COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS OF SUBJECTIVE SEMANTICS IN AZERBAIJANI AND WORLD LANGUAGES

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Language is not a neutral mirror of reality but a living medium through which human beings construct, evaluate and emotionally color the world they inhabit. Within the cognitive framework of meaning, every word carries the trace of perspective a viewpoint shaped by the mind's interaction with experience. The movement from perception to expression transforms objective reference into subjective significance; warmth becomes affection, distance becomes detachment and truth becomes a matter of stance rather than fact. Across languages, this dynamic reveals itself in the subtle grammar of evaluation, the metaphoric weight of adjectives and the pragmatic tones of politeness and irony. Subjective semantics thus stands at the crossroads of cognition and culture, showing that meaning is never given but continually negotiated between minds, emotions and contexts.

Keywords*: subjective semantics, cognitive linguistics, epistemic modality, evidentiality, metaphorical mapping, cross-linguistic comparison, evaluative meaning.*

КОГНІТИВНІ ЗАСАДИ СУБ'ЄКТИВНОЇ СЕМАНТИКИ В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСЬКІЙ ТА СВІТОВИХ МОВАХ

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Мова не є нейтральним відображенням реальності, а живим середовищем, через яке люди конструюють, оцінюють і емоційно забарвлюють світ, у якому живуть. У межах когнітивного підходу до значення кожне слово несе слід перспективи погляду, сформованого взаємодією свідомості з досвідом. Перехід від сприйняття до висловлення перетворює об'єктивну референцію на суб'єктивну значущість: тепло стає прихильністю, відстань відчуженням, а істина питанням позиції, а не факту. У різних мовах ця динаміка проявляється в тонкій граматиці оцінювання, метафоричній силі прикметників і прагматичних відтінках ввічливості та іронії. Таким чином, суб'єктивна семантика перебуває на перетині когніції та культури, демонструючи, що значення ніколи не є заданим, а постійно вибудовується й узгоджується між свідомістю, емоціями та контекстами.

Introduction. In cognitive linguistics the *subjective semantics* of the word refers not merely to its referential core but to the dynamic complex of meanings that reflect the speaker's perspective, evaluative stance, epistemic position and interactional strategies of politeness and face management. Within this framework, meaning is not viewed as a fixed lexical entry but as a living conceptualization, constructed through perception, memory, categorization and socially oriented intentionality. The subjective layer of meaning manifests both within the polysemic structure of the word and in the interactional mechanics of discourse: the speaker's intention, genre conventions, audience expectations and situational framing directly shape semantic construction. Thus, expressions such as *a heavy topic, warm relationship, bitter truth* are not merely stylistic ornaments they are conceptual mappings that encode how humans structure experience through metaphor. Similarly, epistemic and evidential markers like *apparently, seemingly, wohl, -miş, rashii, al parecer* signal the source, reliability and ownership of information, subtly distributing responsibility between speaker and listener.

The discussion is based on examples drawn from multiple language families Indo-European, Turkic and Japonic covering literary, journalistic and digital discourse. The goal is not only descriptive but also explanatory: to show how markers of subjectivity emerge (through *subjectification*), how they become conventionalized and "invisible" in routine use and how their distribution and intensity vary across genres.

Methodological framework. The study follows a *usage-based*, qualitatively oriented approach. Excerpts from literary texts, journalistic writing and digital communication in several languages are analyzed to identify lexical, syntactic and pragmatic markers of subjectivity. The interpretation draws upon frame semantics, prototype theory, conceptual metaphor and metonymy, construction grammar and pragmatic theories of presupposition and speech acts. Examples are illustrative rather than statistical; the emphasis lies on conceptual precision and cross-linguistic comparability.

