# NEGATIVE EVALUATIVE OPPOSITIONS IN THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF JUSTICE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

**Yazdankulova Gulnigor Muzaffarovna**
*Samarqand davlat chet tillar instituti*
*Ingliz tili o'qitish metodikasi kafedrasi assistent o'qituvchisi*
*E-mail: yazdonkulova@icloud.com*
*ORCID: 0009-0004-0334-8501*

**Abstract:** This article offers a comparative study of the English lexemes injustice and unfairness and the Uzbek lexemes adolatsizlik and zulm, which together form the negative evaluative pole of the semantic field of justice. The study aims to identify similarities and differences in their semantic structure, evaluative character, and cultural-pragmatic load. The material is drawn from explanatory dictionary definitions and their contextual uses, and is analyzed through componential analysis, semantic field analysis, and the identification of lexical-semantic oppositions. The results show that in the English pair the evaluation rests mainly on the violation of norms and equality, while in the Uzbek pair it additionally depends on the presence of force, the position of the victim, and moral-religious condemnation. In particular, zulm carries a higher intensity and a stronger active-agent component than adolatsizlik, and the English pair has no fully matching equivalent for it. The findings may be useful for comparative semantics, translation studies, and lexicography.

**Keywords:** semantic field of justice, polar opposition, evaluative semantics, injustice, unfairness, adolatsizlik.

## Introduction

Justice is one of the oldest and most contested categories of human thought, and it stands at the shared center of philosophy, law, political science, and linguistics. In linguistics, the concept is studied above all through the lexical means by which speakers evaluate social life. In every language, the idea of justice is expressed not only through positively valued units but also through negatively valued units set against them. This negative pole often shows more clearly how a society reacts to the violation of its value system, because people tend to become consciously aware of justice at the moment it is breached.

According to semantic field theory, lexical units do not exist in isolation but within a system of relations. In such a system, one distinguishes center and periphery, synonymic series, hyponymic links, and antonymic oppositions. In

the semantic field of justice, the positive pole is formed by units such as English justice and fairness and Uzbek adolat and insof, while the negative pole is formed by lexemes such as injustice, unfairness, adolatsizlik, and zulm. These poles do not correspond to one another mechanically. Each language, drawing on its own cultural experience and historical development, structures negative evaluation differently.

In the scholarly literature, justice has mostly been analyzed from the positive side: the distinction between justice and fairness, Rawls's conception of "justice as fairness," and the treatment of key words as windows onto different cultures. Wierzbicka advanced the idea of understanding cultures through their key words, and Apresyan and Shmelev offered systematic semantic descriptions of the Russian lexemes connected with justice. In Uzbek linguistics there are valuable works on semantic fields, evaluative semantics, and the semantics of Arabic borrowings, but studies that compare the negative pole of the justice field with English material remain insufficient. This gap determines the relevance of the topic.

The aim of the study is therefore to determine, comparatively, the semantic structure and evaluative properties of the English pair injustice/unfairness and the Uzbek pair adolatsizlik/zulm. Three tasks follow from this aim. The first is to extract sets of semes from the dictionary definitions of the selected lexemes. The second is to compare their evaluative intensity and pragmatic properties. The third is to show how the polar opposition is formed in each of the two languages. The working hypothesis is that the English negative pole relies mainly on the seme of violated norms and equality, whereas the Uzbek negative pole additionally relies on the semes of violence, oppression, and moral-religious condemnation.

**Methods**

The study was conducted within a comparative-typological approach. Four lexemes were selected as its object: injustice and unfairness from English, and adolatsizlik and zulm from Uzbek. The selection criteria were as follows. These units express the negation or violation of the idea of justice in both languages. Each stands in a direct antonymic relation to lexemes of the positive pole. Each has an independent entry in general-purpose dictionaries. The pairing also has its own logic: injustice and adolatsizlik are relatively neutral and abstract, while unfairness and zulm differ in evaluative intensity and in their dependence on a concrete situation.

The material consisted of explanatory dictionaries of English, namely the Oxford English Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, and the Cambridge Dictionary, and, for Uzbek, the definitions and examples of the O'zbek tilining izohli lug'ati (Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language), together with contexts drawn

from the press and fiction. Dictionary definitions were treated not as a source of ready-made information but as texts to be analyzed: each semantic feature in a definition was recorded separately and compared across lexemes. It should be stressed that the examples given in this article are illustrative and make no claim to statistical generalization.

