

A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF THE CONCEPT 'CONFLICT' IN INDIA AND UKRAINE

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Abstract. The paper presents a comparative study of the semantic field of the concept of conflict in Ukrainian and Indian cultures. The literature review has shown that there has not been any discussion on the abstract general concept of *conflict*. However, we consider such data exceptionally important for a better understanding of the worldview and cultural differences in diverse countries. Our study aimed to identify cultural features, similarities, and differences in the perception of the concept of conflict by representatives of various cultures. To investigate the way the concept of conflict is perceived, we used a set of methods, including speech activity analysis, free-listing for data gathering and processing, mathematical calculation, systematization, and generalization of results. We conducted our study in three phases: at the first stage we gathered data, at the second we processed them, and at the third phase we generalized the findings and drawing conclusions. The students from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Ukraine) and Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (India) participated in the research (19–24 years old). In general, we got 292 questionnaires. The experiment revealed that the common semantic core of the concept of conflict in Ukrainian and Indian cultures contains seven words: fight, misunderstanding, war, disagreement, quarrel, struggle, aggression. But in contrast to the Ukrainian culture, in India, the associations with the given concept predominantly depict the person's emotional state (sadness, anger, fear,

confusion, and misunderstanding). Participants from India also mention caste discrimination and religious diversity. In Ukraine, the word conflict is much associated with negative interaction (quarrel, aggression, argument, dispute, etc.). Besides, in contrast to the Indian culture, there are no associations with social discrimination and religious diversity. The importance of our findings cannot be stressed too much since they can potentially be used in mediation, social advertising, and international negotiations.

Keywords: *conflict, cultures, semantic field, similarity, difference, India, Ukraine*

Гірник Андрій, Крилова-Грек Юлія, Хан Азізуддин. Психолінгвістичне крос-культурне дослідження поняття конфлікту в Україні та Індії.

Анотація. У статті представлено порівняльне дослідження семантичного поля поняття «конфлікт» в українській та індійській культурах. Аналіз джерел показав, що порівняльні дослідження абстрактного загального поняття «конфлікт» не були предметом розгляду у наукових працях. Між тим, такі дані є важливою інформацією для розуміння світогляду та культурних відмінностей у різних країнах. Метою нашого дослідження було виявити культурні особливості, спільності та відмінності у сприйнятті поняття «конфлікт» представниками різних культур. Для дослідження використано методи дослідження продуктів мовленнєвої діяльності: для збору та обробки даних ми використали метод фрі-лістингу, для обробки – метод математичного підрахунку, систематизації та узагальнення результатів. Дослідження складалося з трьох етапів: на першому проведено опитування та зібрані дані, на другому етапі оброблено отримані дані, на третьому узагальнено результати та зроблено висновки. У дослідженні взяли участь студенти Києво-Могилянської Академії (Україна) та студенти Індійського технологічного інституту Бомбей (Індія). Загальна кількість опитаних склала 292 респонденти віком від 19–24 років. У результаті аналізу слів-асоціацій семантичного поля, з'ясовано, що до спільного семантичного ядра поняття «конфлікт» в українському та індійському культурному просторі входять сім слів: бійка, непорозуміння, війна, незгода, сварка, боротьба, агресія. Водночас, на відміну від українського культурного простору, в Індії слова-асоціації поняття «конфлікт», здебільшого пов'язані із емоційно-чуттєвою сферою (сум, злість, страх, розгубленість, непорозуміння). Також серед слів-асоціацій були слова, пов'язані із кастовою нерівністю та релігійним різноманіттям. В українському культурному просторі слово «конфлікт» в основному асоціюється з негативно забарвленою взаємодією (сварка, агресія, спір, суперечка тощо), і на відміну від індійського культурного простору відсутні асоціації з соціальною нерівністю та релігійним різноманіттям. Результати дослідження стануть у нагоді при побудові стратегії медіації у конфліктних ситуаціях, соціальній рекламі, міжнародних перемовинах.