The cognitive architecture of subjective meaning. To understand subjective meaning, one must first grasp how it connects with the lexical core. A word's core is typically organized around a *prototype*: for instance, *sweet / doux / dulce / şirin* originates from a sensory taste experience, while its

peripheral extensions carry emotional or aesthetic evaluation (*sweet child, sweet memory*). This expansion is systematic, not accidental: at the level of *frames*, "sweetness" evokes scenarios of pleasure, intimacy, and comfort, thus mapping the sensory domain onto the emotional and social ones. Similarly, adjectives such as *warm / teplıy / sıcak* shift from physical temperature to social closeness (*warm welcome, warm heart*), while *cold / froid / kaltes / soyuq* convey distance and detachment (*cold reply, cold relationship*). These metaphorical mappings are both universal and culturally specific: English "warm heart" is positive, German *kaltes Herz* implies cruelty, Turkish *sıcak kanlı* is linked to folk notions of friendliness and Japanese *atsui omoi* (hot feelings) expresses poetic intensity (Langacker, 2008).

Subjectivity, however, is not confined to evaluative adjectives. It also consists of epistemic and evidential networks that encode the speaker's stance toward knowledge. In English expressions like *apparently, seemingly, I suppose, must* convey degrees of inference and epistemic commitment (Traugott; Dasher, 2002); in German *wohl, offenbar, dürfte* play a similar role; in Spanish *al parecer, parece que*; in Turkish and Azerbaijani the suffix *-miş* and adverbs such as *galiba* or *deyəsən*; in Japanese *rashii, mitai, sō da, tte*—all indicate how information is sourced and how the speaker negotiates reliability **(**Narrog, 2012; Wilson, Sperber, 2019**)**. Such markers are essential to the *interactional economy* of discourse: when a journalist writes "*apparently*", responsibility is shared with the information source; in academic writing *it seems plausible that...* (Wilson, Sperber, 2019) softens an argument and signals intellectual modesty; on social media ironic particles (quotation marks, emojis) create both distance and attitude (Ken-Ichi Kadooka, 2021).

Perspective or *construal* is the core mechanism of subjectivity. The same event can be represented through different viewpoints and meaning shifts according to *how* it is presented rather than *what* is presented. Compare: *The committee rejected the proposal* (agentive focus), *The proposal was rejected* (topic focus), *Apparently, the proposal didn't pass* (epistemic focus), *Unfortunately, the proposal didn't pass* (evaluative focus). In Azerbaijani and Turkish discourse, particles like *axı*, *ya*, *mı ki* (Aksan, 2015) in Russian *же/ведь* and in German *ja/doch* all encode layers of emotion, presupposition or stance that profoundly alter interpretation even when the propositional content remains identical. Such elements rarely appear in dictionaries but decisively determine meaning in use.

Politeness and face management function as the social regulators of subjective semantics. The *T/V* distinction (French *tu/vous*, German *du/Sie*,

Russian *ty/vy*) and honorific systems (Japanese *keigo*, Korean *-nim* forms, Turkish *rica ederim*, *mümkünse*, Azerbaijani *xahiş edirəm*, *zəhmət olmasa*) modify the same propositional request to different degrees of deference. The difference between "*Send me the file*" and "*Could you please send me the file?*" is not purely pragmatic but semantic: the second construction encodes an affective stance of consideration and minimizes face threat. Thus, politeness is not merely etiquette it is an integral part of the semantic structure itself.

Genre also influences how subjectivity is distributed. In literature sensory-metaphorical networks such as "*sweet / bitter / warm / cold*" generate imagery and empathy; the lyrical "I" internalizes perspective and aestheticizes polysemy. In journalism subjectivity takes argumentative form: evaluative adjectives, modal adverbs and rhetorical figures (antithesis, metaphor) shape the ethos of persuasion. In digital discourse subjective meaning becomes multimodal realized through emojis, hashtags, capitalization, elongation, ironic quotation and meme semiotics. A single punctuation mark or emoji can function almost like a morpheme, altering interpretation: *great.* can express sarcasm; *çox sağ ol da…* in Azerbaijani online speech conveys ironic dissatisfaction; thanks) is no longer a neutral expression but an index of tone.