The analysis proceeded in several stages. First, componential analysis was applied, and minimal semantic features such as "violation of a norm," "absence of equality," "use of force," "presence of a victim," and "moral condemnation" were extracted from the definition of each lexeme. Second, these semes were compared across the lexemes, and common and differential semes were identified. Third, from the standpoint of evaluative semantics, the intensity, degree of agency, and pragmatic range of the lexemes were examined. Fourth, the antonymic relations with the positive pole were analyzed, namely the pairs justice–injustice, fairness–unfairness, adolat–adolatsizlik, and adolat–zulm. Finally, the question of translational equivalence was checked through bilingual dictionaries and the contextual choice of counterparts.

**Results**

**Semantic structure of injustice**

In English explanatory dictionaries, injustice is defined mainly as the absence of justice or fairness, and also as unfair treatment of someone's rights or deserts. Two core semes emerge from this definition: "absence of justice" and "unjust treatment." A second important property of the lexeme is its abstract and generalizing character. Injustice often names a social or systemic phenomenon, a broad-scale condition visible in collocations such as social injustice, racial injustice, and historical injustice. At the same time, the word is also used as a countable noun (an injustice, injustices) denoting a concrete instance of wrong. In evaluative terms, injustice carries a strong tone of condemnation, but this condemnation is expressed mainly from the standpoint of legal and moral norms, while emotional tension is relatively low.

**Semantic structure of unfairness**

In dictionaries, unfairness is usually connected with the absence of equality, impartiality, or adherence to generally accepted rules of the game. Its core semes are "lack of impartiality," "lack of equal treatment," and "violation of rules," while the seme of the victim is activated depending on the context. Compared with injustice, unfairness is used more in everyday, interpersonal, and situation-dependent cases: evaluation at work, the outcome of a game or competition, or the distribution of resources within a family. Unfairness is also often tied to subjective perception and expresses the speaker's emotional reaction ("this was unfair to me"). Unlike injustice, this personalizes its evaluative force and makes it somewhat milder.

**Semantic structure of adolatsizlik**

The Uzbek lexeme adolatsizlik is formed from adolat by adding the suffixes -siz and -lik, and its semantic structure has a clear logic recoverable from this derivational form: the absence of justice, and the state of that absence. The explanatory dictionary interprets it as a state or action contrary to justice and to truth. Because of its derivational makeup, adolatsizlik is semantically wholly dependent on adolat, and its core seme is that of negation. The lexeme is used both for an abstract condition (injustice in society) and for a concrete act (injustice was done to him), which places it between injustice and unfairness. As a result, adolatsizlik corresponds partially to each of the two English lexemes but is fully equivalent to neither.

**Semantic structure of zulm**

The lexeme zulm was borrowed from Arabic and is used in Uzbek with a strongly negative evaluation. Explanatory dictionaries define it mainly as oppression, torment, wrongdoing, and violence inflicted by the strong on the weak. The following differential semes emerge from this definition: "presence of an agent (the oppressor)," "the agent's possession of power and force," "the weakness of the victim," "infliction of suffering," and "a high degree of moral condemnation." Unlike adolatsizlik, zulm names not an abstract absence but an active and forceful action. For this reason it often appears in combinations such as zolim (oppressor), mazlum (the oppressed), zulm ostida qolmoq (to remain under oppression), and zulmga qarshi kurashmoq (to struggle against oppression), and is strongly tied to socio-political and historical contexts. The religious-moral history of the lexeme is also important: in the Arab-Islamic tradition, zulm took shape as the direct opposite of 'adl (justice), which points to the deep cultural roots of the antonymic relation between zulm and adolat in Uzbek.

**Comparative results by semantic features**

A comparison of the semantic features yields the following picture. The seme common to all four lexemes is "violation of the norm of justice," which secures their membership in a single field. The seme "absence of equality or impartiality" is central for unfairness and auxiliary for injustice. The seme "trampling of rights or deserts" is characteristic of injustice and adolatsizlik; in zulm it merges with the seme of violence and appears in intensified form. The semes "active use of force by an agent" and "weakness of the victim" are differential only for zulm; for injustice and unfairness they are optional, that is, they participate only when the context requires. In terms of intensity, the lexemes are arranged as follows: unfairness lowest, injustice and adolatsizlik in the middle, and zulm highest.

The differences are also considerable from the standpoint of polar opposition. In English, the pairs justice–injustice and fairness–unfairness are morphologically symmetric antonyms formed by prefixation. In Uzbek, the pair adolat–adolatsizlik is likewise a symmetric antonymy formed by suffixation, whereas the pair adolat–zulm is a lexical antonymy that does not depend on word formation. The negative pole in Uzbek thus has a two-tier structure: at the neutral and abstract level, adolatsizlik, and at the intensified and active level, zulm. In English, such a two-tier opposition is not filled by injustice and unfairness but is supplied by other lexemes, for example oppression, tyranny, and cruelty, which lie on the periphery of the justice field.

**Discussion**

The results show that the negative pole of the semantic field of justice has a common core in the two languages but differs in its peripheral structure. The common core is tied to the seme "violation of the norm of justice," which can be interpreted as a semantic universal. At the same time, the difference lies not in the core but in the additional semes and their hierarchy. This partly confirms the initial hypothesis: where the English pair relies mainly on the violation of norms and equality, one member of the Uzbek pair, zulm, adds the semes of force, oppression, and moral condemnation to this core.

The difference between English injustice and unfairness can be explained through the distinction between institutional and interpersonal levels. Injustice is closer to legal and social norms, while unfairness is closer to rules of conduct and distribution. The fact that these two lexemes correspond to the positive-pole pair justice and fairness is not accidental, and it suggests that the axiological distinction between rule and relationship in the justice field is preserved at the negative pole as well. In Uzbek, a similar distinction appears even more vividly in the pair adolat and insof, but at the negative pole it overlaps with the difference in intensity and agency between adolatsizlik and zulm. For this reason, it would be methodologically incorrect to equate the Uzbek negative pole fully with the English division between justice and fairness.

The absence of a single full English equivalent for zulm has significant consequences for translation studies. Depending on context, zulm may be rendered as oppression, tyranny, cruelty, or tyrannical injustice, but none of these fully conveys the religious-moral and historical grounding of zulm, that is, its position as the absolute pole opposed to justice. Conversely, injustice and unfairness are often both translated into Uzbek as adolatsizlik, and the distinction between the two English lexemes is lost. Semantic loss therefore occurs in both directions, and the translator must take into account the semes of context, intensity, and agency.

The results also admit a cultural-linguistic interpretation. The weighty place of zulm in Uzbek may be connected with historical experience, literary tradition, and religious-moral thought: in Eastern literature, the images of the just ruler and the tyrannical ruler have held an important place for centuries. In English, the link between the concept of fairness and the rules of the game, equality, and impartiality may be related to a society's attention to procedural justice. These explanations are, however, hypothetical and need to be tested on broader corpus data.

The limitations of the study should also be noted. First, the analysis relies mainly on dictionary definitions and does not include quantitative data on frequency of use or collocations in real speech. Second, the number of selected lexemes is limited, and other units of the field, for example nohaqlik, jabr, haqsizlik, oppression, and wrong, were not covered. In future research, collocational analysis on large Uzbek and English corpora, association experiments, and the semantic differential method may help refine these results.

In conclusion, although the negative pole of the semantic field of justice shares a common semantic core in the English injustice and unfairness and the Uzbek adolatsizlik and zulm, the lexemes differ markedly in evaluative intensity, agency, and cultural-pragmatic load. In English, the negative pole is structured mainly around the violation of norms and equality, while in Uzbek it appears as a two-tier system between the neutral adolatsizlik and the strong, active zulm. These findings shed light on the language- and culture-specific structure of the concept of justice and can be applied in comparative semantics, lexicography, and translation studies.

## REFERENCES

1. Apresyan, Yu. D. Leksicheskaya semantika: Sinonimicheskie sredstva yazyka. Moscow: Nauka, 1974.
2. Cruse, D. A. Lexical Semantics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
3. Lyons, J. Semantics. Vols. 1–2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
4. Oxford English Dictionary; Merriam-Webster Dictionary; Cambridge Dictionary (online editions).
5. O'zbek tilining izohli lug'ati. Tashkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2020.
6. Rawls, J. A Theory of Justice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.

7. Shmelev, A. D. Russkaya yazykovaya model' mira: Materialy k slovaryu. Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury, 2002.
8. Wierzbicka, A. Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.