Ключові слова: *конфлікт, культури, семантичне поле, спільність, відмінність, Індія, Україна.*

Introduction

In recent years there has been considerable interest in the interdependence and relationship between language and thought as the given issue has not lost its relevance since the emergence of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Literary Encyclopedia, p. 229). There are many ways to examine cultural differences, one of them is to study oral and written speech. Indeed, culture influences the words that we speak, and the words that we speak have an impact on culture and society. Problems of speech, thinking, and culture are increasingly becoming the subject of interdisciplinary studies, including psychology, linguistics, philosophy, social and cultural sciences, which provide a better understanding of the laws of human nature. Comparative

interdisciplinary and cross-cultural researches are a powerful tool for studying the characteristics of various cultures to become aware of similarities and differences between them.

Language reflects our perception of the world that is greatly affected by a wide array of external factors like education, society, and culture. Expanded opportunities for remote communication and virtual collaboration, information exchange, free access to information and communication channels create favorable grounds for the formation of differences and similarities that incorporate a body of words and concepts that have a common semantic field in different cultures. Such knowledge may have many practical applications in comparative and computational linguistics, as well as in ethnopsychology and psychological anthropology. Besides, a better understanding of cultural similarities and differences can be used as a strategy for conflict resolution and mediation or advertising campaign for social effect (social advertising), products, and services.

Levinson and Gumper (1996), Dashieva (1998), Wierzbicka (2001), Ertelt-Vieth & Denisova-Schmidt (2007), Borgoyakova (2002), Goddard et al. (2016), Savvinova (2018) have addressed the cross-cultural issues of consciousness on the example of different semantic units. The core problem of their studies was the peculiarities of thinking, worldview, concepts, and phenomena in different cultures. For example, Levinson and Gumper (1996) distinguish between languages that describe spatial relations in terms of the body (like English 'right/left', 'front/back') and those that orient to fixed points in the environment (like 'north/south/east/west') in some aboriginal Australian languages (Levinson & Gumper, 1996, as cited in Comrie, 2021).

Alongside confirming the interdependence of language, consciousness, and culture, they highlight the unique and genuine features of each culture. Despite their findings appear to be well-founded, they are lacking considerations about the existence of points of similarity in the language image of the world in different cultures.

Vygotsky (1982), Karaulov and Philipovich (2009), Melnikov (1998; 2000), Kiss (1968), DeDeyne et al. (2012) consider the relationship between language, culture, and thought; they have suggested that the system of person's speech meanings presents their worldview and consists of elements containing universal and culture-specific knowledge.

Vygotsky (1982) strongly believed that conceptual thinking is the key type of thinking that is characterized by the use of logical constructions, induction and deduction, ability to draw distinctions between basic and non-basic features, etc. He pointed out the verbality of language and speech-based conceptual thinking. We will explore Vygotsky's theory and try to prove that the analysis of the semantic field of a concept can provide information on the peculiarities of the language image of the world in diverse cultures.

Potebnya (2019), Dridze (1984), Zalevskaya (1998; 2003), Popova and Sternin (2003), Kubryakova (2012) have examined the conceptual picture of the world observed as a reflection of the worldview at the mental level. However, the main

limitation of these studies is researching a monolingual environment, united by a common territory, political system, and certain cultural characteristics, which does not allow establishing similarities and differences between representatives of different cultural groups. Each concept that makes up the picture of the world reflects a system of particular values that prevail in a given culture, as well as has a specific representation in the individual's inner world.

According to the systematic approach in linguistics, proposed by Melnikov (1998), language is a sign system that significantly depends on the conditions of the communication environment, where this system is formed. The conditions of the communication environment stand for the living conditions, type of economic activity, population, geographical location, and other factors that greatly affect the communication. Being a true supporter of Potebnian and Humboldtian ideas, Melnikov drew attention to the internal form of language as a determinant of lexical diversity, which defines the peculiarities of the language picture of the world shared by representatives of the same speech group (Melnikov, 1998; 2000).

Based on the aforementioned, we will consider how the meaning of the concept of *conflict* is manifested in the collective national consciousness in different cultures and what associative fields construct the semantic field of the given concept.

Zalevskaya (2003) put forward the psycholinguistic model of the word, which emphasizes that the word in the individual consciousness is included in a wide network of multilateral relationships. The scholar highlights that words and relationships between words, sensory experience, and background are the objects of the process of differentiation and integration. Zalevskaya (1998) states that a word as a unit and a tool for communication reflects the individual picture of the world as well as tends to correlate those of the individuals in the same social setting.

