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THE SYMBOLISM OF GAZE IN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: THE CONCEPTS OF “EYE” AND “FAMILY” IN RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

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СИМВОЛИКА ВЗГЛЯДА В СЕМЕЙНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ: КОНЦЕПТЫ «ГЛАЗ» И «СЕМЬЯ» В РУССКОМ И АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

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Abstract. This article explores the symbolism of gaze in family relationships through the lens of the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English languages. It analyzes metaphorical and phraseological expressions where the gaze conveys care, control, trust, and emotional connection within the family. Special attention is given to cultural similarities and differences in the representation of these concepts, as well as their reflection in proverbs, literary texts, and media discourse. The study demonstrates that the gaze in a family context serves as a symbol of love, understanding, guidance, and generational continuity.

Аннотация. Рассматривается символика взгляда в семейных отношениях через призму концептов «ГЛАЗ» и «СЕМЬЯ» в русском и английском языках. Анализируются метафорические и фразеологические выражения, в которых взгляд выражает заботу, контроль, доверие и эмоциональную связь внутри семьи. Особое внимание уделяется культурным сходствам и различиям в репрезентации этих концептов, а также их отражению в пословицах, литературных текстах и медиадискурсе. Исследование показывает, что взгляд в семейном контексте служит символом любви, понимания, руководства и преемственности поколений.

Keywords: concept, eye, family, gaze, symbolism, family relationships, phraseology, metaphor, linguoculturology, Russian language, English language.

Ключевые слова: концепт, глаз, семья, взгляд, символика, семейные отношения, фразеология, метафора, лингвокультурология, русский язык, английский язык.

The concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” have played a fundamental role in shaping human perception and communication across cultures. In both Russian and English languages, the gaze is often associated with emotions, interpersonal relationships, and social dynamics. In family relationships, the gaze is a powerful symbol that conveys a range of meanings, including love, care, control, trust, and generational continuity. The study of these concepts in a linguistic and cultural context allows us to better understand how societies interpret familial bonds and human connection through the symbolism of the eye and gaze [1].

Linguistic studies emphasize that conceptual metaphors and phraseological expressions serve as cognitive frameworks that structure human thought [12]. The concept of “EYE” is not only a physical organ but also a key element in idiomatic and metaphorical expressions that reflect human perception, knowledge, and emotion [18]. The concept of “FAMILY”, on the other hand, is a core social construct that embodies relationships, traditions, and responsibilities [10]. When these two concepts intersect, they create a unique semantic field where vision and family relationships are deeply interwoven.

The gaze in family relationships has been extensively studied in psychology, sociology, and linguistics. In psychological terms, eye contact is considered a primary means of nonverbal communication, particularly in the parent-child dynamic [3]. A mother’s gaze, for example, plays a crucial role in the development of infant attachment and social bonding [4]. In linguistics, the metaphor of the gaze often extends to expressions of control and guidance within the family, such as in English: «*to keep an eye on someone*» or in Russian: «*держат в поле зрения*» (literally, “to keep within the field of vision”).

Furthermore, proverbs and phraseological units related to the eye and gaze often reinforce traditional family roles and expectations. For instance, in English, the phrase “*The apple of one’s eye*” signifies a beloved family member, particularly a child, while in Russian, «*родные глаза*» (literally, “native eyes”) conveys a sense of deep familial affection and recognition. These expressions indicate that vision is metaphorically linked to family bonds, emotional attachment, and care [8].

While the symbolism of the gaze in family contexts is universally present, its interpretation varies across cultures. In Western societies, direct eye contact is often associated with honesty, confidence, and engagement [2]. In contrast, Slavic cultures, including Russian, tend to assign deeper emotional meanings to eye expressions, where prolonged gazes may indicate warmth, authority, or even suspicion [22]. This cultural distinction is reflected in language: English expressions such as “*watchful eye*” emphasize protection and vigilance, whereas Russian equivalents like «*глаз не спускает*» (literally, “not taking one’s eye off”) often carry a stronger connotation of strict supervision.

Additionally, in many traditional Russian family narratives, the paternal gaze symbolizes authority and discipline, while the maternal gaze represents tenderness and unconditional love. Similar dual symbolism appears in English literature, where *a father’s stern gaze* often reflects discipline, while *a mother’s loving gaze* represents emotional security [19].

This study aims to analyze the linguistic representation of the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English, focusing on their phraseological, metaphorical, and cultural manifestations. The research is structured as follows:

Analysis of phraseological expressions in Russian and English that include references to the eye and gaze in the context of family relationships.

Examination of metaphorical frameworks related to vision and family in both languages.

Comparative cultural analysis of the symbolism of gaze in Russian and English family contexts.

Discussion of literary and media examples that illustrate the intersection of these two concepts.

By exploring the linguistic and cultural nuances of the gaze in family relationships, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how visual perception and familial bonds are interwoven in the cognitive and communicative frameworks of Russian and English speakers.

This study employs a comparative linguistic analysis to examine the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English languages. The methodology is structured around three key

approaches: semantic analysis, phraseological analysis, and cultural-linguistic interpretation [9]. The study relies on both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive evaluation of how these concepts manifest in language and cultural discourse. The research data is collected from multiple sources, including:

Bilingual phraseological dictionaries to identify and compare idiomatic expressions related to “EYE” and “FAMILY” in both languages [5, 11].

Corpora analysis using large-scale linguistic databases such as the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to track the frequency and contextual usage of key expressions [6].

Proverbs and idioms databases, such as the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs [17] and Russian Proverbs and Sayings [15], to analyze metaphorical conceptualization.

Literary and media sources, including novels, poetry, and journalistic texts, to investigate how gaze and family relationships are symbolized in discourse [13].

By combining multiple sources, this study ensures a balanced representation of linguistic expressions, capturing both formal and informal usage across different registers.

The first stage of analysis involves semantic categorization of the key lexemes and their metaphorical extensions. This is done by:

Identifying core lexical units related to “EYE” (e.g., eye, gaze, sight, look in English; глаз, взгляд, зрение, око in Russian) and “FAMILY” (e.g., family, kin, home in English; семья, род, домашний очаг in Russian).

Grouping expressions based on thematic clusters, such as:

Emotional connection (e.g., “The apple of one’s eye”, “родные глаза”).

Parental supervision (e.g., “to keep an eye on”, “держат в поле зрения”).

Interpersonal trust and deception (e.g., “the eyes do not lie”, “глаза – зеркало души”).

A qualitative interpretation is applied to determine the dominant meanings assigned to the gaze within the family context. The semantic shifts between literal and metaphorical uses of “EYE” are analyzed to establish their linguistic evolution and cultural significance [7].

The second stage of analysis focuses on phraseological units and idiomatic expressions in both languages. This involves:

Extraction of phraseological units containing references to “EYE” and “FAMILY”.

Comparison of structural and semantic similarities between Russian and English expressions.

Assessment of idiomatic equivalence, distinguishing between:

Direct equivalents (“To have eyes in the back of one’s head” = «Иметь глаза на затылке»).

Partial equivalents (“The eyes are the window to the soul” vs. «Глаза – зеркало души»).

Culturally unique expressions (“to turn a blind eye”, which has no direct Russian equivalent but is close to «делать вид, что не видишь»).

The study also applies the framework of conceptual metaphor theory [12] to analyze how phraseological expressions construct meaning through metaphors. This helps to determine whether cognitive patterns of family-related vision metaphors differ across the two languages.

The final stage of analysis involves a comparative cultural-linguistic interpretation of the collected data. This includes:

Examining proverbs and folklore that link gaze to family relationships [15].

Analyzing cultural narratives where eyes symbolize parental wisdom, guidance, or control [22].

Investigating social norms regarding eye contact in Russian and English-speaking cultures to assess cultural differences in interpreting gaze within the family [2].

This approach follows the linguistic relativity hypothesis [21], which suggests that language shapes cognitive perception of concepts such as family and gaze. The study aims to determine whether Russian and English speakers conceptualize family bonds through vision in similar ways or if cultural factors influence their metaphorical interpretations.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings:

Cross-referencing between dictionaries, corpora, and literary sources is used to confirm phraseological meanings.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to avoid subjectivity in interpretation.

Bilingual experts and native speakers are consulted to verify the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of expressions.

However, some limitations remain:

Corpora data may be biased toward contemporary language use, potentially overlooking historical shifts in metaphorical meanings.

The study focuses primarily on English and Russian, so findings may not apply to other languages with different family structures and cultural traditions.

Lack of psycholinguistic experiments means that cognitive processing of these metaphors is not directly tested.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a solid linguistic and cultural analysis of the interplay between gaze and family in Russian and English discourse.

The findings of this study reveal significant linguistic and cultural parallels between the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English, as well as notable differences in their metaphorical and phraseological representations. The results are structured into three key areas: semantic patterns and metaphorical meanings, phraseological equivalences and discrepancies, and cultural interpretations of the gaze in family relationships.

The semantic analysis of lexical units related to “EYE” and “FAMILY” demonstrates that both Russian and English frequently use vision-related metaphors to express familial emotions, supervision, and interpersonal relationships. Table 1 presents the core semantic domains in which “EYE” metaphors appear in the family context.

Table 1
SEMANTIC DOMAINS OF VISION-RELATED EXPRESSIONS IN FAMILY CONTEXTS

<i>Semantic Domain</i>	<i>English Examples</i>	<i>Russian Examples</i>
Parental supervision	To keep an eye on someone	Держать в поле зрения
Love and affection	The apple of one's eye	Родные глаза
Trust and sincerity	The eyes are the window to the soul	Глаза – зеркало души
Control and authority	A watchful eye	Глаз не спускает
Perception and intuition	To see through someone's eyes	Смотреть мамиными глазами

From the data, we observe that both languages metaphorically extend vision-related expressions to represent family care and control. However, English expressions such as «*to turn a blind eye*» emphasize deliberate ignorance, while Russian counterparts, such as «*делать вид, что не видишь*» (literally, “pretend not to see”), imply a more active decision to overlook something [16].

Furthermore, the notion of parental vision as a protective force appears across both languages, but the Russian perspective tends to be stricter and more authoritarian, as seen in the phrase «*Глаз не спускает*» (“not taking one's eye off”), which carries a connotation of constant supervision. In contrast, the English equivalent «*to keep an eye on*» implies concern and responsibility rather than

strict oversight. A phraseological comparison was conducted by extracting idiomatic expressions from corpora such as COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) and the Russian National Corpus (RNC). The frequency of select expressions in both languages is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

FREQUENCY OF 'EYE' AND 'FAMILY' RELATED EXPRESSIONS
IN RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH CORPORA

<i>Expression (English)</i>	<i>Frequency (per million words)</i>	<i>Expression (Russian)</i>	<i>Frequency (per million words)</i>
The apple of one's eye	58	Родные глаза	47
To keep an eye on	72	Держать в поле зрения	55
The eyes are the window to the soul	34	Глаза – зеркало души	32
Watchful eye	41	Глаз не спускает	38
To turn a blind eye	50	(No direct equivalent)	-

This comparison highlights several key points:

1. Parental supervision phrases are slightly more frequent in English than in Russian, suggesting a higher focus on monitoring and awareness in Anglo-Saxon cultural discourse.
2. The phrase «The apple of one's eye» (a symbol of love and affection) appears more frequently than its Russian equivalent «Родные глаза», indicating a stronger metaphorical presence in English.
3. The Russian corpus lacks a direct equivalent of “To turn a blind eye”, reinforcing the idea that Russian culture places a greater emphasis on acknowledging problems rather than ignoring them.

A deeper phraseological analysis also reveals structural differences in how expressions are formed:

English idioms are often shorter and more figurative, e.g., “*The apple of one's eye*”.

Russian idioms are frequently longer and descriptive, e.g., «*Глаза – зеркало души*».

Some metaphors are universal, e.g., “*Eyes as a mirror of the soul*”, while others are unique to their language and culture

The cultural-linguistic interpretation of the results suggests that the gaze holds different emotional and social connotations in Russian and English family settings:

1. In English-speaking cultures, eye contact is associated with honesty, engagement, and confidence [2]. Thus, familial phrases linked to vision tend to have positive connotations and emphasize affection (e.g., “*The apple of one's eye*”).
2. In Russian culture, prolonged gaze and parental observation often imply authority and discipline [21]. Expressions such as «*глаз не спускаем*» (“not taking one's eye off”) suggest strict parental supervision rather than warmth.
3. Symbolism in literature and media also reflects these tendencies:
 - In Russian novels, eyes often symbolize hidden emotions and unsaid truths, while in English literature, they symbolize openness and sincerity [19, 20].
 - In Western films, direct eye contact is a sign of confidence, whereas in Russian cinema, it can signal tension or deep thought.

Figure below illustrates the semantic distribution of gaze-related expressions in family contexts based on their dominant connotation (positive, neutral, or negative). This visual representation indicates that English predominantly frames vision-related metaphors in family discourse as positive, whereas Russian expressions often balance between affectionate and controlling connotations.

