SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF DENDRONYMS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE LINGUOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

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https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24472303

Abstract. This article examines how names of trees acquire culturally salient meanings in Uzbek and English discourse. Rather than assuming that a tree species carries a single universal symbol, the study distinguishes lexical denotation, conventional cultural association, and context-dependent literary interpretation. A qualitative comparison of selected dendronyms—chinor/plane tree, tut/mulberry, terak/poplar, tol/willow, eman/oak and apple tree/olma—shows that symbolic correspondences are frequently asymmetric. In Uzbek cultural contexts, associations may be shaped by settlement landscapes, shade, household practices and oral tradition; in English-language contexts, they may also draw on biblical allusion, literary convention and emblematic national histories. The article proposes a transparent procedure for verifying symbolic interpretations against dictionaries, attested texts and ethnographic evidence. Its conclusions are interpretive and do not claim corpus-wide frequencies.

Keywords: dendronym; linguoculturology; Uzbek; English; tree symbolism; cultural semantics; comparative linguistics; metaphor.

Introduction

Tree names are a particularly productive point of contact between language, landscape and collective memory. Their primary referents are botanical entities, yet their use in narratives, proverbs, place names and ritual descriptions can activate additional layers of meaning. A speaker may refer to a willow as a plant, employ it as an image of sorrow, or use it to evoke a recognisable riverside setting. These readings are not interchangeable. The methodological problem is therefore not simply to list “meanings” attached to trees, but to establish which associations are conventional in a given speech community and which emerge only within a particular text.

This distinction matters in Uzbek–English comparison. A direct translation may preserve a botanical referent while failing to convey the historical or social experience associated with it. Conversely, similar figurative functions may be performed by different trees. The objective of this study is to identify plausible patterns of symbolic convergence and divergence and to offer a replicable framework for analysing them without reducing complex cultural traditions to fixed stereotypes.

2. Theoretical background

Linguocultural analysis treats lexical items as potential access points to culturally organised knowledge. In cognitive linguistics, figurative interpretation is motivated by mappings between experiential domains, but a mapping must be supported by usage rather than inferred from the analyst’s intuition (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Cultural conceptualisations are also distributed and variable across speakers, generations and settings (Sharifian, 2017). Consequently, statements such as “the oak means strength” are best formulated as claims about documented traditions or genres, not as invariant properties of the word oak.

Symbolism can operate through at least three mechanisms. First, perceptual characteristics—height, longevity, flexibility, fruitfulness—motivate metaphorical associations. Second, practical uses, such as

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mulberry cultivation or the provision of shade, connect a tree with social life. Third, inherited narratives, religious references and literary quotations establish conventional associations that cannot be recovered from the plant's physical appearance alone. These mechanisms may overlap, but they require different kinds of evidence.

3. Materials and methods

The study uses a purposive comparative sample of six dendronym pairs. The selection prioritises culturally recognisable trees and contrasting ecological or literary profiles; it is not a statistically representative sample of Uzbek or English vocabulary. Botanical equivalence is checked at the level of common English names, with attention to taxonomic ambiguity: "plane tree" may designate Platanus species, while Uzbek chinor is commonly associated with oriental plane (Platanus orientalis). "Poplar" covers several Populus species, and "willow" covers Salix species. This prevents the analysis from treating broad common-name categories as exact species matches.

For each item, four analytical questions are applied: (1) What is the literal botanical referent? (2) Which physical or social characteristics can motivate a figurative reading? (3) In what kind of text or practice is the association attested or plausibly expected? (4) What information is lost or added in translation? The comparisons below are hypotheses grounded in widely documented semantic mechanisms and selected literary-cultural traditions. They should be tested further against balanced Uzbek and English corpora, proverb collections and ethnographic sources before frequency or community-wide claims are made.

4. Results and comparative analysis

Dendronym pair	Potential symbolic domain	Important qualification
chinor / plane tree	Longevity, continuity, public gathering, shade	Local landscape and social use may be more salient than a fixed literary emblem.
tut / mulberry	Nourishment, household economy, intergenerational continuity	Associations depend on sericulture, fruit use and local history.
terak / poplar	Height, uprightness, landscape identity	English poplar imagery is genre-dependent and not an automatic equivalent.
tol / willow	Flexibility, water, melancholy	English "weeping willow" is a specific conventional image; Uzbek uses require separate evidence.
eman / oak	Strength, endurance, rootedness	English oak symbolism is historically prominent; Uzbek oak may have different cultural salience.

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olma / apple tree	Fruitfulness, desire, knowledge, domestic life	Biblical and literary allusions are context-specific, not intrinsic lexical meanings.