The relationships between culture and thinking within one language family and country were examined by Nguyen Thi Huong (2000), Anisimova (2004), Ufimtseva (2005), while Dashiyeva (1998), Borgoyakova (2002), Goddard et al. (2016) conducted cross-cultural studies on the example of different languages and countries.

A growing body of comparative analysis by Wierzbicka (2001), Cliff et al. (2008), Goddard et al. (2016), Krylova-Grek (2007), Bloom and Keil (2001), Wolf and Holmes (2011) examined the relationships between language and thought in different cultures.

In her seminal paper, Wierzbicka (2011) demonstrated that every language has key concepts, like friendship and freedom, expressed in keywords that reflect the fundamental values of a certain culture. Moreover, these key concepts differ from those of the other culture. For her, the relationships between language, thought, and culture are indisputable since the vocabulary reflects the persons' values, ideas, attitudes, and thoughts about being (Wierzbicka, 2001, p.15). The researcher comes to the conclusion that revealing the essence and meaning of the concept implies taking into account a particular set of elementary meanings, "Semantics can have an explanatory value only if it manages to "define" (or explicate) complex and obscure meanings in terms of simple and self-explanatory ones" (Wierzbicka, 2001, p. 51).

Krylova-Grek (2007) investigated the peculiarities of translation of words-concepts based on Ukrainian and English. It was found that the formation of the concept is much affected by a plethora of civilizational phenomena, including culture, history, social development, and so on. Alongside experience and individual characteristics, the abovementioned factors lead to the formation of the word-concept meaning hosted in the individuals' minds. At the same time, the psycholinguistic approach in translation is grounded on the generalized features of perception widespread in a certain culture. The system of abstract concepts constructs a picture of the world of both an individual and an entire society with a common language, culture, legal and political organization, and heritage shared by the people of this society. A set of such concepts reflects and mentally represents the principal features of an object, ability, or phenomenon. Hence, the study of the key concepts that exist in a given society makes it possible to explore the picture of the world of a particular community (Krylova-Grek, 2007).

In this paper, we will examine the way the representatives of diverse cultures with different experiences and backgrounds perceive and understand the word-concept *conflict*.

Despite a distinction between abstract and general concepts, we have combined them into the same group since they reflect the intangible items and core values of each society. Therefore, we believe that the analysis of such concepts is an important tool for understanding the picture of the world that exists at the current moment of the cultural consciousness. We will focus on the perception of the abstract concept of *conflict* by representatives of Indian and Ukrainian cultures in order to compare and find out its similarities and difference in both cultures.

Notwithstanding the fact that each person has their own story and experience, we are convinced that individuals belonging to the same cultural group perceive certain concepts identically as they are affected by the same factors, including territorial, legal, political, cultural, and historical ones, as well as the media, which has the power to influence individuals' beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and concepts. We strongly believe (Krylova-Grek, 2016) that the media have a huge impact on the general picture of the world in the same culture, in particular, on such abstract general concepts as *conflict*.

Thus, following Zalevskaya (1998; 2003), Wierzbicka (2001) we define the word-concept as a unit of an individual's memory and mental lexicon, which reflects their knowledge, personal and cultural experience, and worldview perception.

There is no controversy surrounding the fact that language is one of the major factors to determine the uniqueness of each culture. Besides, language is the main means of reproducing the picture of the world. The system of concepts constructs a picture of the world, which reflects an individual understanding of reality. Though people are living in a very material world, the way they organize their living space much depends on the worldview formed by the perception of the world around them. The system of concepts is a multidimensional issue, serving the spiritual, intellectual, and social needs of an individual and a society.

A number of interdependent external and internal factors influence the development of the concept, changes, or clarifications in its meaning. Historically, the concept of *conflict* was affected by historical, social, cultural (perception and verbalization by a particular society), psychological (speech-reflected thoughts about a concept). In our paper, of fundamental interest are the common and distinctive features of the way the abstract general concepts of *love*, *conflict*, *happiness*, and *freedom* are perceived. We intend to trace the connection between cultural traditions and the meaning of word *conflict*. We also investigate how the meaning of the concept of *conflict* differs in various cultures. Furthermore, we try to find out the common associations in the semantic field of the concept and define the relevance of their meaning (in order in the list of associations).

