such as Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002) have extensively categorized function words into syntactic classes and explored their semantic roles in shaping sentence meaning. They emphasize the indispensable role of function words in signaling logical and temporal relations, modality, definiteness, and

discourse functions. For instance, prepositions like *at*, *in*, and *on* convey spatial and temporal relations, while conjunctions like *and*, *but*, and *because* establish logical and causal connections.

Uzbek linguists, including M. Tursunov (1992) and Sh. Rakhmatullayev (2000), have also provided valuable insights into the nature and classification of functional words in the Uzbek language. In Uzbek, the semantic load of function words often merges with morphological markers, particularly suffixes and particles, due to the agglutinative nature of the language. Uzbek employs various postpositions, clitics, and modal particles to express nuances such as direction, condition, and emphasis, which are typically expressed using prepositions or modal auxiliaries in English. Comparative studies, such as those by Karimov (2010) and Mirzaeva (2015), have highlighted significant semantic and syntactic differences in how English and Uzbek utilize function words. These differences are rooted in their typological distinctions—English being an analytical language with a fixed word order, and Uzbek being agglutinative and more flexible in word placement due to its rich system of affixation.

Additionally, cross-linguistic research by typologists (e.g., Comrie, 1981; Dryer, 2007) provides a broader framework for understanding how function words evolve and operate differently across languages. These studies support the claim that while function words are universal in function, their semantic expressions and syntactic behaviors are deeply influenced by the language's structural typology and cultural context.

In sum, existing literature underscores the need for a detailed comparative semantic analysis of function words, particularly between typologically distant languages like English and Uzbek. However, there remains a relative scarcity of comprehensive works focusing specifically on the semantics of function words in these two languages, indicating a gap this paper aims to address.

Moreover, the role of function words in discourse cohesion and pragmatic interpretation has gained attention in the field of discourse analysis. Halliday and Hasan (1976) emphasized how conjunctions and referencing devices contribute to text cohesion, while more recent studies by Fraser (1999) have examined discourse markers as a subcategory of function words that signal speaker attitude, manage discourse flow, and indicate coherence relations. These functions, although often semantically light, are critical in constructing meaningful communication, especially in spoken interaction.

In Uzbek linguistic research, attention has also been given to the pragmatic and stylistic roles of particles and auxiliary words. For instance, the works of S. Usmonov (2005) and N. Jo'raev (2011) have addressed how Uzbek modal particles like “*ku*,” “*-da*,” and “*xam*” reflect speaker stance, certainty, and emphasis. These studies reveal that such function words not only fulfill syntactic roles but also carry substantial pragmatic weight, influencing the tone and interpretation of utterances. From a pedagogical standpoint, function words pose challenges for second language learners due to their abstract meanings and context-dependent usage. Comparative pedagogical studies (e.g., Swan & Smith, 2001; Mukhamedova, 2018) show that Uzbek learners of English often struggle with prepositions and modal verbs, owing to the absence of direct equivalents in Uzbek or the differing structural patterns in sentence formation. Similarly, English-speaking learners of Uzbek may find postpositional and suffix-based function word equivalents difficult to master due to the synthetic nature of Uzbek morphology.

Additionally, corpus-based studies (e.g., Biber et al., 1999; Sharipova, 2020) have provided quantitative insights into the frequency and distribution patterns of function words in both languages. These studies help to identify usage trends, collocational patterns, and functional tendencies of auxiliary words in naturally occurring texts, further enriching the understanding of their semantic behavior across linguistic contexts. Despite the growing body of work on function words individually within each language, there is still a lack of systematic semantic comparison between English and Uzbek in this domain. Most available studies focus either on syntactic classification or translation issues without exploring the deeper cross-linguistic semantic functions. This paper thus aims to fill this scholarly gap by conducting a contrastive semantic analysis of function words in English and

Uzbek, with a focus on conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliary elements, thereby contributing to both theoretical linguistics and practical language teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative linguistic methodology to analyze the semantic features of function words—specifically conjunctions and prepositions in English and their counterparts, *boglovchilar* and *kòmakchilar*, in Uzbek. The primary aim is to identify similarities and differences in how these grammatical categories function semantically within the syntactic structures of both languages.

1. Research Design

A qualitative-descriptive approach was adopted, with elements of contrastive analysis used to explore language-specific traits. The study was based on a corpus-driven selection of high-frequency function words from both languages, derived from grammar references, language corpora, and academic dictionaries.

2. Data Collection

Function words were extracted from:

The British National Corpus (BNC) for English,

The Uzbek National Corpus (O'zbek Milliy Korpus),

Traditional and modern grammar manuals (e.g., Quirk et al. for English; Sirojiddinov and Mamatov for Uzbek),

Pedagogical texts and real-life usage samples from media and literature in both languages.

3. Data Categorization

The collected data were classified into:

Coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (e.g., *and, but, because* vs. *va, ammo, chunki*),

Simple and compound prepositions (e.g., *in, at, due to* vs. *da, bilan, sababli*).

Each function word was analyzed for:

Semantic load (logical, temporal, causal relationships),

Grammatical positioning within sentences,

Polysemy and usage variability.

4. Analytical Procedures

Semantic functions were mapped based on syntactic environments and pragmatic roles.

Comparative semantic mapping was used to show overlapping and diverging meanings.

Interlingual equivalence was examined through parallel translation corpora and back-translation validation.

5. Tools and Frameworks

The study is grounded in the frameworks of:

Cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008),

Structural semantics,

Typological linguistic theory (Comrie, 1989).

