



## Article

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### A Corpus-Based Analysis of English and Kurdish Words Expressing Love: A Cross-Cultural Study

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#### Abstract

As a new field of study “Kurdish Studies” needs to be studied in a detailed way in order to attract attention in linguistic and social studies. Through such studies, interdisciplinary approaches will bring about new openings in the field; a contrastive study of words expressing love in Kurdish-Kurmanji and English is crucial to the understanding of semantics and pragmatics. This is a sensitive matter since love requires great attention to the feelings of all levels of society and to individual cases. A thematic classification of words in both languages will facilitate understanding, and hence enable a grasp of the language and culture.

**Keywords:** Love, Contrast, Kurdish-Kurmanji, English, Culture

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## **Introduction**

The topic of love is never-ending in terms of the many conflicts about it over time. Volumes of books have been written, and many scholars have gone into detail on this subject. As is known, countless wars have been fought for love. Thus, the importance of the subject is undeniable, and besides being an attractive topic from the social viewpoint, it is of great significance to academics. A person in love might be exhilarated from love yet feel pain, agony and/or sorrow simultaneously. The popularity of the subject might conceal some unknown risks as lovers feel inclined to express their approach to love naturally as they experience it in time. However, let us not deviate from the purpose of this article, which is to compare and contrast words expressing love in both English and Kurdish-Kurmanji, and thus to show the similarities and differences through which one can understand the cultural differences in regard to the subject of “love.” Worldview of different cultures has a

huge impact in the way emotion words are perceived (Mergena and Kuruoğlu:2017: 91).

I will abstract the basic and common words expressing love and classify them thematically. As for English, the comparison leans on English as the lingua franca of our contemporary modern world. Such comparison should yield some unconnected and unrelated relations, associations and differences. I have not come across the same or similar studies using internet academic search engines.

“Emotions and language” are unquestionably interrelated. According to Schnoebelen (2012: 7), “emotion often plays a crucial, even definitional, role in describing a linguistic phenomenon.” Hence, the words chosen are not just words but rather words arising from emotion-loaded versions that facilitate communication among people in love while they can provide personal semantically changed words with figurative usages. In this manner, words can effect a change in meaning.

Culture influences the words we use and how we communicate. Love can be understood variously in different societies due to the context of different cultures.

Love is viewed as a universal phenomenon which has been defined in various ways (Karandashev, 2015). An individual person can define love from a local perspective to a

universal one. Most recently, it has been described as a revolution and as a co-creative process (Grün et al., 2017). Röttger-Rössler (2006) points out those concepts of love and their connotations diverge in terms of experiences and expressions in accordance with their cultural contexts.

The concept of love in Western societies has over and over again been described as referring to concepts of romantic love (Mirsu--Paun& Oliver, 2017), spiritual love (Kaplan & Keys, 1997), or platonic love (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). But in the end, any kind of love comprises the same basic feeling but in different contexts.

When it comes to the feeling, agony or warmth it provides, it may differ from person to person let alone from society to society. Moreover, love can be thought of as a very nice feeling or as a disappointment, as a coldblooded emotion or as a passion. That is, love can be thought of in terms of extremities (Schmid, 2014: 1).

What is love and how to address the loved one!

As is well-known love is a universal phenomenon (Kokab & Ajmal, 2012: 43). Although everyone experiences it in away that differs especially in respect to the level of emotion, the expression of love has some universal terms as well. It is the strongest emotion that can take hold of someone if even for a while with supreme feelings of attachment, commitment, intimacy, caring, and so on.

Many cultures offer a variety of in-common expressions, terms, sentences or anecdotes that are shared in the community and in the society at large.

Love can be called a deep feeling of affection and care that involves intimacy, commitment and passion, that nourishes like air, food, water, words and touch and has a behavioural, physiological and biochemical signature (Field, 2016: 184). True affection can open the way for feelings deep enough for love to alter the person in many respects at an amazing pace.

Kövecses (2003:27) says that love appears to be the most highly metaphorized emotional concept. Therefore, it is reasonable to enter into discussions on love more than on other feelings. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 177) maintain that many aspects of human experience are too abstract and vague, and cannot be fully grasped on their own terms. Therefore, they must be comprehended in other terms – emotion is one of the terms classified as vague. The ability to understand is according to individual capacity, previous experience, as well as expectation and cultural background.