Thus, the present cross-cultural study focuses on the concept of *conflict* as a psycholinguistic phenomenon. We explicate concept as a way to understand the worldview of other cultures, which generates a number of images, associations, ideas that are based on cognitive, cultural, historical, and social experience at the age of globalization and single information space.

The aim of our research is to analyze the semantic field of the concept of *conflict* and identify cultural peculiarities, similarities, and differences in the perception of the aforementioned concept by representatives of Ukrainian and Indian cultures. In this context, we tried to examine the way the representatives of different cultures perceive the same abstract concept and single out identical and contrasting in the semantic field of the concept, its core, and periphery.

It can be conceivably hypothesized that cultural peculiarities and social structure affect the consciousness of representatives of the same cultural space and form the semantic field of the concept of ‘conflict’.

Methods

The interdependence and relationship between language, thought, and the views on the world around, i.e. picture of the world, can be detected by observing how means of language represent an understanding of the world acquired by members of a certain group. In an attempt to study the relationship between language and thought, we use analysis of speech activity, in particular, the free listing method to collect and process data.

The study was conducted in three phases: data gathering and processing were carried out in the first and second phases, respectively; the third phase was dedicated to the generalization of the findings and drawing conclusions.

The initial step of data collection implied gaining first-hand information, so we used the free-listing, a well-established ethnographic method that serves to identify cultural domains (a common set of beliefs, patterns of behaviour, values, meanings, etc. that people belonging to a particular culture share). We asked subjects to write down the most salient words that they think are associated with the concept of conflict. It is considered that it is enough to interview 20–30 respondents to obtain the

required data (Weller & Romney, 1988). The larger the sample is, the more reliable the results.

An essential feature of cultural domains is that they refer to the way the individuals of a certain group perceive the world around them. Besides, they are intrinsic to all members of the group. Nevertheless, members of the same cultural group may not completely agree on the elements, which this domain consists of (Borgatti, 1998).

As stated by Girnyk (2016), the more important is the frequency of each word specified by respondents. Some words will be frequently-used; some will be mentioned less commonly, while unusual or unexpected associations will be listed by only a few participants. Thus, we can get a core-periphery concept structure, where the core is made up of the most frequently mentioned words. One of the approaches to reducing the number of items in the studied area is to find a natural gap in the frequency distribution (Girnyk, 2016). The data processing phase includes systematizing and generalizing subjective and objective indicators, identifying the core and periphery of the semantic field, and obtaining quantitative and qualitative results.

During the third phase, we made conclusions, based on quantitative and qualitative results obtained.

Procedure

Speaking of concepts in cross-cultural studies, we divide them into three groups: 1) unique concepts, whose meaning is determined by the peculiar features of language and culture. For example, such concepts include non-equivalent words that are considered to be untranslatable. Among the best strategies are transliteration and descriptive translation; 2) concepts with a partial coincidence of the semantic field. For instance, in different concepts that refer to objects and phenomena may be equivalent or have certain differences due to national and cultural specifics (e.g., *table, rain, bread*); 3) abstract general concepts that can't be physically perceived or measured, like *happiness, conflict, joy*, etc.

In our paper, we focus on the third type of concept, namely, the word-concept *conflict*.

The initial cohort was composed of 292 respondents from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine (101 participants), and Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India (91 respondents). All of the participants were aged 19–24. In general, we got 292 questionnaires; however, 22 of them were filled in incorrectly, so they were not processed. Thus, a total of 170 questionnaires were used for the survey. The margin of statistical error was 5%.

During the first phase of the experiment, the respondents had eight minutes to write on a separate sheet of paper all the words they think relate to the concept of *conflict*. The task duration was determined in our pilot study, which showed that even the most diligent Ukrainian students stop completing the task at the 7th or beginning of the 8th minute as they had nothing to add to the list of associations.

Then, the research team analysed and processed the data to compare the findings with the hypothesis. We examined the first 15 most commonly used words-associations since the rest of the words were used occasionally (1–2 times) and did not affect the overall result.

Results

India

As reported before, of the 91 questionnaires, 22 were not processed as instead of associations the answers contained descriptions of the conflict, personal attitudes and examples, etc. Hence, we analyzed 69 questionnaires.

In general, the participants used 161 word-associations. The first 15 words were mentioned 27 to 6 times (Table 1).

Table 1

The first 15 most commonly used words-associations (India)

No	Word in English	Ukrainian equivalent	Number of mentions	% of the total
1	anger	злість	27	16.8
2	*difference	відмінності, (інші погляди, ідеологія тощо)	24	14.9
3	fight	бійка	19	11.8
4	confusion	розгубленість	14	8.7
5	sadness	сум	12	7.6
6	misunderstanding	непорозуміння	12	7.6
7	war	війна	11	6.8
8	disagreement	незгода	11	6.8
9	opposite	протилежний	9	5.6
10	fear	страх	8	5
11	aggression (aggressiveness)	агресивність,агресія	6	3.7
12	to argue (argument)	сварка	6	3.7
13	struggle	боротьба	6	3.7

*Word *difference* was used both independently and in word combinations that clarified the cause of the conflict, such as *a difference of opinion*.

In the context of the conflict, the subjects hinted at the cultural and historical features of India and its people: caste as a cause of conflict, religion, nationality. The

concept of conflict was associated with the name of B. R. Ambedkar, a politician who campaigned against caste discrimination (two times). The questionnaires also mentioned family and international conflicts.

Summarizing the data of all questionnaires (91), it is worth noting that Indian students alluded to the Indian fictional films, which showcased the conflict. Some respondents made clear what conflicts they think of, for example, Kashmir conflict, India's independence from Britain, conflicts related to inequality: between rich and poor, resource distribution, conflicts in a family between siblings, parents, in society, or international conflicts between the USA, Pakistan, and India. Besides, there were six associations related to self-analysis and reflection: Self, self-watching, self-supremacy, self-respect, self-righteousness, self-made. At the same time, such responses were sporadic and therefore did not influence the overall results of the experiment.

Ukraine

The sample consisted of 101 respondents, who generated 940 associations. The first 15 were mentioned 74 to 24 times (Table 2).

Table 2

The first 15 most commonly used words-associations (Ukraine)

No	Word Ukrainian	in English equivalent	Number of mentions	% of the total
1	сварка	argument	74	7.9
2	суперечка	quarrel	68	7.2
3	непорозуміння	misunderstanding	62	6.6
4	війна	war	49	5.2
5	сутичка	collision	42	4.5
6	бійка	fight	42	4.5
7	протистояння	confrontation	36	3.8
8	спір	dispute	27	2.9
9	образа	resentment	24	2.6
10	незгода	disagreement	24	2.6
11	протириччя	contradiction	22	2.3
12	боротьба	struggle	22	2.3
13	агресія	aggression (aggressiveness)	18	1.9
14	зіткнення	clash	16	1.7
15	розбірка	showdown	13	1.4

After analysing the data, we noticed that Indian students demonstrate a higher consistency in the words that form the core of the concept of *conflict*. Most often they associate conflict with *anger*, *differences*, and *fight*, which make up 43.5% of the entire list of words. The three most popular words among Ukrainian students are *quarrel*, *dispute*, and *misunderstanding* that make up only 21.7% of the total.

At the same time, it should be noted that Indian students mentioned an average of 2.3 words associated with the concept of *conflict*, while Ukrainian students named 9.3 words. Besides, the first three words of the semantic core in Ukrainian and Indian cultures have nothing in common. However, when we compare ≤ 4 % of words mentioned by Ukrainian and Indian students (the first 6 words), we will notice that two words (*бійка* – *fight* and *непорозуміння* – *misunderstanding*) out of six (i.e. a third) coincide. When drawing an analogy between the first 15 words, we can see seven coincided associations (*бійка* – *fight*, *непорозуміння* – *misunderstanding*, *війна* – *war*, *незгода* – *disagreement*, *сварка* – *argument*, *боротьба* – *struggle*, *агресія* – *aggression*).

Discussion

The comparison of data obtained on the basis of two languages allowed identifying similar and different cultural components in the semantic field of the concept of *conflict*, its core, and periphery in two extremely different cultures. The first 15 words belong to the core, while the rest forms the periphery. The study showed that the peripheral words had different meanings and were used occasionally (one or two times) and therefore could not affect the results.

