



THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD “MOTHER” IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This research explores the etymology and linguistic development of the word “mother” in both English and Uzbek languages, offering a comparative analysis of their historical roots, phonetic evolution, and cultural significance. This comparative etymological study not only illustrates the divergent linguistic lineages of English and Uzbek but also highlights universal patterns in language, such as the early development and emotional centrality of familial terms like “mother”. The research contributes to a broader understanding of language evolution and cultural perspectives embedded in linguistic expressions.

Keywords: nurturer, symbolic representations, caretaker, flawed individuals, sacrifice, compelling.

The figure of the mother has always held a central place in literature. Across cultures and historical periods, mothers have been portrayed in countless ways — as nurturers, protectors, teachers, and even complex or flawed individuals. Whether as literal characters or symbolic representations, mothers in literature reflect deep emotional, cultural, and moral truths about the human experience. In most traditional and classical literature, the mother is portrayed as a source of unconditional love, comfort, and support. She is the emotional anchor of the family, often putting the needs of her children above her own.

One of the most universal roles of the mother in literature is that of the nurturer. In countless works, the mother is the emotional core of the family — selfless, kind, and compassionate. She is often portrayed as someone who sacrifices everything for the well-being of her children.



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In Uzbek literature, mothers are typically idealized as moral anchors and symbols of unwavering love. In the prose of Said Ahmad, a quote from “Silence” (Jimjitlik): “A mother’s heart is both the cradle and the fire, nurturing and burning with care, unyielding no matter the challenge”,¹ we find mothers who endure hardship and remain devoted to their families. Similarly, in English literature, characters like “Marmee” in Louisa May Alcott’s “Little Women” represents strength, wisdom, and gentleness, “I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship”.² This quote captures Marmee’s calm strength and the way she teaches her daughters to face life’s challenges with resilience and grace.

In many literary traditions, the word “mother” goes beyond the literal and becomes a powerful metaphor. In Uzbek literature, expressions like “ona yurt” (motherland) and “ona til” (mother tongue) show how deeply the figure of the mother is tied to identity, language, and national pride. These phrases evoke strong emotional and cultural connections, portraying the mother as a symbol of belonging and origin.

Likewise, in English and global literature, we see symbolic uses such as “Mother Earth” or “Mother Nature” — expressions that highlight the mother as the life-giver and caretaker of the natural world. Here, the role of the mother expands to include creation itself, placing her at the heart of existence.

Now, I will continue my article with important and necessary information that covers the main topic. I mean, the etymology of the word “mother” in Uzbek and English languages. The word for “mother” in Uzbek is “ona”, and its etymology can be traced to the Turkic language family, to which Uzbek belongs. The word “ona” has cognates in other Turkic languages, such as “ana” in Turkish, “ana” in Kazakh, and “ana” in Kyrgyz. The term has ancient roots and is believed to stem from Proto-Turkic “ana”, which also meant “mother”.

The word itself is thought to have originated from a root associated with nurturing or familial relationships, which is common in many languages for terms referring

¹ Said Ahmad. “Jimjitlik” (Silence) Gafur Gulom 1989. P129

² Louisa May Alcott. “Little women” Project Gutenberg, 1868. Chapter 44.



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to close familial roles. This root appears to be consistent across many Turkic languages, reinforcing the concept of “mother” as the primary caregiver or nurturer in the family unit. Here are some literary examples where the concept of “mother” (and the word *ona* or *ana*) plays a significant role in the cultural and emotional landscape of the Turkic world, drawing on the term from various Turkic languages. An example of this, if we look at a work that has its place among the works that the world recognizes, “Yurt qayg’usi” (*ona bilan o’g’il*), (The grief of motherland (mother with son)) by Abdurauf Fitrat (Uzbek). In his works, Uzbek writer Abdurauf Fitrat often reflects on the central role of the mother in shaping an individual’s character and life. One notable example comes from his work “Ona” (Mother), where he explores the profound love and sacrifice a mother embodies.

Excerpt from “Yurt qayg’usi (*ona bilan o’g’il*)”:

“Ona, sening ko’zingda nur bor, sening yuragingda mehr bor. Har bir bola o’z onasini sevadi, chunki u dunyodagi eng yaxshi insondir”.³

Translation: “Mother, in your eyes there is light, in your heart there is love. Every child loves their mother because she is the best person in the world.”

