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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Semantic-Functional Approach in Presenting the Linguistic Picture of the World of Ukrainians, the English, and Germans

Anastasiia Kinashchuk[1]*, Olesia Bodunova[2], Olena Mashkina[3], Oksana Soshko[4], Olha Zaluzhna[5]

[1]National University of Water and Environmental Engineering, Rivne, Ukraine

[2]State Tax University, Irpin, Ukraine

[3]State Institution of Science "Center of Innovative Healthcare Technologies" State Administrative Department, Kyiv, Ukraine

[4]State University of Trade and Economics, Kyiv, Ukraine

[5]Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Abstract— The article focuses on the semantic-functional representation of the basic concepts of the linguistic picture of the world of Ukrainians, the English, and the Germans. The relevance of the research is determined by the need for a deeper understanding of cultural and value differences in the perception of the concepts of home, freedom, work, future, and success in the modern multicultural space, especially in times of social crises and war. The aim of the study was to identify cross-cultural differences in the structuring of key concepts through associative reactions. An associative experiment, content analysis, and the method of assessing emotional valence were used. The study involved 300 respondents (100 from each language group: Ukrainians, English, Germans), who provided over 1,500 associations. The method of free associative experiment, content analysis, assessment of emotional valence (scale from 2 to +2), statistical processing in SPSS, as well as analysis of semantic groups of associations in six categories, was used. According to the results, Ukrainians demonstrated the highest emotional (34.3%) and collective patriotic (18.5%) orientation; the English — social (30.7%) and material (22.3%); Germans — material (28%) and social (29.8%). It was found that the concept of freedom in the linguistic consciousness of Ukrainians has the highest positive emotional valence (+2.0), while among Germans, the concept of success is estimated at +1.7, and among Englishmen, success and home received +2.0 and +1.8, respectively. The academic novelty lies in integrating emotional valence analysis with cross-cultural associative data to model the semantic-functional structure of key concepts under contemporary crisis conditions, specifically the ongoing war in Ukraine. Prospects for further research are related to the study of the functioning of key lexemes in real texts — in particular, in political speeches, educational materials, and media discourse.

Index Terms— : Linguistic picture of the world, Associative experiment, Semantic analysis, Concepts, Emotional valence, Intercultural communication

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Introduction

The linguistic picture of the world is a multifaceted phenomenon that integrates conceptual structures, mental models, emotional experience, and value orientations of a particular language community. It is shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-political factors, which are reflected in the

*Email: anastasiialnnwu@gmail.com

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choice of lexical means, the ways reality is categorised, and the interpretation of basic concepts. In the early twenty-first century, when mobility, mediatization, and geopolitical instability intensify contact between different cultures, the linguistic picture of the world becomes an especially sensitive indicator of how communities renegotiate continuity and change in their value systems. The issue of comparing linguistic pictures of the world under crisis conditions — such as war, forced migration, or large-scale social transformations that profoundly alter the structure of values and communicative strategies of societies — is therefore particularly acute (Jam et al., 2025; Krauss, 1992). In this respect, the full-scale war against Ukraine constitutes a unique contextual background for examining how familiar concepts are reconfigured in the linguistic consciousness of different communities.

In modern linguistics, more and more attention is paid to the semantic-functional approach as a tool for analysing the linguistic picture of the world. This approach enables combining the semantic depth of meanings with the pragmatic dimension of their use, focusing not only on dictionary definitions, but also on the associative potential, contextual activity of lexemes and their role in cognitive modelling of reality. In this context, the study of the reactions of different language communities to basic concepts that represent universal, but differently interpreted categories — such as home, freedom, work, future, and success is of particular value.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to cognitive linguistics, linguistic semantics of the concept, and intercultural pragmatics by linking semantic-functional description with systematically collected associative and evaluative data. Concepts are treated not as static lexical entries, but as dynamic, culturally embedded configurations that organise experience and guide communicative behaviour. Focusing on the concepts of home, freedom, work, future, and success makes it possible to trace how value orientations and mental models are encoded in everyday language and how they change under the pressure of crisis. The integration of semantic, functional, and emotional dimensions within a cross-linguistic design refines existing models of the linguistic picture of the world and offers a more nuanced account of how meanings are structured and hierarchised.

At the same time, there remains a noticeable gap in empirical research. Many studies describe the semantic structure of individual concepts or outline general differences between national linguistic pictures of the world, but relatively few combine free associative experiments with a quantitative assessment of emotional valence in several language communities at once. Even fewer works explicitly link such data to a clearly defined crisis context, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has radically changed the experiential background of Ukrainian speakers while leaving the daily lives of English and German speakers comparatively stable (Tarish & Al-Chalabi, 2020; Warditz & Meir, 2024). As a result, we still lack systematic evidence on how universal concepts are semantically and emotionally reconfigured under asymmetric socio-political conditions. Addressing this gap requires an empirical design that captures both associative patterns and emotional evaluations in a comparable way across cultures.