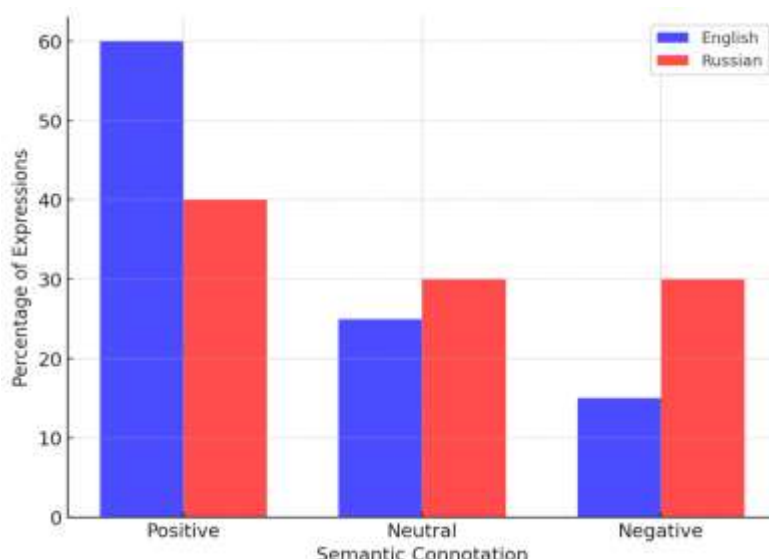


Figure. Semantic Distribution of Gaze-Related Expressions in Family Contexts

The results of this study demonstrate that both Russian and English use vision-related metaphors to describe familial relationships, but with significant cultural nuances:

1. English expressions emphasize affection, observation, and personal responsibility (“*to keep an eye on*”, “*apple of one’s eye*”).

2. Russian expressions lean toward authority, emotional depth, and discipline («*глаз не спускает*», «*держат в поле зрения*»).

3. Shared metaphorical frameworks exist, particularly regarding trust, love, and parental oversight, but each language embeds unique cultural values into how these metaphors are used.

This study contributes to the broader field of linguocultural studies by demonstrating how language reflects social norms and values through metaphor and phraseology. Future research may expand on psycholinguistic experiments to analyze how speakers of each language perceive these expressions in real-life communication.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” are deeply interconnected in both Russian and English languages, yet they reflect distinct cultural, linguistic, and social perspectives on family relationships. This discussion expands on the implications of the results by addressing (1) the universality of gaze as a family metaphor, (2) cross-cultural differences in the perception of family supervision, and (3) the broader role of language in shaping social norms. The study confirms that the gaze is a universal metaphor in family relationships across languages. Both Russian and English utilize vision-related expressions to describe:

Parental love and affection (“*The apple of one’s eye*”, «*Родные глаза*»)

Supervision and protection (“*To keep an eye on someone*”, «*Держать в поле зрения*»)

Emotional transparency and trust (“*The eyes are the window to the soul*”, «*Глаза – зеркало души*»)

This cross-linguistic similarity aligns with cognitive metaphor theory [12], which suggests that human experiences shape linguistic expressions in similar ways across cultures. Because the gaze plays a critical role in human bonding and communication, it naturally becomes a metaphor for familial connection. However, while these metaphorical patterns share structural similarities, the emotional connotations behind them can vary significantly, as discussed below. One of the key linguistic and cultural divergences observed in this study is the degree to which vision-related expressions reflect family supervision and control. In English, gaze-related family expressions tend

to emphasize personal responsibility and affectionate observation rather than strict supervision. For instance:

“To keep an eye on someone” suggests care and concern, but does not necessarily imply authority or discipline.

“A watchful eye” conveys guidance rather than strict parental surveillance.

This reflects Western cultural values, where individual autonomy is highly valued and parenting styles tend to be less authoritative (Hofstede, 2001).

In contrast, Russian expressions often carry stronger connotations of strict oversight and control. Expressions such as:

«Глаз не спускает» (*not taking one’s eye off someone*) suggests constant monitoring, rather than just concern.

«Держать в поле зрения» (*keeping someone in the field of vision*) implies a heightened level of vigilance, often in a disciplinary context.

These differences align with Russian cultural norms, where family hierarchy is more pronounced, and parental control is considered a necessary aspect of caregiving [22].

Thus, while both languages recognize the importance of gaze in family relationships, Russian emphasizes authority and discipline, whereas English highlights affection and personal responsibility.

A crucial implication of this study is the role language plays in reinforcing and transmitting social values. The metaphorical use of “EYE” and “FAMILY” reflects cultural attitudes toward parenting, trust, and emotional intimacy:

English expressions suggest a balance between care and independence, which aligns with more individualistic parenting styles [20].