This heartfelt passage beautifully captures the universal essence of motherhood — light, love, and unmatched value. A mother is portrayed not only as a giver of life but as a guiding light and a source of endless compassion. The statement reflects a deep emotional truth: no matter where we come from, the bond between a child and their mother remains one of the most sacred and unbreakable connections in the world. It is a tribute to every mother’s enduring love and the timeless role she plays in shaping hearts and lives.

The importance of the first use of the word “mother” in Turkish literature, as well as in Uzbek literature, is great. We can present the following as an example: “Ana” by Yakup Kadri Karaosmanog’lu (Turkish). In this novel, the word “ana” plays a symbolic role, reflecting the idea of a nurturing motherland, as well as the biological mother. The novel is set during the early years of the Turkish Republic

³ Abdurauf Fitrat. “Yurt qayg’usi”, Buxoro axbori. 1918



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and explores themes of nationalism, identity, and the deep connection of people have with their mothers.

Excerpt from “Ana”:

“Ana seni sevmenin en güzel yolu, senin verdiğin değerleri yaşamakta gizlidir.”⁴

Translation: “The most beautiful way of loving you, mother, is hidden in living the values you have given.”

This passage eloquently expresses that true love for a mother is not only found in words or gestures but in the way her teachings and values are lived out. It highlights the idea that the deepest form of respect and affection for a mother is to embody the principles she imparts, carrying them forward in one’s life. It is a tribute to the lasting influence of a mother’s wisdom, showing that her love is perpetuated through the actions and choices of her children.

As well as, in English literature, the image of the mother is also portrayed in various impactful and profound ways. The figure of the mother is depicted in a compelling manner in English literature, therefore the word “mother” in the English language has a long and rich etymological history. Its roots trace back to several ancient languages, and its meaning and cultural significance have evolved through time, often appearing in English literature in various forms. Below is the detailed etymology of the word, along with examples from English literature that illustrate its usage. In old English the word “mother” was “moder” (pronounced /'mo:ðer/), which had the same meaning as today — referring to a female parent. This form comes from the Proto-Germanic “mōdēr”, which is the ancestor of words for “mother” in many Germanic languages. The Proto-Germanic root “mōdēr” comes from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root “méh₂tēr” (pronounced /'mæ:t̪er/). The PIE root is also the source of the word “mother” in many Indo-European languages:

Latin: “mater”, from which English derived words like “maternal” and “matriarch”,

Greek: “mētēr” (μήτηρ).

⁴ Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu. “Ana”, Istanbul.1957 p75



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Sanskrit: “mātr̥”.

Old Irish: “mathir”⁵.

Indo-European Origins: The PIE root “méh₂tēr” is believed to represent the concept of “mother” as a source, a nurturer, or a life-giver. This root is shared by many Indo-European languages, which is why the word for mother across various cultures is often strikingly similar in form.

The concept of “mother” has been a significant and enduring theme in English literature. Here are a few key literary examples that show the importance of the word “mother” in different contexts, in famous tragedy William Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” the relationship between Hamlet and his mother, Gertrude, plays a central role. The word “mother” is used to describe the nurturing, yet often conflicted, maternal figure, example: “Good night, mother”,⁶ this shows place of mother in tragedy.

This line, spoken by Hamlet to Gertrude, emphasizes the complicated dynamics between mother and son, with Hamlet’s anger and betrayal at his mother’s remarriage to his uncle.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” can be another light example of our theme. In this short story, the narrator’s relationship with motherhood is central to the plot. As she descends into madness, her identity as a mother becomes entangled with her struggles for autonomy, for example: “I lie here on this great big bed, and I am so glad to be alone... I want to be more than a mother and a wife, but my role has been defined for me”.⁷ Here, the word “mother” reflects not just the biological role but also the societal expectations placed upon her, which contribute to her sense of entrapment.

In both literatures, “mother” is not only a biological figure but also a powerful symbol of love, sacrifice, and survival. Through these literary examples, we see how the word “mother” transcends its etymology to become a central, complex force in both personal and societal contexts. The context “mother” is more than

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, 2008

⁶ William Shakespeare. “Hamlet”, First Folio, 1623. Act 3, Scene 4

⁷Charlotte Perkins Gilman. “The yellow wallpaper”, The New England Magazine. 1892



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just a character — she is a mirror of human emotion, cultural identity, and moral strength. Whether she appears as a nurturing caregiver, a tragic heroine, a symbol of homeland, or a divine force, the figure of the mother continues to inspire, challenge, and move readers. In both Uzbek and English literary traditions, the mother plays a central and irreplaceable role — reminding us of our shared need for love, origin, and connection. As literature evolves, so too does the image of the mother, but her essence as a source of life, meaning, and complexity remains timeless.

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