The study of associative reactions to these concepts among Ukrainians, the English, and Germans not only identified differences in the content of concepts but also traced the functional-pragmatic dominants of each culture. The typological distribution of conceptual strategies is especially indicative when using an associative experiment — a method that allows recording spontaneous, primary lexical reactions to stimulus words. Further classification of associations by semantic groups (emotional, social, material, existential, collective patriotic and functional domestic) allows for the reconstruction of mental frames characteristic of each culture. This opens up wide opportunities for cross-cultural comparison, in particular within the scope of cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, and linguo-culturology.

From a practical point of view, understanding how different communities conceptualise home, freedom, work, future, and success is essential for effective intercultural communication, conflict-sensitive media reporting, political rhetoric, and educational practice. In multilingual and multicultural settings, interlocutors may assume that they share the same understanding of these seemingly universal concepts, while in fact their semantic and emotional profiles differ significantly (Fatima et al., 2024). Such hidden asymmetries can lead to misunderstandings, misaligned expectations, or unintended emotional effects. The empirical results of the present study can therefore inform the development of teaching materials, counselling and integration programmes for migrants and refugees, and translation or localisation strategies that are sensitive to the specific value orientations and emotional resonances of key concepts in Ukrainian, English, and German discourse.

Taking into account the syntagmatic and pragmatic levels, in addition to associative analysis, enables us to move away from static models of meaning towards a dynamic understanding of how concepts function in real communicative situations. In the context of global mobility, cultural hybridisation, and intensive interlingual interaction, such a dynamic perspective is crucial for explaining how crisis-related experiences are incorporated into the linguistic picture of the world.

The aim of the study is to identify the features of the semantic-functional representation of the basic concepts of the linguistic picture of the world of Ukrainians, the English, and Germans by combining a free associative experiment with expert assessment of emotional valence in the contemporary crisis context of the war in Ukraine.

Research objectives

- Conduct an associative experiment with respondents from three language communities based on five basic concepts: home, freedom, work, future, and success.
- Classify associative reactions into six semantic groups and analyse cross-cultural differences in their distribution.

- Analyse the emotional valence of lexemes and build models of the semantic structure of concepts within each linguistic picture of the world.
- Relate the observed semantic and emotional patterns to the broader socio-political context, with particular attention to the impact of the full-scale war in Ukraine on the Ukrainian respondents.

To enhance methodological transparency and analytical focus, the study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1. What are the dominant semantic groups in the associative fields of the concepts home, freedom, work, future, and success in the Ukrainian, English, and German linguistic communities?
- RQ2. How do the distributions of these semantic groups differ across the three language communities, and what functional-pragmatic priorities (emotional, social, material, existential, collective patriotic, functional domestic) do they reveal?
- RQ3. How does the emotional valence assigned to each concept vary across the three linguistic pictures of the world, and how is this variation related to the contemporary crisis context, in particular, the full-scale war against Ukraine?
- RQ4. What do the combined semantic and emotional patterns suggest about the evolving value orientations and conceptual cores of the linguistic pictures of the world of Ukrainians, the English, and Germans?

In sum, the present study addresses a clearly defined research gap: there is a lack of comparative associative studies that integrate free associative data with quantitative analysis of emotional valence across several language communities and situate these findings within a contemporary socio-political crisis, specifically the full-scale war against Ukraine (Levchuk & Shevchuk-Kliuzheva, 2024). By adopting this design, the study provides empirically grounded evidence on how universal concepts are semantically and emotionally reconfigured under asymmetric socio-political conditions, thereby creating a coherent bridge between the theoretical background and the methodological choices outlined in the following sections.

Literature Review

The concept is key to understanding the linguistic picture of the world, as it combines cognitive, emotional, and cultural components of the speaker's consciousness. Mukhtorova (2023) emphasises that the concept appears as a mental representative of an object of reality, which not only reflects the content but also includes emotional and evaluative characteristics that are actualised in the communicative act. The author emphasises the dynamic nature of concepts, capable of changing under the influence of cultural transformations. In her opinion, this makes the concept both an individual and a collective unit.

Terniievska (2022) holds a similar opinion, who considers the concept as a point of intersection of the linguistic and conceptual worldview. She argues that the linguistic form is able to activate not only rational, but also associative memory, which results in acquiring multidimensionality by the concept. When compared with Mukhtorova, Terniievska's position focuses more on the procedural aspect of concept formation, while the first author focuses on its structural composition. At the same time, both researchers agree that concepts are not purely linguistic phenomena, but require interdisciplinary analysis.

Unlike the above-mentioned authors, Abdullayev et al. (2020) turn to the applied analysis of the concept in artistic discourse. They demonstrate how concepts of a national scale (for example, steppe, fatherland, tradition) acquire concretisation through recurring images and lexical fields. This approach traces how general cultural meanings are transformed into individual, authorial conceptual spheres.