The historical dimension of subjectivity *subjectification* and *grammaticalization* reveals striking parallels across languages. English *must* evolved from deontic necessity to epistemic inference; *very* (from Old French *verai* — "true") shifted from truth-intensity to degree modification. In Turkish and Azerbaijani, *-miş* extended from hearsay evidentiality to evaluative and even ironic nuances in narrative contexts. Russian *кажется* moved from perceptual "to seem" to an epistemic hedge; Japanese 〜てしまう began as a completive aspect marker and now encodes regret or emotional coloring (Ken-Ichi Kadooka, 2021). In all such cases neutral descriptive forms gradually acquire traces of stance and emotion, later becoming conventionalized and "invisible", embedded into the lexical-semantic structure as default meaning.

At the discourse-construction level, subjectivity is sustained by recurrent templates. In English patterns like *I guess / it seems that / the fact is that* function as stance frameworks; in German, *es scheint, dass… / ich denke, … / das Problem ist, dass…* build the expected rhetorical scaffolding; in Spanish, *lo cierto es que… / cabe destacar que…* strengthen textual ethos; in Azerbaijani and Turkish, *görünür ki… / deyəsən… / doğrudur ki…* mark graduated com-

mitment. The semantic load of these constructions lies not only in words but in rhythm, intonation and illocutionary contour: the same lexical items acquire different subjective shades when placed in different constructions.

Perhaps the most revealing insight from multilingual data is that subjective semantics represents a meeting point between universals and local specificities. Deep metaphorical mappings such as "*closeness is warmth*" display cross-linguistic stability, yet their dosage, fine-tuning through particles, politeness calibration and ironic coding vary with culture. This variability poses real challenges for translation and intercultural communication: literal equivalence often erases subjective layers, weakening illocutionary force. Subjective semantics, therefore, is not merely a theoretical construct but a foundation for translation strategy, communicative ethics and rhetorical design.

Subjective Semantics across Genres and Time. The distribution of subjectivity across genres shows that this phenomenon performs distinct functions in each type of discourse.

In literary discourse subjectivity serves as an artistic lens through which emotional tonality and aesthetic experience are constructed. Writers often embed it in the inner speech of characters or in metaphorical layers of narration. In James Joyce's *Ulysses* the subjective strata of language are embodied through the stream-of-consciousness technique, where perception, time and self-awareness fracture into associative sequences. In Azerbaijani prose authors such as Anar, Elchin and I. Afandiyev build subjectivity through inner dialogue, ironic narrative tone and reflexive perspective. For example, moral categories like will and conscience are transformed into semantic energy; markers such as *görünür, bəlkə, deyəsən* (it seems, perhaps, apparently) create the psychological rhythm of narration. Here, subjectivity becomes not only a semantic layer but also an aesthetic principle (Hasanova, 2021).

In journalistic discourse subjective semantics carries rhetorical weight: the author maintains a personal stance while projecting the illusion of objectivity. Phrases like *Görünür ki, hökumətin qərarı...* or *Böyük ehtimalla, bu addım... ("It seems that the government's decision...," "Most likely this step...")* balance information and accountability. In Western media markers such as *it seems that, apparently, allegedly* are an integral part of written ethics (Wierbicka, Goddard, 2018). In Turkish and Azerbaijani journalism *deyəsən, elə bil, guya* often convey not only epistemic uncertainty but also emotional irony. In an age of information overload, these markers serve as signals of both distance and reliability.

280

In digital discourse subjectivity has become multimodal. Meaning is constructed not only through words but through emojis, graphic rhythm, hashtags and prosodic mimicry. A simple phrase like *çox sağ ol da...* (thanks, yeah right...) signals ironic dissatisfaction; *superrr!!!* expresses exaggerated enthusiasm; *great.* denotes sarcasm. Online, subjectivity is also collective users share emotional codes that build *"affective communities"*. Thus, subjective semantics becomes not merely individual but a reflection of social psychology in digital culture.

Diachronically the evolution of subjective meaning is closely tied to grammaticalization processes. English *must* shifted from expressing external necessity to epistemic inference, while *really* evolved from "*in truth*" to an emotional intensifier. In Turkish, the suffix *-miş* has moved beyond its original hearsay function to express surprise, irony or emotional stance: in *Görürsən, o da gəlmiş!* (So he's come, huh!), the form encodes the speaker's attitude, not simply evidentiality. Similarly, Azerbaijani *yəqin* (certain) has weakened into a marker of mild assumption. These paths of *subjectification* can be observed across virtually all natural languages and illustrate the parallel evolution of language and human cognition (Hasanova, 2021).

On the interpretative level subjective semantics represents not only personal emotion but also the embodiment of cultural norms. Each society's ethical system, communicative values and emotional codes influence how subjectivity is linguistically modelled. In Japanese, avoiding a direct "*no*" through expressions like *chotto...* (a bit...) reflects politeness and indirectness as part of the semantic fabric (Ken-Ichi Kadooka, 2021). In English *I'm afraid...* expresses both politeness and responsibility; in Azerbaijani, *bilmirəm, bəlkə də...* (I don't know, maybe...) (Hasanova, 2021) signals modesty and social tact. Thus, subjective semantics emerges as a "verbalized portrait" of both cognition and culture a mirror in which the human mind and the social order meet (Faucconnier, Turner, 2002).

Results and Discussion. The analysis of cross-linguistic and cross-genre material demonstrates that subjective semantics permeates all levels of language structure and functions as both a cognitive and social phenomenon. While its lexical, grammatical and discursive manifestations display universal tendencies, their activation and intensity vary across languages, genres and cultural systems.

1. **Lexical level**. Subjectivity is primarily realized through connotative and evaluative shades of meaning. Words rooted in sensory experience, such as *sweet, heavy, warm, cold* convey emotional or social evaluation in

many languages. This confirms that human conceptualization of meaning is grounded in sensory-based metaphorical mappings.

2. **Grammatical level.** Epistemic and evidential markers encode the speaker's attitude toward the source and reliability of information. Expressions such as *yəqin, görünür, -miş, apparently, wohl, al parecer* reveal how languages grammatically distribute cognitive responsibility. Through grammaticalization, many of these forms have shifted from neutral reportive markers to carriers of stance, emotion or irony.

3. **Discourse level**. Subjective semantics is realized according to genre conventions. In literary discourse it manifests through inner speech, metaphorical density and lyrical tonality; in journalistic writing, it mediates between factual reporting and rhetorical positioning. In digital communication subjectivity becomes multimodal emojis, hashtags, orthographic rhythm and graphic irony constitute its primary resources.

4**. Interactional level**. Politeness and face-management strategies act as social regulators of subjective meaning. Formulas such as *Could you please...*, *zəhmət olmasa...* or *I'm afraid...* are not merely etiquette they function as semantic softeners that calibrate emotional distance and preserve interpersonal balance.

5. **Diachronic perspective**. Processes of *subjectification* reveal a universal tendency: expressions that once conveyed objective information evolve into markers of personal stance or affect. This transformation illustrates the adaptive interaction between communicative economy and psychological expressiveness in language evolution.

6. **Cognitive dimension.** Subjective semantics is closely linked with conceptual metaphor, frame and prototype theory. Meaning does not arise directly from external referents but from the conceptual network of human experience. Subjectivity is thus the linguistic trace of conceptualization itself the "signature" of consciousness within meaning.

7. **Cultural dimension**. Subjective meanings reflect the ethical and communicative codes of societies. Indirectness in Japanese responsibility-sharing in English and modesty or emotional politeness in Azerbaijani all represent culturally encoded patterns of subjectivity. The language system mirrors not only cognition but also value orientation.

Conclusion. Subjective semantics reveals language as far more than a medium of information transfer it is a vehicle of human consciousness, emotion and social relation. It stands at the intersection of universality and cultural specificity: while metaphorical and epistemic structures reflect uni-

versal cognitive patterns, politeness, irony and emotional coding express culturally distinct norms. The study of subjective meaning shows that words do not merely describe the external world they articulate the way individuals *feel*, *evaluate* and *interpret* reality. Language, therefore, is not only the mirror of thought but also the semantic embodiment of human sensibility and interpersonal stance.

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