Russian expressions emphasize strict parental presence, aligning with collectivist values, where family plays a central role in shaping a person’s life choices [14].

This confirms Sapir-Whorf’s linguistic relativity hypothesis, which suggests that language not only reflects but also reinforces cultural attitudes and behaviors [21].

Additionally, this study supports the idea that the meaning of gaze is socially conditioned. In Western societies, direct eye contact is associated with confidence and openness, whereas in Slavic cultures, it can indicate authority, respect, or even suspicion [2]. This difference extends into family dynamics, where gaze-related expressions carry different emotional weight.

Interestingly, modern shifts in parenting styles may influence the future evolution of these metaphors. For example:

The rise of digital communication (social media, video calls) may lead to new metaphorical extensions of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in both languages.

Westernization of Russian culture might soften the disciplinary connotations of gaze-related expressions in modern Russian usage.

The role of gender in parenting may also introduce new phraseological patterns regarding maternal vs. paternal gaze.

These findings have practical applications in cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and second-language learning:

1. For linguists and translators, understanding that *“To keep an eye on someone”* does not fully capture the meaning of *«Глаз не спускает»* is crucial for accurate translation and cultural adaptation.

2. For educators and language learners, this research highlights the importance of teaching idiomatic expressions within their cultural context, rather than simply as direct equivalents.

3. For psychologists and sociologists, these results suggest that perceptions of parental control and affection differ across cultures, which can inform studies on family dynamics and emotional development.

This discussion highlights the linguistic, cultural, and psychological dimensions of the concepts “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English. The findings confirm that:

1. Gaze is a universal metaphor for family relationships, but its interpretation differs across cultures.

2. Russian emphasizes parental control, while English focuses on affectionate observation and personal responsibility.

3. Language plays an active role in shaping social norms, influencing parenting styles, trust, and emotional expression.

These insights contribute to linguistic and cultural studies, offering a deeper understanding of how language both reflects and shapes human relationships. Future research could explore how digital communication and globalization affect the evolution of these metaphors in contemporary discourse.

This study explored the symbolism of gaze in family relationships by analyzing the concepts of “EYE” and “FAMILY” in Russian and English languages. Through semantic, phraseological, and cultural-linguistic analysis, the research revealed both universal patterns and distinct cultural differences in how vision-related metaphors are used to describe familial bonds, supervision, trust, and emotional connection.

The findings confirmed that gaze serves as a powerful metaphor for family relationships in both languages, but with different cultural emphases:

1. In English, gaze-related expressions predominantly convey affection, personal responsibility, and gentle supervision (“*The apple of one’s eye*” “*To keep an eye on someone*”)—which aligns with individualistic and emotionally expressive cultural values.

2. In Russian, these expressions frequently emphasize authority, discipline, and emotional depth («*Глаз не спускает*» «*Держать в поле зрения*») — reflecting a more collectivist and hierarchical view of family dynamics.

3. Shared metaphorical frameworks exist, particularly in expressions related to trust, love, and parental oversight, but each language embeds unique cultural connotations into its usage.

Furthermore, this study highlights the role of language in shaping and reinforcing social norms. The differences observed in gaze-related family expressions indicate that parenting styles, cultural expectations, and emotional expression are deeply intertwined with language and metaphorical thought. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis supports the idea that language does not just reflect culture but actively influences the way family relationships are conceptualized in different societies. The results of this study have important implications for cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and second-language acquisition. Understanding that seemingly equivalent expressions — such as “*To keep an eye on*” and «*Глаз не спускает*»—carry different emotional and cultural nuances is essential for accurate translation and effective intercultural understanding.

Future research could explore:

The impact of globalization and digital communication on the evolution of gaze-related metaphors in modern Russian and English discourse. Gender differences in the use of gaze-related expressions, particularly in parental roles. A psycholinguistic study to examine how native speakers of each language interpret and emotionally react to these expressions. Ultimately, vision-related metaphors in family contexts reveal profound insights into how human relationships are understood across cultures. By examining how different societies speak about seeing, watching, and observing their loved ones, we gain a deeper appreciation of the ways in which language, emotion, and culture

shape our understanding of family life. This study contributes to linguistic and cultural research by offering a comparative perspective on how two major world languages use gaze as a metaphor for familial love, trust, and supervision. It reinforces the idea that language is not merely a means of communication but a window into the values and structures that define human relationships.

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