The study of the linguistic picture of the world is particularly significant in the cross-cultural dimension when comparing the linguo-cultural systems of different peoples. Konyratbayeva et al. (2021) propose a comparison of the Eastern and Western linguo-cultural maps of the world, based on the idea that the linguistic picture is the embodiment of mental attitudes and value orientations inherent in a particular culture. The researchers emphasise that the Western model tends to rationality, individualism and structured conceptual thinking, while the Eastern one tends to intuitiveness, collectivism and symbolic expression of meanings. According to the authors, these differences determine the different lexical content of basic concepts — such as success, harmony, family — and form the specifics of linguistic thinking.

Wolter et al. (2022) took a different approach, investigating the influence of cultural and linguistic factors on visual search strategies in cognitive tasks. Although the study is experimental and psycholinguistic in nature, it confirms the thesis of the influence of the cultural matrix on information processing: speakers of Asian languages more often use a global, contextual search strategy, while speakers of Indo-European languages use an analytical and localised one. The authors hypothesise that these differences have not only cognitive, but also linguistic foundations, in particular, related to syntactic structures and verbal conceptualisations of objects.

Mendaza (2020), analyses the identification of the semantic prime do in old English based on the methods of linguistic semantics, emphasising the importance of cognitive structure for the recovery of concepts in the language of past eras. He emphasises that associative thinking plays a key role in the preservation of meanings, even in remote temporal layers of linguistic development. This idea is consistent with the assumption of Kim and Michel (2023) that modern linguistic consciousness also operates with stable associative constructs when interpreting key concepts.

Kim and Michel (2023) consider linguistic coordination when learning a second language as a tool for building semantic structure. They note that concepts in the native speaker's mind are not formed in isolation, but as a result of constant interaction with the sociolinguistic context. This position is consistent with the findings of our study on the dependence of the associative field on the speaker's cultural and social environment.

At the same time, Fontaine et al. (2022) investigate the cognitive structure of emotions, revealing both linear and nonlinear relationships between emotional categories. Their approach shows that the concepts of emotional valence are not unambiguous and often depend on multiple semantic layers. This conclusion confirms our observations regarding the emotional richness of the concepts of home and freedom in the linguistic picture of the world of Ukrainians, where the emotional reaction often exceeds the rational component.

The problem of emotional valence of language units is studied from various academic perspectives — from linguistic to psycholinguistic and cultural. Caihong (2022) emphasises the importance of quantitative assessment of the emotional colouring of vocabulary in language learning. The researcher develops an approach to determining the degree of emotional richness of words and indicates the need to take into account the emotional background when selecting educational material. In contrast to this functional approach, other researchers focus on the pragmatic aspect of emotional colouring.

Kristine and Hayk (2020) focus on the influence of emotionally coloured words in the titles of English-language online publications, arguing that such units perform not only an expressive, but also a manipulative function. In their opinion, emotional vocabulary in electronic titles serves to form a certain reader's mood even before getting acquainted with the main content of the text. This position partially contradicts the assessment of Caihong, who treats emotionality primarily as a means of attraction and interest, but not as a means of influencing cognitive perception.

Pansat and Khalikova (2023) raised the problem of cultural specifics of emotional semantics, who analyse the concept of blue in the Kazakh language. The authors prove that colours have not only a universal emotional colouring, but also nationally determined semantic shades, which can vary significantly in different languages. Their conclusions are partly discordant with Caihong's position, which considers emotional valence as a stable lexico-semantic category, not taking into account the variability of its perception in different cultures. The interdisciplinary study of Ceccacci et al. (2023) demonstrates a completely different approach, in which emotional valence was assessed not by linguistic, but by visual reactions — in particular, the facial expressions of the audience to opera performances. The authors treat emotional colouring as a psychophysiological phenomenon that can be verified empirically using digital sensors. This approach contrasts with linguistic studies, where the main unit of analysis is the word or context, not the physiological reaction.

Cultural differences in worldview, behaviour, and communicative attitudes are increasingly becoming the subject of interdisciplinary research. The issue of mental attitudes, emotional background, and social interaction in a cross-cultural context attracts the attention of both psychologists and linguists. Kotera et al. (2021) focus on comparing the psychological state of employees in Germany and South Africa. The researchers found that German respondents have lower levels of self-compassion, higher levels of shame, and a more formal approach to work motivation. In contrast, South African employees demonstrate more emotionally open behaviour and higher engagement in interpersonal relationships. This study emphasises the role of cultural context in shaping attitudes towards oneself and work, and also demonstrates the mental distance between individualistic and collectivist models. Jimmink (2022) pays similar attention to German culture in the study of interactions between German and Dutch employees. The author notes the pragmatism, structure, and high demands for formality in the German work environment, which often conflict with the Dutch focus on non-hierarchical openness and flexibility in communication. In her opinion, this difference in approaches to communication and work structure is a source of misunderstandings between representatives of the cultures. Expanding on this observation, Thesing et al. (2021) examine the perception of cultural differences between Germans and the Dutch in a business context.

