

Contrastive Linguo-Cultural Analysis of the Concept ‘Faith/Belief’



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In the last ten years many linguists working in the field of linguo-cultural studies have shown an active interest in the theory of concepts. **Cultural concept**, which is the main unit of this science, is a multi-graded semantic formation having its expressive, valuable and notional characteristics.

The most difficult concepts for comparative analysis are those at “the highest level” such as *love, liberty, happiness, faith/belief*. All these so-called “universal concepts” of spiritual culture give a sense and purpose to people’s existence that is outside their individual being. Among all the concepts mentioned, *faith* is the most valuable.

The importance of happiness, love and liberty in real life is fragile, and only faith can relieve a person of disappointment. Human beings are mortal and horror-stricken by the thought of death. Only faith in immortality and life after death can ease one’s spiritual longing.

Without belief human life becomes senseless. “Faith is the strength of life”, says L.N.Tolstoy. “Faith”, which conveys meaning to socio-cultural life, is the most global and universal concept. It embraces all other universal concepts, such as *love (From faith to love the way is short)*, *liberty/justice (If you believe in truth don’t try to convince, it will win by itself (Rostin))*, *happiness (Only two things make happiness: faith and love (Nodje))*.

History proves that human beings have never lived without belief in something higher, supreme, surpassing them and absolute. Every culture goes through spiritual self-determination, asserting faith in something eminent and unattainable, something which fosters sense and provides salvation from the uncountable metamorphoses of nature.

So in the course of history we move from belief to unbelief and from unbelief to the search for new belief, new values in life which can give sense to our existence.

Faith is the main value influencing the functioning of governments and social institutions and also individuals. Hence the study of this concept is extremely pertinent.

But what does it mean to believe? The Hebrew word denoting the concept of belief in the Old Testament is *aman*, which is actually the word we normally use at the end of our prayers (*amen*, which should really be pronounced *amein*). We say, *In the name of Jesus, Amen*, which means, “I believe it”. *Believe* means “to lean upon”, that is why there are a number of words with the preposition “upon” in the semantic field of this concept, such as *reckon upon, depend upon, count upon, build upon, rely upon, rest upon, calculate upon, pin one’s faith upon, upon my faith*, etc.

Analyzing the etymology of the word *faith/belief* in different languages, Florensky

distinguishes the main tendencies involved in the perception of *faith* by various nations. Thus, in some cultures the concept of *faith/belief* refers to inter-personal relations of a moral character. For example, in Greek, Latin, English, Armenian, Russian, German, Hebrew and Sanskrit *to believe* means “to trust, to love, to permit, to begin, to approve”.

The concept of *faith/belief* is connected with the concept of *truth*. Latin *veritas* (*truth*) has the same root as Russian *вера*. In Armenian *trustworthiness* and *faith* have the same root (հավաստիություն, հավատ). According to Florensky, “truthworthiness is the feeling of truth, but the comprehension of truth is possible only in the case of belief” (Florensky, 1914).

Contrary to the existing stereotypes, the word *faith/belief* stands conceptually close to *trust* (in Russian - *вера - доверие*, in Armenian *հավատ* - where the first meaning is “faith” and the second meaning is “trust”, in English - “belief - trust”).

Faith is a suggestion of trust. According to V.I. Karasik, the image of the noun *вера* (belief, հավատ) must be quality, which is verbalized by an adjective or a verb. In the given case, we have the verb *верить* - *иметь твердую убежденность, уверенность в ч-л.* (Б.Т.С.); *believe* - 1) to have a firm religious faith; 2) to consider to be true or honest, *believe in* - to have faith or trust in someone (LDCE); *հավատալ* - 1) իբրև ճշմարտություն իրողություն ընդունել մի բան, որ չզիտենք կամ որի համար դրական ապացույցներ չկան, 2) վստահ լինել, վստահություն զգալ մեկի կամ մի բանի նկատմամբ, 3) հավաստիանալ, համոզվել (ՀԲԲ).

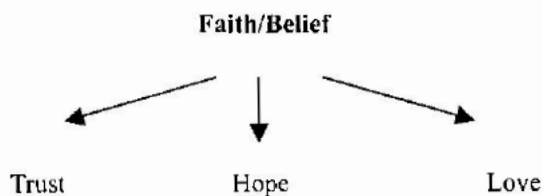
Analyzing the expressive component of the concept on the basis of its inner form and etymology, we see that the Indo-European meaning of *faith/belief* is “to put one’s trust (in)”: *հավատալ* - “հուսալ, վստահություն տածել”; *верить* - “уповать, питать доверие” was conveyed through the expression *to give heart*, (old use) which is perceptible in the Latin *credo* (հավատամք, credo).

The word *faith/belief* (հավատ, *вера*) has wide and narrow senses. In the wider sense it means “truthfulness of existence of smb. or smth.”:

- *belief in God, honesty, magic, etc;*
- *հավատ առ աստված, ապացույց, ուխտ և այլն;*
- *вера в силу Бога, в силу добра, честность, в приметы и т.д.*

In the narrower sense, the word *faith/belief* means only “belief in God”.

Let us analyze the semantic structure of the word in its narrow sense - “belief in God”, which expresses assurance in the real existence of God, trust in him, hope for him and love of him.



The concepts *faith, trust, hope, love* are based on the general structural model, "the circulation of communication between two agents".