4.1. Chinor and the plane tree: continuity and shared space

The plane tree’s large crown and long life can motivate images of endurance and protection. In Central Asian settlement landscapes, the social role of mature shade trees offers an additional interpretive route: a tree can become a landmark or a site around which communal life is organised. Thus, an Uzbek reference to chinor may evoke not only age but also the remembered space of a village or neighbourhood. English plane tree, by contrast, can readily function as a literal urban or botanical term without activating the same associations. A translation that uses plane tree is denotationally useful but may require contextual explanation where the source text depends on local social memory.

4.2. Tut and mulberry: practical culture and symbolic extension

Mulberry is significant not only because it bears fruit but also because mulberry leaves have historically supported silkworm cultivation. Such practical relationships can supply the background for figurative meanings concerning labour, domestic provision or continuity. Yet it would be unwarranted to claim that every Uzbek use of tut signifies family unity. The analytical point is narrower: material practices can make certain symbolic readings available. An English reader encountering mulberry may not share that practical knowledge, so a translator may need to preserve the word while making the relevant activity explicit elsewhere in the passage.

4.3. Terak and poplar: verticality and cultural specificity

Tall, upright growth makes poplar a plausible source for images of height and aspiration. Nevertheless, a metaphor motivated by physical form is not the same as a conventional cultural symbol. The comparative researcher should examine actual collocations, similes and narrative settings before describing a national pattern. In translation, the semantic feature of verticality may survive, while local associations with roads, courtyards or planted rows may not.

4.4. Tol and willow: a partial symbolic overlap

English literary usage provides a recognisable example in the “weeping willow”, where the drooping branches motivate an image of grief. Shakespeare’s willow song in Othello (Act IV, Scene 3) illustrates the connection between willow imagery and lament in a particular literary tradition. Uzbek tol can similarly participate in descriptions of water and flexible branches, but the presence of a comparable visual form does not prove an identical history of sorrow symbolism. Cross-language equivalence should therefore be established at the level of a specific text and interpretive function.

4.5. Eman and oak: uneven conventionalisation

In English, oak frequently participates in emblematic representations of strength and endurance, including historical associations with the British landscape and national imagery. Uzbek eman identifies an oak, but an English emblematic association cannot simply be projected onto all Uzbek discourse. This is an example of asymmetric cultural salience: the two words can refer to related trees while carrying different expectations for readers. A translator may choose a literal equivalent, a short gloss or a functionally comparable image depending on genre and audience.

4.6. Olma and apple tree: allusion versus everyday reference

Apple trees can evoke cultivation, harvest and domestic abundance in both linguistic settings. In English-language literary or religious contexts, “apple” may additionally invite associations with temptation or knowledge, although the biblical Genesis narrative does not identify the forbidden fruit as

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an apple. This distinction is crucial: a later iconographic tradition must not be mistaken for a statement in the primary text. Uzbek olma imagery likewise requires contextual reading rather than automatic assignment of a universal symbol.

5. Discussion

The comparison yields three methodological observations. First, botanical equivalence does not guarantee symbolic equivalence. Second, similarities grounded in visible features are more readily transferable than associations dependent on local practices or inherited texts. Third, the unit of analysis should be an attested occurrence—preferably accompanied by its genre, date and discourse setting—rather than an isolated dictionary headword.

For empirical follow-up, a bilingual dataset could collect at least 100 contextual occurrences per selected dendronym from clearly defined periods and genres, recording literal versus figurative use, evaluative polarity, semantic domain and translation strategy. Two independent annotators could code the material, reconcile disagreements and report inter-annotator agreement. Such a design would allow the present interpretive propositions to be tested, revised or rejected. No such corpus or annotation experiment was conducted for the present article, and no numerical findings are claimed.

The practical relevance extends to translation and language education. Learners may correctly memorise tree names yet misinterpret a cultural allusion. Teaching materials can therefore pair lexical equivalence with short authentic contexts and questions about source traditions. In literary translation, retaining a culturally marked tree name may be preferable to replacing it with a more familiar English symbol when the original landscape is important to the text.

Conclusion

Dendronyms connect ecological knowledge with figurative and social meanings, but those meanings are neither fixed nor necessarily symmetrical across Uzbek and English. The selected comparisons suggest that chinor and tut are especially productive for investigating the relationship between landscape, everyday practices and cultural memory, whereas willow and oak illustrate the importance of established English literary and emblematic traditions. These are analytical directions, not quantitative generalisations. Reliable linguocultural comparison requires attested examples, careful botanical identification and explicit separation of textual interpretation from claims about community-wide convention.

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