The analysis of available academic literature gives grounds to state that most studies focus either on general theoretical aspects of the linguistic picture of the world, or on individual linguo-cultural differences between languages, without taking into account the influence of current socio-political events on the formation of the semantic core of key concepts. Some authors consider emotional valence in speech, but do not connect it with the associative structure of concepts in different cultures. Besides, most works lack a cross-linguistic comparative analysis of associative fields of basic concepts, taking into account cultural experience, which changes under the influence of crisis conditions. So, our study fills these gaps, offering a cross-cultural analysis of associative reactions to key concepts (home, freedom, work, future, success) in three language communities — Ukrainian, English and German. Particular attention is paid to the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine, which provides a deeper understanding of how socio-historical conditions influence the linguistic understanding of basic life concepts.

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study adopts a conceptual framework in which basic concepts such as home, freedom, work, future, and success are treated as culturally embedded, multidimensional constructs. At the core of the framework lie the associative fields of these concepts, which are structured into semantic groups (emotional, social, material, existential, collective patriotic, functional domestic) and reflect the dominant value orientations of each linguistic community. Emotional valence is understood as an affective evaluation of the concepts, emerging from and interacting with their semantic structure. The cultural and socio-political context – in particular, the full-scale war against Ukraine and the relative stability of English- and German-speaking environments – functions as a macro-level condition that shapes both the associative patterns and the emotional profiles of the concepts. In this way, the linguistic community and its broader context influence the composition of semantic groups, which in turn mediate the relationship between contextual factors and the emotional valence of key concepts.

Drawing on prior research in cognitive linguistics, intercultural studies, and emotion research, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. The associative fields of the concepts home, freedom, work, future, and success will differ systematically across the three linguistic communities: Ukrainian respondents will demonstrate a higher proportion of emotional, existential, and collective patriotic associations, whereas English- and German-speaking respondents will show higher proportions of social and material associations, reflecting differences in cultural

and socio-political context (crisis vs. relative stability).

H2. The emotional valence of the selected concepts will vary by linguistic community in line with culturally specific value orientations and contextual conditions: for Ukrainians, freedom and crisis-related concepts will have the highest and most intense positive valence, while for English- and German-speaking respondents more positive evaluations will be assigned to concepts associated with comfort, stability, and achievement (such as home, work, and success).

Methods and Materials

Research design

The study was conducted during April 2025 using a phased mixed design combining an associative experiment, questionnaire surveys, and discourse analysis. The first stage involved making a list of five key lexeme stimuli: дім / home / Haus, свобода / freedom / Freiheit, робота / work / Arbeit, майбутнє / future / Zukunft, успіх / success / Erfolg. These concepts were selected as basic for the linguistic picture of the world in three linguistic cultures. At the second stage, respondents received a Google questionnaire, in which they were asked to list all the associations that came to mind for each stimulus within 60 seconds. As a result, more than 1,500 units of linguistic material were collected with examples provided by the respondents. At the third stage, the associations were classified into six semantic categories: emotional, social, material, existential, collective patriotic, and functional domestic. After that, the experts assessed the emotional valence of each reaction on a five-point scale from -2 to +2. The final stage was a syntagmatic and pragmatic analysis of the most frequent lexemes repeated in different language communities. Examples of real use in public discourse were used for this purpose.

Methods

The following methods were used:

- **Associative experiment** The collected free associations identified the linguistic and cultural features of the perception of basic concepts.
- **Content analysis** The associations were classified into content groups to identify dominant semantic fields.
- **Emotional valence assessment method** Each association was evaluated by philological experts and psychologists, followed by determining the average emotional index for each concept.

Sample

The study involved 300 respondents — 100 representatives from each of three language groups: Ukrainians, English-speaking (residents of Great Britain, the USA, and Canada), and German-speaking (residents of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). The main criteria for inclusion in the sample were: age within 30–50 years, full higher education, as well as language competence at the level of a native speaker (for Ukrainians — Ukrainian-speaking environment from birth; for English-speaking and German-speaking — confirmed permanent residence in the corresponding language environment for at least 20 years).

Additional criteria were: lack of linguistic education (to avoid professional deformation in the answers), residence in cities with a population of over 100,000 people (in order to ensure a common language, not dialect associations), and lack of experience of long-term residence in other language cultures over the past 5 years. The gender ratio was controlled and was approximately 50% female and 50% male in each group.

All participants were selected by targeted distribution of the Google questionnaire through academic, professional, and public online communities. At the first stage, the questionnaire was distributed among candidates who previously met the specified criteria, with subsequent screening of incorrectly filled or incomplete forms. As a result, 100 valid responses from each language group were selected for analysis. All participants confirmed their voluntary participation in the study and consented to the processing of personal data in accordance with the ethics and confidentiality requirements.