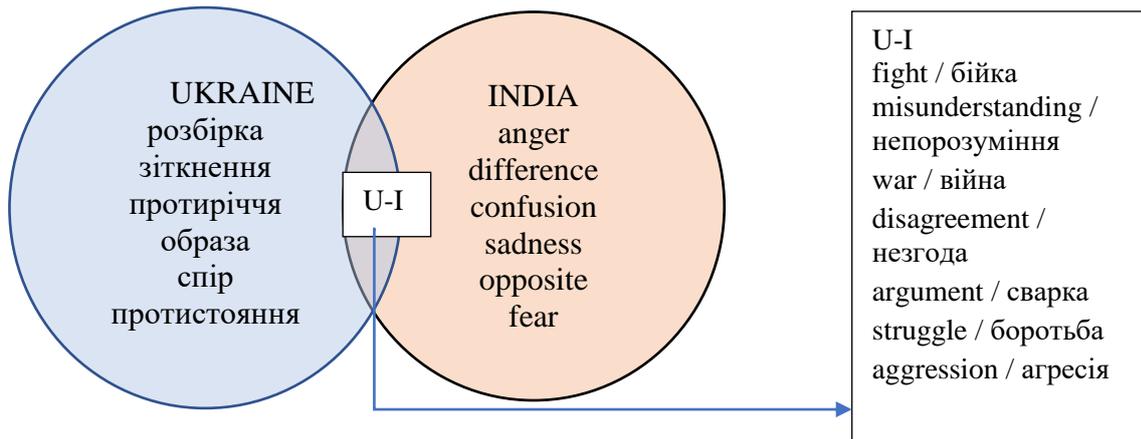
Based on the data analysis, the difference in the words of the core can be explained by the fact that the top 15 words mentioned by Ukrainians are mostly associated with verbal and physical interaction, only *insult* (meaning feelings of bitterness and annoyance) refers to a person's emotional state. On the contrary, Indian students named five times more words to denote an emotional state (*anger*, *confusion*, *sadness*, *fear*, *tension*). It is interesting to note that *anger* and *difference* (in thoughts, views) take the first and second places in the Indian respondents' list of words and the twenty-first and twenty-fifth places, i.e. outside the main semantic core, in the list of associations written down by Ukrainians, respectively.

The analysis of the words of the semantic core showed obvious differences between the two cultures. In contrast to Ukraine, in India, the problems associated with the concept of *conflict* and included in the core are mainly related to the sensory and emotional perception of conflict (*anger*, *fear*, *confusion*, *misunderstanding*) and its physical manifestation (*fight*, *struggle*). As for the periphery of the concept, it contained words, which referred to caste discrimination and religious diversity. At the same time, in the Ukrainian culture, conflict is mainly associated with negative interactions (*сварка*, *агресія*, *спір*, *суперечка*, etc.). The semantic core included only one word (*образа*), which depicts the person's emotional state. Besides, Ukrainian students had no associations related to social discrimination or religious diversity.

The common semantic core of the concept of *conflict* in the Ukrainian and Indian cultures included the words as follows fight, misunderstanding, war, disagreement, quarrel, struggle, aggression (Fig. 1).

Figure 1

The Comparative Analysis of the Semantic Core of the Concept 'Conflict' in the Ukrainian and Indian Cultures



Conclusions

We have described the general abstract concept of *conflict*. The evidence from this study suggests that cultural differences significantly affect the worldview and the semantic field of the concept. At the same time, certain similarities can be used to facilitate dialogue and mediation, for example, for conflict resolution, to develop reconciliation strategies based on a common understanding of basic concepts.

Thus, cultural features and social structure influence the consciousness of representatives of the same culture and form the semantic field of the concept of *conflict*. Awareness of differences will also help to get to know another culture better. Understanding similarities and differences in the perception of the concept of *conflict* can be employed to build an effective strategy for mediation and negotiation in international relations, etc. The present findings have important implications for solving the problem of misinformation and propaganda in the media, which when covering the conflicts appeal to the person's emotional and sensory sphere. For instance, journalists tend to divide the sides of the conflict into in-group and out-group members, dehumanize the opponent, and present the situation as lose-win (in contrast to the mediation aimed at the win-win position).

In addition, the findings have the potential in arranging the multicultural public space, based on commonly shared values. Thus, in our view, these results are an

excellent initial step toward further studies on cultural differences of such abstract general concepts as *conflict*.

Future work will concentrate on the meaning of the concept of *conflict* in other cultures. We will try to define a common semantic core of the given concept as universal and independent from ethnic and cultural specifics.

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