Qualitative coding and thematic analysis were done manually, supported by AntConc for frequency comparison and concordance evaluation.

6. Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, selected examples were tested in different discourse contexts (formal, informal, literary, colloquial). Triangulation was achieved through consultation with expert linguists and native speakers of both languages.

7. Cross-linguistic Comparison Techniques

The study incorporated **cross-linguistic contrastive analysis**, focusing on semantic fields and conceptual metaphors embedded in conjunctions and prepositions. For example, while English uses *because* to denote causality, Uzbek equivalents such as *chunki* and *sababli* are also compared in terms of usage frequency, nuance, and syntactic flexibility.

To further elaborate the comparison:

Frequency tables were developed to track how often particular function words appear in native corpora.

Contextual analysis was used to examine how these function words behave in relation to verb valency and sentence modality.

Instances of **functional asymmetry**—where a function word in one language has no exact semantic equivalent in the other—were noted and analyzed qualitatively.

8. *Semantic Field Grouping*

Function words were grouped according to their **semantic functions**:

Additive (e.g., *and*, *va*)

Adversative (e.g., *but*, *ammo*)

Causal (e.g., *because*, *chunki*)

Temporal (e.g., *before*, *oldin*)

Spatial (e.g., *under*, *ostida*)

These groupings allowed for a structured comparative analysis and helped in identifying patterns of **grammaticalization**—how originally lexical items in Uzbek evolved into functional prepositions, a phenomenon less prominent in English.

9. *Corpus Examples and Translation Verification*

Each identified function word was illustrated using corpus-based authentic sentences. A **parallel translation technique** was employed to ensure functional equivalence in meaning and usage between English and Uzbek. This was supported by:

Reverse translation (Uzbek to English and vice versa),

Comparison with published bilingual dictionaries and grammar guides,

Expert review from bilingual linguists.

10. *Limitations and Ethical Considerations*

While the study aimed for a broad representation, it was limited to modern standard English and literary/standard Uzbek. Dialectal variations and spoken forms were excluded. No personal data or subject-based experiments were involved, so no ethical clearance was required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek function words, focusing on conjunctions and prepositions (bo‘g‘lovchi va ko‘makchilar), revealed several noteworthy patterns in both semantic functions and syntactic behaviors.

Frequency and Usage Patterns : Corpus-based data show that both languages heavily rely on certain high-frequency function words, such as *and* / *va*, *in* / *da*, and *because* / *chunki*. However, the exact range and distribution of function words vary due to typological differences—English as an analytical language versus Uzbek as an agglutinative one.

Syntactic Positioning : In English, prepositions precede the noun (e.g., *in the house*), while in Uzbek, the prepositional meaning is embedded in suffixes attached to nouns (e.g., *uyda*). This illustrates a structural economy in Uzbek grammar, where a single word can encapsulate both lexical and grammatical information.

Semantic Equivalence: Although many function words have clear equivalents (e.g., *but* = *ammo*), in several cases, perfect interlingual equivalence is absent. For instance, English prepositions like *by*, *onto*, or *upon* require broader context-based translations in Uzbek, often involving analytic constructions or paraphrasing.

Polyfunctionality : Uzbek function words often demonstrate broader semantic roles. For example, *uchun* can denote purpose (*for the child*), cause (*because of the weather*), or direction, depending on context. In contrast, English tends to use distinct prepositions for each function (*for*, *due to*, *towards*).

Contextual Dependency : The study found that English function words are more rigid in usage, often requiring specific syntactic constructions. Uzbek, however, exhibits greater pragmatic

flexibility, with meaning frequently inferred from context, which allows omission or rearrangement of function words without losing clarity.

The findings underscore fundamental typological differences between the two languages that shape the use and semantics of function words.

Typological Influence: The agglutinative nature of Uzbek leads to the integration of grammatical meaning into word endings, reducing the number of standalone function words. English, by contrast, employs discrete lexical items to perform similar roles.

Pedagogical Implications: Language learners transitioning between English and Uzbek must not only memorize vocabulary but also grasp structural logic and semantic nuance. For instance, translating prepositions literally may lead to misunderstanding if morphological markers are ignored.

Translation Challenges: Translators must often engage in interpretive translation rather than direct substitution. Uzbek's context-based pragmatics may allow omission of certain function words, whereas in English their inclusion is often mandatory to maintain grammaticality.

Further Research: Future studies could expand the scope to include dialectal variations, colloquial expressions, or historical development of function words in both languages. Additionally, a pragmatic analysis of discourse-level connectors and their role in coherence can offer more insight.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the semantic features of function words—particularly conjunctions and prepositions—in English and Uzbek, using a comparative linguistic methodology. The analysis demonstrated that, despite performing similar grammatical functions, function words in these two languages differ significantly in form, frequency, and contextual usage due to typological distinctions. Key findings reveal that, English function words are often separate lexical units with fixed positions in syntax. Uzbek, being an agglutinative language, tends to incorporate grammatical meaning into word endings, making function words more flexible and context-dependent. Semantic equivalence is not always direct; some English prepositions or conjunctions may require explanation or reformulation in Uzbek. These insights have practical implications for bilingual education, translation studies, and language acquisition. Educators and translators should be mindful of the structural and semantic asymmetries to avoid oversimplification or misinterpretation.

In conclusion, understanding the nuanced roles of function words in each language enhances not only linguistic competence but also cross-cultural communication. Future research may investigate how these differences manifest in spoken discourse or how they evolve over time in media and literature.

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