Language is commonly thought to have the power to convey all emotions, but needs the right time and place; and when it comes to love, there is often a lot we want to express.

So it comes as no surprise to find that the English language is packed full of words of endearment – words that people use every day in conversations with the people that they love, be it family, friends, or that special someone.

In Britain, one can regularly encounter terms of endearment used casually among strangers – the teenage working in the newsagent, the woman working in the bakery, or the taxi driver taking someone to the station. This may be regarded as surprising, but the frequent use terms of endearment as a kind of casual, friendly greeting, does not mean the speaker is in love with the listener; it is just a manner of speaking in which the speaker is most probably trying to be polite! To the present writer, it seems bizarre to hear people who may or may not know each other address each other with words like “Love,” or “Honey” – words used in environments such as work, in a taxi, or anywhere outside regardless of gender.

Since “Love” is used in everyday talk by way of habit, it is easy to converse in a casual way. “How was your day, love?”, “Hello, love, would you like a cup of tea?”

Figurative words of speech in each culture in regard to people’s personalities that make use of the word “heart,” like heavy-hearted, light-hearted, and cold-hearted have their counterparts in Kurdish-Kurmanji, too. The common ones as follows:

Dilsar (cold-hearted)

Dilgerm (warm-hearted)

Dilxweş (happy)

In Kurdish, words ordinarily used for deep love are not in common usage in everyday speech as with English. In daily life such usage would be considered inappropriate or shameful. Not all people in all cities are alike; Kurds in Serhad region (Eastern Anatolia) are thought to be more serious-minded in their daily life, whereas in some valley regions such as Mardin, Batman or Rojavathere are those who are thought to be more lightweight, even somewhat lax.

### **Methodology**

Register is of great significance in all walks of life – how we address people formally, how we call to people casually. Our speech changes according to the environment and atmosphere in which we find ourselves. There are variations within different cultures as well. While a certain word or idiom might convey a positive meaning, it could mean the direct opposite in another environment. As a result, the methodology of comparing and contrasting is used in regard to thematic groups. Diverse classification will enable people

to see how the language gives unlike and different perspectives. Due to contact between speakers of different languages, foreign words (especially Arabic words) enter into the Kurdish language and then behave as though they were Kurdish words, following Kurdish grammatical rules (Karacan et al, 2016 : 23). To broaden definitions, linguists turn to the study of adjectives which facilitates the essential foundation of the present research. In all languages, the description of nouns is through adjectives (Geyik, 2018: 83). Of interest is that Kurdish poets write with an awareness of relationships of nouns to adjectival description.

### **KURDISH – ABSTRACT WORDS**

Words that are in common usage might vary among groups of people. While the younger generations tend to use words expressing love more than the older ones, the words they prefer naturally differ. The following words generally convey abstract notions.

Rihê min (my soul, soul mate)

Evîna min (my love)

Canê min (my sweetheart, darling)

Giyana min (my soul, soul mate)

Delala min (my beauty, my beautiful)

“Evîna min” and “gîyana min” have similar meanings and might be considered to be influenced by other languages such as English of media origin, or Turkish, the official language in Turkey.

### **Kurdish – Flowers – Plants**

The tendency to reference natural beauty in nature is not something new. It is widely known that many people coming from different cultures have a preference for natural manifestations of beauty to connect one with the other. As a society, Kurds who are involved in a lot of agriculture activity, feel comfortable with references to the flora and fauna of a natural environment. They are the realities of culture chiselled into daily life and seen in all walks of life.

Beybûnê (daisy)

Çîçekê – Nêrgîzê (Narcissus)

Gulê – Sorgulê – Zergulê (Rose – red rose – yellow rose)

Gulavdûnê (the water of rose)

Gulgenimê (the rose over the anther)

Gulokê (fresh and young rose)

Gulxatûnê (roselady)

Meyremokê (the spring flower)

Şimamokê (micro melon)

Toprihanê (sweet basil)

### **Kurdish –Animal**

A society whose ancestors had good relations with all living things predominantly animals have the capacity to make associations with and use the words expressing love with any words related to the animals for the loved ones. Surely, when those words are directly translated some of them might sound funny, strange or even meaningless. That is an example of how perception that is logical in a culture becomes meaningless in another.

Çûkê (bird – little bird)

Kewê (partridge)

Xezalê (gazelle)

Karxezalê (young gazelle)

Minminîkê (butterfly)

Şepalê (lioness)

### **Words Made From Body Parts**

As is known, the importance of the body and its parts is relevant to everyone in every aspect of life. That is one reason why body parts are used for self-expression, and the crucial reason for each organ having an application without which countless functions would be obstructed and normal life would be unbearable. The following are some organs such as eyes, cheek, heart, face and etc.

Çavê-n min (my eye-s)

Çav çav+belekê, çav+reşê- çav+şînê (words made from eye)

Dem dêm+gûlê, dêm+kitêbê, dêm + qemerê (cheek)

Dil dilberamin, dil+tihoê, dil+bîhoê (heart)

Ebrû ebrû+şevê, rû+hîlalê (face)

Gerden gerden+zerê, gerden+gazê, gerden+şemalê (neck)

Kezi Kezî+zerê (braid, plait)

Lêv□lêv+hungivê, lêv+şekirê (lips)

**Words Meaning Beauty**

No love is meaningful without words of expression uttered by those who love. Moreover it is very normal that in each meeting, partners use new words or give new and additional meanings to words for their loved ones. “Words meaning beauty” are conducive for use to convey and utter “the love” in which partners as linguists are in ardent pursuit and search of meanings for their emotions and feelings.

Delalê (beauty)

Heyranê (devoted)

Nazenînê (fragile, very sensitive person)

Nazikê (fragile, delicate)

Pitê (babe, bambino)

Rindikê (beautiful)

Şengê (lively love)

Nîkê (very beautiful)

**Words made from nature**

As a nation Kurds are known to be a society living in mountainous regions with all kinds of natural picturesque scenery. They, therefore, tend to define everything in terms of nature including words expressing love. Such natural words as “snow, white snow, sky and rainbow are conspicuous examples. Kaptan (2018: 52) highlights that the close connection between nature and woman is an undeniable occurrence. Therefore, the existence of close relation between love, woman and nature is a stubborn fact.

Berfê (snowy)

Spîberfê (whitesnow)

Ezmanê, asîmanê (sky)

Keskesorê (rainbow)

**Words giving sweet taste**

The universal “sweet taste” as in a common context has a place in nearly every culture to express the sweetness of the loved one. This is in a marked comparison to the commonsimilar and different usages of the perception of sweet things or sweetness in cultural context. Any sweet edible things can be mentioned, based on fruit, prepared dessert and etc.

Şêrînê (sweety)

Şekirxendê (sweet sugar)

Şekirê (candy)

Şêrîndeyê (the sweet one)

Mewîjê (raisin)

Dimsê (molasses)

Hungivê (lêv+hungivê) (honey - honeylipped)

### **Words made from prefix –xweş**

One great advantage of Kurdish is a morphology that enables people to create new words by combining either prefixes or suffixes to be precise in expressing new meanings. The adjective “xweş” meaning beautiful, nice, good can highlight the new words in numerous perspectives. It can form compound words as with good-looking, good-mannered, well-spoken and so on.

Xweşxeberê (well-spoken, Johnsonian)

Xweşcemalê (good-looking)

Xweşkelamê (well-spoken)

Xweşxwanimê (nice-lady)

Xweşkokê (beauty)

Xweşpeyvê (well-spoken)

### **Words used for men**

Words to show men as brave, heroic, undefeatable and manly is another way of encapsulating the notion of manhood not only in the Kurdish language but also in many other languages.

Egîdê min (my hero)

Şêrê min (my lion)

These words can be used for “sons” to express numerous additional meanings.

### **English words – the common ones**

An essential part of the process of falling in love is creating a new world with the person in love, and the language that is used plays a big role in that. When we meet and fall in love, a whole new language develops, one of interesting words and unexpected sometimes childish names or phrases that no one but the happy couple understands. The

learned and wide-ranging words might straightforwardly and with no effort be replaced with personal and much more meaningful words we define.

Love

Heart

Darling

Honey

Sweetie

Sweetheart

Angel

Babe

Dearest

### **Dear/dearie**

The last-mentioned is an aged expression of endearment, dating back to at least the early 14th Century. It comes from the Old English “deore” meaning precious, valuable, costly, loved, and beloved. It is supposed that this is a shortening of dear one, which has been used as a term of affection at the start of letters since the 1500s.

### **Words meaning wonderful**

English is a language which is famous for having countless synonyms as for example the numerous synonyms for the adjective “wonderful.” This feature of the language affords English speakers the opportunity to find new contexts.

The general words meaning wonderful are as follows: Impressive outstanding exceptional first-class marvellous memorable remarkable splendid celebrated eminent magnificent notable noteworthy prominent unforgettable wonderful distinguished (Geyik, 2019: 69).

Words to be used for the loved one are as follows:

Wonderful

Adorable

Amazing

Enchanting

Gorgeous

Life-changing

My everything  
Beautiful + beau + beauty  
Angel

### **Word expressing long-term love**

For each relationship, words used tend to change over time in accordance with the quality of the relationship. The more time passes, the more specific words are found to name the other in the relationship, sometimes the basic universal ones, sometimes the personal words as defined by the couple.

Dear  
Beloved  
Wife  
Husband

### **Words meaning taste**

One common and similar usage in both English and Kurdish is the preference for words designating things that provide taste especially “a sweet taste.” Still the cultural influence cannot be disregarded or discounted.

Strawberry  
Honey  
Honey bunch  
Pumpkin  
Sugar  
Sweetie  
Sweet

Although the word pumpkin has a positive meaning in English, the situation is very negative in a Kurdish semantic unit. The word “pumpkin” is “kudir” in Kurdish and has an extra meaning of idiot, stupid used especially for people who cannot use their brains in every sense. Therefore, a direct translation by a foreigner could cause bad problems between the couple. That is why in any culture, differences and mentalities should be taken into account for unexpected problems to be avoided.

**Words Meaning Friendly darlings**

In some cultures, it may not be common or normal to use love words in friendly contexts, but it is in English. Due to the common effect of the mass media particularly films, soap operas and TV series, one aspect of a language such as English can instantly be very effective in other cultures. Psychologically the media makes it easier to use such words within other cultures; for instance many people use the words “darling and honey” more than they would in their own language or they may express their love as in “I love you” in a more lackadaisical manner.

Sweetie

love

hun

darl (for darling)

darlings (teenagers)

One observation that attracted my attention is that teenagers take comfort in using language in a flexible way to express themselves, which then gives rise to a change in the language. That is why research related to the language of an age group should never be underestimated or ignored.

Baby

Babes

Lover

Honey

Snookums

Lamb chop

Cutie-pie

Sweetiekins

**Words with abstract notions**

What can be more influential than abstract feelings articulating love and addressed to loved ones? The abstract is generally conceded to be a step beyond the concrete and forces the lover to a different level of expression. However the abstract words should be appropriately used to give the precise meaning.

Better half

Life-changing

My everything

Apple of one's eye  
Light of my life  
One and only  
Dear one  
Heavenly

### **Words taken from other languages**

The interaction of languages can be observed in many respects especially in sentences conveying "I love you." Even in Turkey many people ranging from teenage to adults might know "I love you" in roundly five languages. Among the world languages, Kurdish has many

Distinctive features; the existence of various dialects is a historical reality. And this reality should be considered as a richness of the languages not as something negative (Karacan et al. 2015: 114).

### **Conclusion**

The words used to address the person to be loved in the given languages allow us to assume that culture is responsible for the way we make sense of the world. They provide us with the rules that guide us through our lives inside our societies. Through words, we express and convey our feelings to our beloved ones.

When the words expressing love are classified in both Kurdish and English, it becomes clear that the mentality and understanding of love, a universal emotion, is very similar. There are, however, various factors affecting their usage. The effect of other languages from neighbouring regions might be observed in Kurdish, whereas English affects other languages especially through mass media, and Kurdish as well.

Love can be regarded as nearly a taboo subject in Kurdish usage; it is a very prevalent and natural subject in English. While Kurdish people prefer the nonverbal in expressing love, the peoples of English-speaking countries prefer the opposite – as well as the nonverbal which they may modify according to individual inclinations. Among Kurdish peoples, the notion of never-ending love can be conceived of within the one accepted marriage, while in England and the U.S.A., the situation might revert to the personal decision level.

Even though there are so many in-common and similar words in both languages, the present writer considers that words expressing love are individual and personal, and

ultimately cannot be universal. In actuality, it is the words which encapsulate the abstract feeling of love that directly relate to the love one feels for someone or some abstract principle.

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