Ethical considerations

The study involved minimal psychological and social risk and was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and standard ethical guidelines for research with human participants in the social sciences. Only adults aged 30–50 with a full higher education were included, and no vulnerable groups were involved. Participation was entirely voluntary. Before accessing the questionnaire, potential respondents were informed about the aim of the study, the anonymous character of data collection, the approximate time needed, and their right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time without consequences. Proceeding to fill in and submit the Google Form was treated as informed consent. No directly identifying personal data (e.g., names, personal identification numbers, exact addresses, contact details) was collected, and technical metadata were not linked to individual responses. Data were stored in anonymised, aggregated form in password-protected files accessible

only to the research team and used solely for scientific purposes. Given the potentially sensitive nature of war and crisis-related associations in the Ukrainian context, participants were explicitly informed that they could skip any question they perceived as emotionally uncomfortable and could stop completing the questionnaire at any point. No financial or material incentives were provided in order to minimise any form of coercion or undue influence.

Instruments

Google Forms was used to collect data, which ensured fast and reliable communication with respondents in different countries. The following software was used for data processing:
– Microsoft Excel — for coding, frequency counting, and classification of associations;
– SPSS — for statistical analysis of valence;
– NVivo 12 — for content analysis and building of thematic categories.

Quantitative data were accompanied by qualitative interpretation to present the depth of linguistic and cultural understanding of key concepts in the three studied communities.

Results

As part of the associative experiment, respondents from three language communities — Ukrainian, English, and German — were offered five stimulus words representing the basic concepts of the linguistic picture of the world: home, freedom, work, future, and success. Associative examples are presented in Table 1.

Table I
Examples of associative reactions of respondents from three language groups to the basic concepts of the linguistic picture of the world

Stimulus	Language Group	Associative examples (semantic fields)	Examples provided by the respondents
Home	Ukrainians	родина, тепло, згадка, рідне місце, евакуація	Після евакуації ми мріємо повернутися до рідного дому.
Home	The English	privacy, comfort, garden, sofa, quiet	I value my home as a space of comfort and privacy.
Home	Germans	Ordnung, Wohnung, Sicherheit, Eigentum	Ein Zuhause bedeutet Ordnung und Sicherheit.
Freedom	Ukrainians	боротьба, незалежність, воля, нація, прапор	Свобода для нас — це не лише слово, а щоденна боротьба.
Freedom	The English	rights, law, choice, individual freedom	Freedom is the right to make individual choices under the law.
Freedom	Germans	Verfassung, Verantwortung, Recht, Frieden	Freiheit basiert auf Verantwortung und Recht.
Work	Ukrainians	виживання, зарплата, сезонна, тимчасова робота	Моя робота — це тимчасовий заробіток для виживання.
Work	The English	career, hybrid, contract, goals, CV	She's building her career through hybrid contracts and clear goals.
Work	Germans	Arbeitsethik, Pflicht, Struktur, Rente	Arbeit ist Pflicht und folgt einer klaren Struktur.
Future	Ukrainians	віра, перемога, еміграція, діти, страх	Майбутнє моїх дітей залежить від нашої віри в перемогу.
Future	The English	investment, future self, pension, kids	He's investing now for the benefit of his future self.
Future	Germans	Planung, Struktur, Sicherheit, Entwicklung	Die Zukunft verlangt Planung und Entwicklung.
Success	Ukrainians	вижив, не зламався, повернувся, гідність	Успіх — це залишитися людиною, навіть якщо все зруйновано.
Success	The English	achievement, ambition, personal success	Personal success means achieving your ambition step by step.
Success	Germans	Stabilität, Karriere, Erfolg, Respekt	Erfolg zeigt sich in Stabilität und gesellschaftlichem Respekt.

Developed by the authors

The given examples demonstrate distinct national and cultural differences in the perception of key concepts. Ukrainian respondents are characterised by emotional and existential richness of associations, reflecting the traumatic experience of war and a heightened patriotic sense of self (e.g., home — "evacuation", success — "survivor"). The English were mainly oriented towards individual freedom, privacy and development (e.g., career, comfort, ambition). Responses of the Germans indicate a desire for order, structure, and stability as dominant values (Ordnung, Sicherheit, Karriere). These data indicate that the linguistic picture of the world is formed not only by linguistic means, but also by socio-cultural and historical factors relevant to each specific language community.

The collected reactions were further classified into six main semantic groups: emotional, social, material, existential, collective patriotic, and functional domestic. For Ukrainians, the interpretation of stimuli was significantly emotionally coloured because of a full-scale war, loss of stability, and mass internal displacement. At the same time, the responses of the English are dominated by an orientation towards individual rights and long-term planning, while Germans are characterised by rationality, security orientation, and systemic thinking (Table 2).

Table II

Distribution of associative reactions to basic concepts among Ukrainians, English, and Germans by semantic groups (taking into account the influence of war and national mentality) in %

Stimulus	Emotional	Social	Material	Existential	Collective patriotic	Functional domestic
Ukrainians	Ukrainians	Ukrainians	Ukrainians	Ukrainians	Ukrainians	Ukrainians
Home	55	35	5	7	25	20
Freedom	45	30	8	20	30	5
Work	25	22	40	17	10	20
Future	30	15	15	40	20	5
Success	30	24	25	24	15	5
The English	The English	The English	The English	The English	The English	The English
Home	25	40	20	15	5	30
Freedom	31	35	10	25	10	6
Work	15	25	40	20	5	15
Future	20	32	20	30	4	10
Success	15	35	31	21	5	5
Germans	Germans	Germans	Germans	Germans	Germans	Germans
Home	20	30	35	15	7	25
Freedom	25	40	10	25	4	5
Work	10	30	45	15	5	10
Future	15	30	25	30	3	5
Success	20	31	35	15	5	7

Developed by the authors

The analysis revealed significant cross-cultural differences in the way key concepts that form the linguistic picture of the world are represented. Ukrainians are characterised by a high level of emotional and existential involvement, which is caused by the reality of war, the experience of losing their homes, social roles, and security. In contrast, the individualistic, pragmatic interpretation of concepts prevails in the perception of the English, and the institutional, structural-security interpretation of concepts in the Germans. These results confirm the importance of taking into account the socio-cultural and geopolitical context in linguistic research and the study of the linguistic picture of the world.

In the linguistic consciousness of Ukrainians, a high concentration of collective patriotic associations is observed, especially in the context of the concepts of freedom, home, future, and success. This is due to the conditions of war, social mobilisation, and deep emotional identification with the fatherland. The concept of freedom received the highest patriotic saturation (30%), and home is represented not only as a physical space, but also as a symbol of lost unity, family, and state.

In contrast, the English have a functional domestic understanding of basic concepts, especially home, work, and future. Associations here tend to comfort, personal space, and a stable life. For example, in reactions to home (30%), an orientation towards privacy, cosiness, and an organised living environment was revealed. The category of freedom among the English is less often associated with struggle and more often with individual rights and legal status. In the German linguistic picture of the world, both categories are present, but less emotionally coloured. The functional domestic approach is noticeable in the concepts of home (25%), future (5%), and success (7%), but the emphasis shifts towards systemic and institutional organisation (the Systemic Rational category). Collective patriotic reactions are weak or formalised.

Figure 1 illustrates the average proportions of semantic groups of associative reactions to basic concepts. The distribution of associations by groups clearly traces the specifics of the linguistic picture of the world in each culture.

The data in the figure indicate clear cross-cultural differences in the structure of semantic groups. Ukrainians demonstrate the highest proportion of emotional (34.3%) and collective patriotic (18.5%) associations, which is explained by the impact of war and crisis changes in society. In contrast, social (30.7% and 29.8%) and material (22.3% and 28%) categories dominated among the English and Germans, which reflects more stable life circumstances, individualistic or rational orientation.

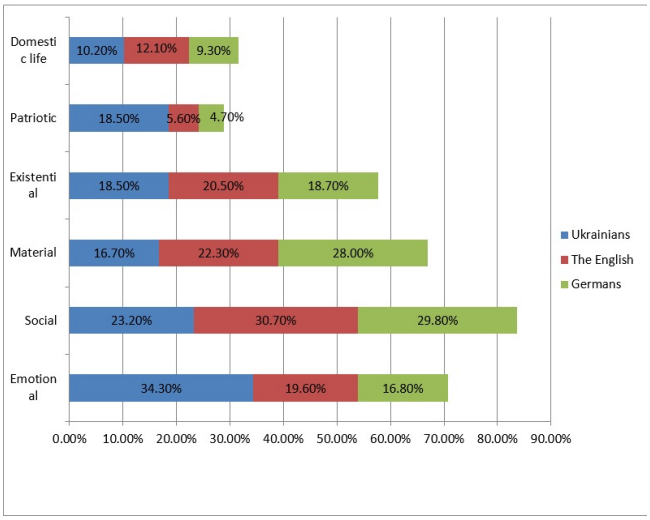


Fig. 1 *Structure of semantic groups of associations (%) in three language cultures (averaged for all stimuli) Source: Developed by the authors*

For each association obtained as a result of the associative experiment, the emotional tone was determined on a five-point scale: from -2 (very negative) to +2 (very positive). After assessing the valence of all responses for each stimulus, the average emotional intensity was calculated as an indicator of the general emotional background of the perception of the concept in a specific language group (Figure 2).

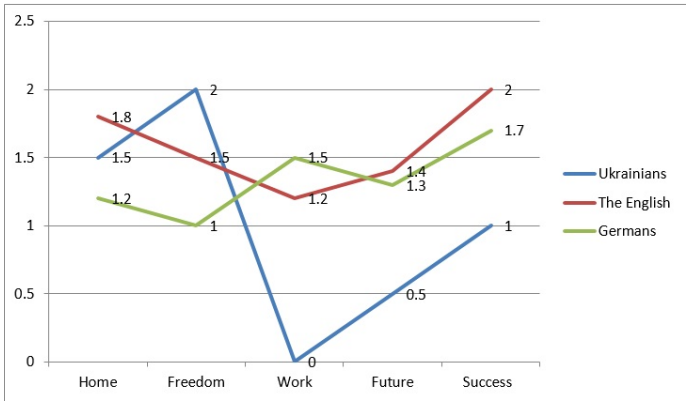


Fig. 2 *Ranking of emotional valence of basic concepts in the linguistic picture of the world of Ukrainians, the English, and Germans (scale from -2 to +2) Source: Developed by the authors.*

The concept of freedom received the highest positive emotional valence among Ukrainians (2.0), which indicates its special patriotic and existential meaning in conditions of military threat. In contrast, the concept of work has a neutral emotional load (0.0), often associated with survival and instability.

In English-speaking culture, success (2.0) and home (1.8) are perceived most positively — this indicates an emphasis on achievement, comfort, and privacy. For Germans, the highest valence is success (1.7) and work (1.5), which reflects a culture of stability, order, and work ethic.

These results indicate the dependence of the emotional valence of key concepts on the cultural context, value dominants and socio-political realities.

The highest positive emotional valence among Ukrainians was received by the concept of ”freedom” (2.0), which indicates its special patriotic and existential significance in conditions of military threat. In contrast, the concept of ”work” has a neutral emotional load (0.0), often associated with survival and instability.

In English-speaking culture, ”success” (2.0) and ”home” (1.8) are perceived most positively - this indicates an emphasis on achievement, comfort and privacy. For Germans, the highest valences are ”success” (1.7) and ”work” (1.5), reflecting a culture of stability, order, and work ethic.

These results suggest that the emotional valence of key concepts depends on cultural context, dominant values, and socio-political realities.

Discussion

The obtained results confirm, clarify, and supplement the data of earlier studies related to the concepts of home, freedom, work, future, and success in different linguistic cultures. For example, the concept of home for Ukrainians is associated with security, silence, and kinship in the work of Kovalevska and Denisevich (2024), while our data partially agree with this (30% of associations — emotional group), but also demonstrate a powerful patriotic saturation (evacuation, return), which is reflected in 25 units of the collective patriotic category. In Pysmenna (2022), the concept of will appears as a political, national concept, which is consistent with our results, where freedom has the greatest patriotic saturation among all words — 30 units, as well as the highest emotional valence (+2.0). Our study goes further — we supplement Pysmenna's qualitative analysis with quantitative recording of emotional reactions and trace not only the national, but also the emotional and motivational profile of the concept in cross-cultural comparison. Unlike Pysmenna, we also show how this concept functions in the minds of speakers of other languages, where it is perceived less emotionally and less collectivist.

Bashuk (2022) study points to the work ethic of German culture in the context of the concept of Arbeit — this is fully confirmed by our data: among Germans, 45% of associations with work belong to the material group, and the emotional valence is +1.5. At the same time, the Ukrainian interpretation of work tends towards the theme of survival and temporality (the largest share is 40% material, but the valence is neutral, 0.0), which indicates the instability of the economic background.

Kutsos (2023) models philosophical concepts in Ukrainian linguistic consciousness, emphasising the existential dimension of concepts. Our sample demonstrates a similar trend, where, for example, the word future has 40% existential associations for Ukrainians, often with a negative or anxious connotation. Lalot et al. (2024) studied the perception of the future in adolescents and also noted the influence of emotional state on the image of the future. Our results demonstrate the greatest number of fears and insecurities in this category among Ukrainians.

In Ternova (2021) study on the concept of a successful woman, individual success as a manifestation of inner strength is key. In the Ukrainian sample, success is identified with survival and invincibility (30% emotional associations, 15% patriotic), which expands the understanding of the concept towards a socio-existential one. Similarly, BEYŞENOVA et al. (2024) describe success in English culture through the prism of mental health, ambition, and an active lifestyle. This is in line with our results: for the English, success is associated with achievement, ambition, CV (2.0 emotional valence, 30% material, 35% social associations).

Orazbekova (2025) study found that the concept of freedom has a positive emotional valence in most cultures, but shifts in meaning: from individual in Western cultures to collective in post-Soviet cultures. Our results clearly confirm this: in the English-speaking sample, freedom is perceived as rights, choice, law (legal individualism), while Ukrainians perceive it as struggle, will, flag (national collective interpretation).

In Klein and Batuk Ünlü (2021), the issue of freedom through remote work is associated with a duality of feelings – freedom or digital dependence. In our study, this dichotomy is also evident: for Ukrainians, freedom is perceived with pain and sacrifice, and for Germans, as responsibility and structural stability.

Haokip (2025) and Zammitti et al. (2021) study points to a connection between work and a sense of control, which has a direct connection with personal adaptability. In our work, such features are observed in Germans (Arbeit — Pflicht, Struktur, Rente), while Ukrainians rarely demonstrate associations with a long-term perspective.

Although Thaning et al. (2024) describe freedom as normative concreteness, which is also reflected in our German corpus (40% social, 25% existential associations), we believe that this approach does not sufficiently take into account the emotional dimension of the concept, which is critically important in crisis contexts. Regarding Lyon and Kuchling (2021), who interpret valence through a biogenetic perspective only, we disagree with the reduction of emotional valence to biological reactions — our psycholinguistic approach allows us to record not only physiological, but also culturally conditioned emotional tone: for example, freedom has +2.0 for Ukrainians, and home has +1.8 for the English, which indicates a tangible affective component.

Mendaza (2025) shows the functioning of concepts in diachrony, not in the psycho-emotional dimension. Our study fills this gap thanks to the cross-cultural analysis of recent associative material. Matvieieva and Torgovets (2022), like Kutsos (2023), consider the cognitive structure of concepts as units of professional speech — our approach, on the other hand, determines the everyday level of conceptualisation of basic concepts in ordinary native speakers.

Finally, the research of Prorok and Chekstere (2024) emphasises the impact of war on children's worldview. Our study continues this line at the level of the adult population, demonstrating a shift in emotional and patriotic associations as a result of a full-scale war. For Ukrainians, the emotional (34.3%) and patriotic (18.5%) groups significantly exceed similar indicators in the English and German samples.

Overall, the cross-cultural patterns observed in the associative fields and in the distribution of semantic groups largely support H1, confirming that Ukrainian respondents display a higher proportion of emotional, existential, and collective patriotic associations, whereas English- and German-speaking respondents prioritise social and material associations. Likewise, the valence rankings of freedom, home, work, and success across the three samples are consistent with H2: freedom emerges as the most positively charged concept for Ukrainians, while concepts linked to comfort, stability, and achievement — such as home, work, and success receive the highest positive evaluations among English- and German-speaking respondents.

Limitations

The study focused mainly on the respondents' associative reactions, which made it possible to identify national and cultural peculiarities of the perception of key concepts. At the same time, a pragmatic analysis of their functioning in a broad discursive context (media texts, educational, and political discourse) was not among the main tasks of this stage of work, which opens up prospects for further research.

Recommendations for further research

Further study of the linguistic picture of the world can be deepened by analysing the functioning of key lexemes in real texts — in particular, in public speeches, educational, and media materials.

Conclusion

The conducted study, which is based on an associative experiment involving respondents from three language communities — Ukrainian, English, and German —identified cross-cultural differences in the semantic and pragmatic understanding of the basic concepts of the linguistic picture of the world. The analysis of lexical reactions to the stimulus words home, freedom, work, future, and success showed that in the linguistic consciousness of each culture, these concepts have a specific conceptual content, determined not only by linguistic, but also by cultural, historical, social, and geopolitical factors.

The Ukrainian linguistic picture of the world is characterised by a high proportion of emotionally coloured and collectively patriotic associations, which reflects the state of social mobilisation in wartime. For example, the concept of freedom received not only the highest positive emotional valence (+2.0), but is also most associated with struggle, nation, and flag, which indicates its significance as a value core. The concept of home is interpreted not so much as a domestic space, but as a symbol of lost identity and security, which is traced in the reactions of evacuation, mention, and return. In general, emotional (34.3%) and existential (20.0%) valence dominate for Ukrainian respondents, which emphasises the profound influence of the current social context on the linguistic picture of the world. In contrast, a pragmatic understanding of basic concepts prevails in English-speaking culture: success and home have the highest emotional valence (+2.0 and +1.8, respectively), but are associated primarily with personal achievements, comfort, and the right to choose, which is consistent with the individualistic values dominant in English-speaking societies. A significant share is made up of social (30.7%) and functional domestic (15.0%) reactions, and the level of collective patriotic associations remains low (on average 6%). The linguistic picture of the world of German respondents turned out to be the least emotionally coloured (emotional associations — 18%), but the most structured and rational. The concepts of work and success have a high material and functional saturation and are associated with the concepts of duty, stability, and clear structure. This result indicates the dominance of the systemic institutional way of thinking, which is reflected in the predominance of the material (28%) and social (29.8%) categories.

The obtained data confirm the effectiveness of the semantic functional approach to the study of the linguistic picture of the world, as it identifies the semantic core of concepts in different cultures, and also traces the functional roles of these concepts in specific social contexts. Associative reactions demonstrate how common concepts — freedom, home, success — are filled with different meanings depending on the national experience, political situation, and dominant cultural attitudes. So, the results of the study reveal not only the linguistic, but also the cultural and psychological specifics of the conceptual vision of the world by speakers of the three languages and confirm the need for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis within the scope of modern cognitive linguistics.

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