The semantic components of this word are realized in their word-building forms:

- *trust* - a strong belief in goodness, strength, reliability of smb. or smth;
- *hope* - a feeling of trust, when you believe in a better future, in smth, in smb;
- *love* - kind feeling, tender devotion to a person whom you can believe, on whom you can rely;
- *վստահություն* - մի բանի մեջ համոզված լինելը, հավատ;
- *հույս* - սպասել, հավատալ ինչ-որ բանի/մեկի;
- *սեր* - հավատ դեպի սիրված էակը;
- *доверие* - поверить (слову, обещанию);
- *надежда* - верить (верю, что он/она исполнит свое обещание);
- *любовь* - верить, доверять любимому человеку;

A deep-seated connection with the act of sacrifice of an animal (or its organs) is revealed in the concept *faith/ belief*.

The idea of sacrifice, in which the priest and the sacrificed animal are the subjects of the action, can be found in the concept *love* (*love* = to give one's heart/soul to smb.; *սիրել* = սիրտը նվիրել, սիրտը տալ ինչ-որ մեկին; *любить* = отдавать свое сердце).

The act of magic transmission is traceable in the derivational structure of the verb *hope*:

hope - hope for smth;

հուսալ - հույս դնել ինչ-որ մեկի վրա/ ինչ-որ բանի վրա;

надеяться - на кого или что либо.

By analogy, the following three concepts expressing wishes, provocation and direction to the object /subject have much in common.

The semantic proximity is obvious in the word-combinations of the verbs *believe, hope, and love*.

<i>believe</i>	}	with all one's heart, from the bottom of one's soul
<i>hope</i>		
<i>love</i>		

<i>հավատալ</i>	}	հոգու ողջ ուժով, ամբողջ սրտով,
<i>հուսալ</i>		
<i>սիրել</i>		

<i>верить</i>	}	всем сердцем, страстно, горячо
<i>надеяться</i>		
<i>любить</i>		

and the corresponding nouns:

<i>faith/belief</i> <i>hope</i> <i>love</i>	}	→	blind, dispassionate, weak, great, to entertain ~, give~
<i>հավատ</i> <i>հույս</i> <i>սեր</i>	}	→	կույր, մեծ, ներշնչել, տածել, տալ, կորցնել
<i>вера</i> <i>надежда</i> <i>любовь</i>	}	→	сильная, слепая, внушать, разделять, давать

The analysis shows that the contiguity of the semantic structure (word combination) can be observed either in two languages, or in all the three languages.

To be in love	սիրահարվել ինչ-որ մեկին	влюбиться в кого-либо
To fall in love		
To believe in smth./smb.	հավատալ ինչ-որ մեկին	верить в кого-либо

Cherish a belief - cherish hopes

հավատալ - հուսալ

питать/леялеть веру - питать/леялеть надежду

To lose belief - to lose hope - to lose love

կորցնել հավատը - կորցնել հույսը - կորցնել սերը

Потерять веру - потерять надежду - потерять любовь

The inner form of all the three concepts, which is connected with the situation of changeable initiative, “supposes, however, different ideas about the subject and object of reciprocal causal actions”.

One of the differentiating displays of this distinction is the difference in the government of the verbs (*to believe in smth/smb; to hope for smb./smth.; to love smb./smth.*). The same can be found in Russian (*верить в к-л/во ч-л; надеяться на к-л/ч-л; любить к-л/ч-л*)

However, in Armenian this difference is vaguer (*հավատալ ինչ-որ մեկի/բանի; հուսալ ինչ-որ բան; սիրել ինչ-որ մեկի/բան*).

Contrastive analysis of the parameological and aphoristical realization of the concept *faith/belief* in the three languages proves that the expressive component making the

cognitive metaphors definite in the linguistic recognition and by which the abstract essence is cognized, practically, does not differ in the three languages analysed above.

The classification of the connotations of the concept *faith/belief* in the aphorisms and parameology of three languages proves the existence of three types of semantic transference as synthetic, antropomorphic and biomorphic metaphors of expanse.

In this case the interpretation of the symbol *saving faith* as faith, the basis of life, can find its expression in the images of bridge-building, while hard vital situations and mental sufferings have the image of light, radar, electricity, oasis.

The comparative analysis of parameological and aphoristic expressions of the concept *faith/belief* in English, Armenian and Russian shows less interest to this category in Armenian parameological and aphoristic mentality (thinking).

There are fewer metaphoric notions of *faith/belief* as a noun in Armenian. The expressive associations of *faith/belief* in English and Russian are mainly universal (anthropomorphic, biomorphic, reemorphic metaphors).

Similarity in picturesqueness in the three languages can be explained by the unity of world outlook and Christian religion which unites the peoples speaking Indo-European languages.

In all the languages the concept *faith/belief* is a kind of metaphor, the meaning of which depends on the paradigm and context of interpretation.

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**«Faith/Belief» կոնցեպտի
զուգադրական և լեզվամշակութաբանական վերլուծություն**

Մշակութային կոնցեպտը, որը բազմաչափ իմաստային կազմություն է (նրանում առանձնացվում են հասկացական, պատկերավոր և արժեքային կողմերը), լեզվամշակութաբանության միավոր է: Հավատը, որը իմաստավորում է մարդկային կյանքը և բարոյական արժեքների հիմքն է, առավել գլոբալ մետաֆիզիկական կոնցեպտ է: Հավատը այն արժեքն, որը մարդուն բերում է հետագա արժեքների ստորակարգային ընկալմանը:

Սույն աշխատանքում հավատի կոնցեպտը զուգադրական վերլուծության է ենթարկվում երեք լեզուների (անգլերեն, հայերեն, ռուսերեն) մշակութային ավանդույթում: