

NILAY NUR TAŞDEMİR

Eötvös Loránd University Doctoral School of Linguistics,

nilaynur@student.elte.hu

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8822-1217>

Nilay Nur Taşdemir: A Freelisting Analysis of VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD: Empirical Insights from Turkish and Hungarian Cultural Conceptualizations  
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## **A Freelisting Analysis of VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD: Empirical Insights from Turkish and Hungarian Cultural Conceptualizations**

This study examines how Turkish and Hungarian speakers conceptualize VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD in their respective native languages using a freelisting task. The responses from 118 Turkish and 121 Hungarian participants were analyzed for frequency and grouped into conceptual themes. The results show that both groups associate these concepts with universal notions such as belonging and place attachment. Turkish speakers tend to conceptualize VATAN in terms of collective identity, national symbols, and moral duty, whereas Hungarian speakers tend to conceptualize SZÜLŐFÖLD through individual experiences and family ties. The findings confirm that VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD share a common universal core; however, their meanings are shaped by unique patterns.

**Keywords:** cognition; cultural linguistics; cultural conceptualization; cultural categorization; freelisting

### **1. Introduction**

Attachment to land is a fundamental dimension of human experience. People form emotional and cognitive bonds with places tied to their origins, upbringing, and lived histories (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). These cognitive bonds develop through everyday practices and social interaction, thereby extending the meaning of place beyond its material form (Tuan, 1997). Moreover, communities interpret belonging to place through the lens of their cultural values and worldviews (Bartmiński, 2018; Sharifian, 2017a). Wierzbicka's comparative semantic research on homeland concepts such as German HEIMAT and VATERLAND, Polish OJCZYŻNA, and Russian RODINA shows that while the concept of a native land is universal for every culture, the underlying meanings of these terms remain cross-culturally distinct and non-equivalent (Wierzbicka, 1997). Her work highlights the necessity of examining such concepts within their specific cultural and linguistic contexts, as their meanings cannot be fully captured through direct translation or generalized interpretation (Wierzbicka, 1997).

Building on this view, examining additional contexts further clarifies how cultures conceptualize belonging to a land and origin in distinct yet comparable ways. The Hungarian SZÜLŐFÖLD and the Turkish VATAN are culturally rich but understudied homeland concepts. Both refer to a person's place of origin through different lenses. Research links SZÜLŐFÖLD to personal experience, kinship, and locality (Bańcerowski & Bárdosi, 2004; Lakó, 1981; Pátrovics, 2012), while

VATAN is shaped by political discourse, military history, and public narratives (Gündüz & Gündüz, 2020; Taşçıoğlu, 2018).

These cross-cultural differences raise the question of how meaning is constructed cognitively. In Cognitive Linguistics, meaning arises from mental processes that interpret and organize experience (Rosch, 1978; Talmy, 1988). Speakers construct meaning by selecting and structuring what they perceive and remember, making conceptualization central to meaning-making (Lakoff & Johnson, 2006; Langacker, 1987). Conceptualization involves categorization, imagery, and embodied schemas. Although these processes rely on universal cognitive mechanisms, they are not neutral. The ways people categorize the world, the distinctions they consider meaningful, their perspectives, and their habits are shaped by the social, cultural, and political environments in which they live (Palmer, 1996). Cultural experience influences what is valued and significant; it shapes the conceptual structures that construct linguistic meaning (Lakoff & Johnson, 2006; Langacker, 1987; Rosch, 1978; Talmy, 1988). Despite this recognition, much empirical work on conceptualization relies on individualistic Western populations, limiting insight into culturally embedded concepts across linguistic communities (Henrich et al., 2010; Kim & Tjuka, 2024; Wierzbicka, 2023). Furthermore, Sharifian (2017a) argues that, while including more cultures is a positive development, Cognitive Linguistics still lacks a sufficient connection to empirical research on cultural knowledge.

To address these limitations, a framework is needed that accounts for both shared cognitive processes and culturally shaped knowledge. Cultural Linguistics provides such a framework by examining how cultural knowledge is encoded and transmitted through language. It builds on Cognitive Linguistics while incorporating insights from cognitive anthropology and cultural psychology. Within this framework, language is understood as a cultural system shaped by collective memory, shared practices, and historically grounded worldviews (Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b). Concepts such as SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN are treated as culturally mediated conceptual domains, or cultural conceptualizations that arise from recurring cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors (Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b). These domains capture how members of a speech community conceptualize relationships to land, belonging, and identity through patterns transmitted across generations (Wierzbicka, 1997).

A further gap concerns methodology. Although Cultural Linguistics has developed robust theoretical tools for examining cultural cognition, it has rarely employed freelisting. Freelisting is a widely used method in cognitive psychology and anthropology for uncovering the internal structure of conceptual domains (Stausberg, 2021). It elicits spontaneous associations by asking participants to list words or phrases related to a target concept and reveals culturally patterned knowledge drawn on when conceptualizing that domain (Weller & Romney, 1988). Because the method captures both shared meanings and individual

variation, it is well-suited to the study of cultural conceptualizations. Despite this fit, its potential within Cultural Linguistics remains largely unexplored.

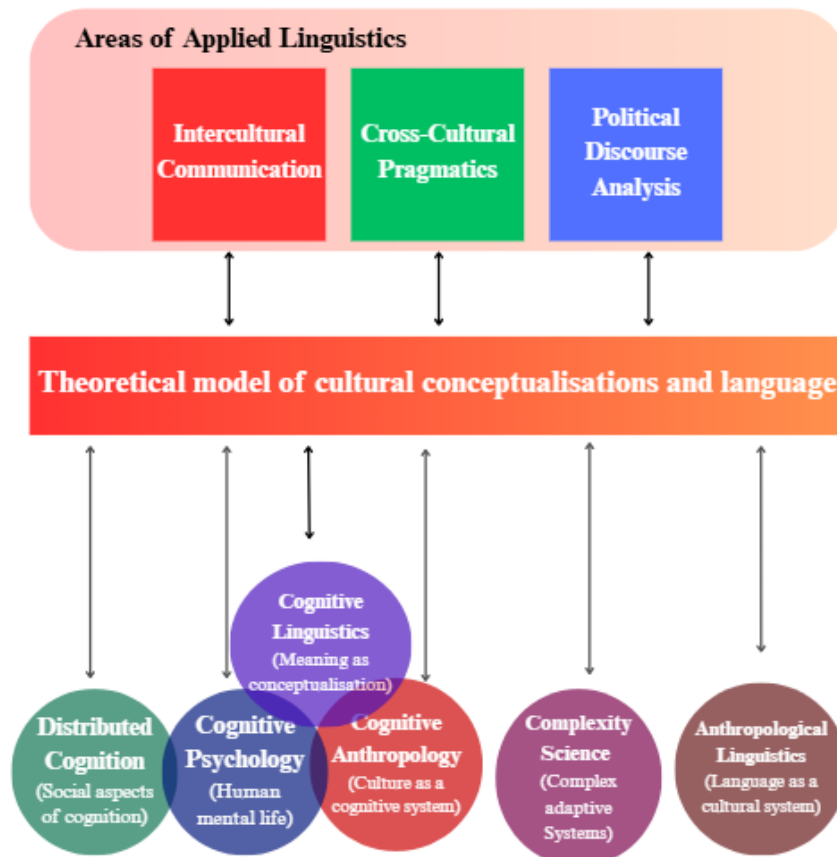
The present study addresses these gaps by investigating how Hungarian and Turkish speakers conceptualize SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN through a freelisting task. By analyzing spontaneous associations, the study identifies both universal foundations of place attachment and culturally specific patterns of expression within each linguistic community. Situated within Cultural Linguistics, the analysis deepens understanding of how cultural cognition shapes key cultural concepts and demonstrates the value of freelisting as a methodological tool in Cultural Linguistics research.

## **2. Foundations of Cultural Linguistics**

Cultural Linguistics builds on core insights from Cognitive Linguistics, which holds that meaning arises from an individual's mental representation of events and relationships (Lakoff & Johnson, 2006; Langacker, 1987; Rosch, 1978; Talmy, 1988). These representations, or conceptualizations, are structured through categories and schemas that organize experience and reduce cognitive load (Rosch, 1975, 1978). In categorization, the brain groups experiences, objects, and places into meaningful classes based on shared features. In schematization, it abstracts across experiences to form generalized mental structures (Talmy, 1988). Together, these mechanisms range from simple perceptual patterns to complex knowledge structures that organize background information and guide meaning. Although these processes are universal, the content of schemas and categories is shaped by the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which individuals exist (Palmer, 1996).

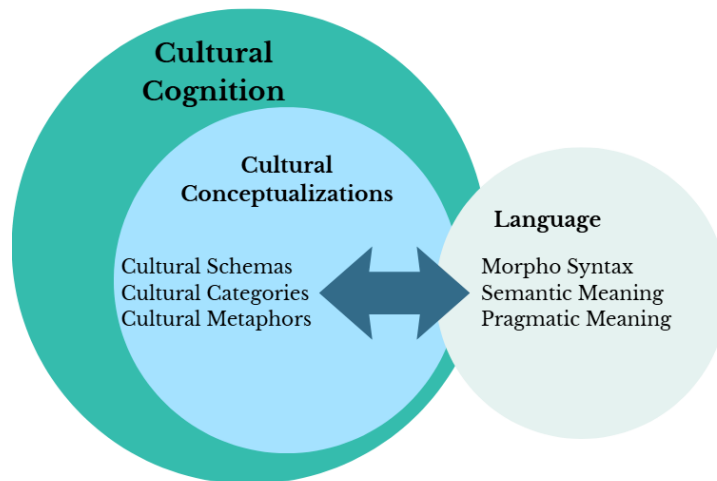
According to Sharifian, current cognitive theories remain insufficiently connected to applied linguistics, especially where cultural knowledge is central. As shown in Figure 1, Cultural Linguistics addresses this gap by treating language as a cultural system and integrating insights from cognitive psychology, cognitive anthropology, and cognitive linguistics (Sharifian, 2011, p. xvii). This transdisciplinary approach explains how cultural knowledge is encoded, transmitted, and negotiated in everyday language use, thereby allowing Cultural Linguistics to extend analytical tools from across the cognitive sciences (Sharifian, 2017a).

Figure 1. Theoretical model of cultural conceptualizations and language (Sharifian, 2011, p. xvii).



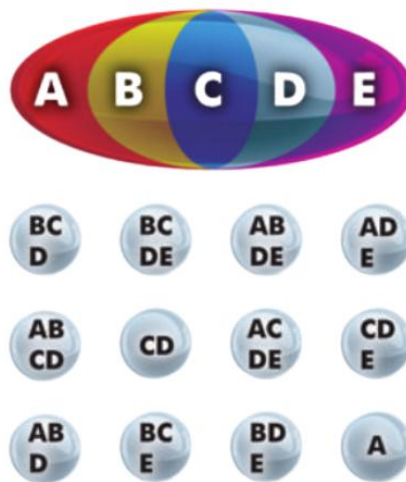
A core premise of Cultural Linguistics is that language carries cultural norms, values, and shared meanings through schemas, categories, and metaphors. Shared meanings emerge from repeated interaction within a community and establish common expectations and tendencies. The relationship between culture and language is formalized in the cultural cognition model shown in Figure 2. In this model, cultural conceptualizations develop through repeated social interaction and are sustained across generations. Cultural knowledge, however, is unevenly distributed and varies in cohesion across communities and social scales (Sharifian, 2017b).

**Figure 2.** The theoretical and analytical frameworks of Cultural Linguistics (Sharifian, 2017a, p. 85)



Cultural conceptualizations are maintained through partial overlaps among individuals. No individual holds all elements of cultural conceptualization. As shown in Figure 3, each unit represents a member’s mind, and the letters A, B, C, D, and E represent schema elements. These elements are distributed unevenly due to demographic differences, social roles, and interaction patterns (Sharifian, 2017a).

**Figure 3.** A distributed model of cultural schemas (Sharifian, 2011, p. 6).



Cultural categories in Cultural Linguistics examine how members of a speech community experience concepts and organize them into meaningful groupings. Categorization is universal (Rosch, 1978), but shared cultural experience shapes category content and boundaries. Cultural categories, therefore, reflect community-level patterns of meaning that arise from repeated social interaction. This knowledge clusters change as members enter, leave, or shift positions within the group (Sharifian, 2017b).

Everyday experience shapes cultural categories and schemas; therefore, cultural conceptualizations are neither static nor purely individual. They may be reconceptualized during increased contact between speech communities or during major social change. In Cultural Linguistics, cultural reconceptualization refers to the adaptation or transformation of cultural conceptualizations in response to such change (Sharifian, 2017b).

Because conceptualization is dynamic, cultural categories are not stored identically across minds; however, overlapping experiences within a community lead to common understandings, resulting in cultural conceptualizations. Consequently, the meaning of cultural concepts cannot be determined by individual speakers or isolated forms alone. It must be inferred from recurring patterns across community members (Sharifian, 2017b; Wierzbicka, 1997). Cultural Linguistics, therefore, provides the analytical tools needed to examine how culturally grounded categories are formed, shared, and negotiated within a community and offers an appropriate framework for this study's aims.

### **3. Cultural Conceptualizations of SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN**

Within a Cultural Linguistics framework, SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN are culturally mediated conceptual domains. They arise from universal semantic structures and develop into culturally specific patterns of experience. Shaped by collective memory, social practices, and symbolic frameworks for interpreting place, both concepts represent complex cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2017b; Wierzbicka, 1997)

In Hungarian, SZÜLŐFÖLD is a morphologically transparent compound whose structure is readily accessible to speakers. It derives from the root *szül-*, cognate with *szülni*, “to give birth,” and *szülő*, “parent.” The root carries meanings of birth and origin, so related forms often express ancestry, kinship, and lineage. For example, *szülők* means “parents” and *születés* means “birth.” The second element, *föld*, refers to land or soil as the physical environment. Drawing on schemas that link birth, origin, and land, the concept partly aligns with other European expressions based on parenthood or birth, such as Spanish TIERRA NATAL, Swedish FOSTERLAND, and Russian RODINA (Pátrovics, 2012). SZÜLŐFÖLD also operates as a two-layered concept grounded in local experience and national identity (Lakó, 1981). Bańczerowski and Bárdosi (2004) show that its primary sense refers to one’s concrete place of birth, as in: “*Az a szülőföld, ahol köszönnek az embernek az utcán: ‘Szervusz’*” (“The native land is where people greet you on the street with ‘Hello’”; p. 8). The authors further identify a broader sense in which SZÜLŐFÖLD denotes the homeland as a whole country and partly overlaps with HAZA. SZÜLŐFÖLD emphasizes birth and origin, whereas HAZA functions more explicitly as a national and political concept denoting the country as a collective entity (Bańczerowski & Bárdosi, 2004, p. 2). This broader sense appears in expressions such as “*Messze idegenbe szakadt szülőföldjétől*” (“He was torn far

away into foreign lands from his native country"; Bańczerowski & Bárdosi, 2004, p. 8) and Gyulai Pál's line "*Szülőföldem, hazám dicső Magyarország*" ("My native land, my homeland, glorious Hungary"; author's translation, Gyulai, as cited in Bańczerowski & Bárdosi, 2004, p. 8). SZÜLŐFÖLD is also common in contexts of leaving one's place of origin. Lakó (1981) notes that it can strongly influence a person's life, but not deterministically, since many people leave and succeed elsewhere.

The Turkish VATAN, of Arabic origin, is morphologically opaque and follows a different etymological and conceptual path. Influenced by Arabic and Persian intellectual traditions, VATAN is commonly framed through metaphors of sacred soil and communal responsibility. For centuries, it referred to one's land of birth, often associated with the paternal locality, similar to SZÜLŐFÖLD. However, during Turkish Republican nation-building, VATAN underwent major semantic expansion and reconceptualization. This reconceptualization during the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to various compound expressions, such as *vatandaş* (citizen/compatriot), *vatandaşlık* (citizenship), *vatan borcu* (duty to the homeland, military service), *vatansever / vatanperver* (patriot), and *vatan haini* (traitor to the homeland). Political discourse, military narratives, and religious symbolism framed VATAN as a sacred land whose protection is a moral duty (Taşçıođlu, 2018). Influenced by Arabic and Persian intellectual traditions, studies across Middle Eastern and Central Asian contexts show that VATAN is frequently conceptualized as a domain of devotion and commonly framed through metaphors of sacred soil and communal responsibility (Gündüz & Gündüz, 2020; Taşçıođlu, 2018; Zagidulina et al., 2016; Zoyirovna, 2025).

The cognitive representation of homeland concepts has been researched through various approaches. Egan and Nugent (1983) examined how adolescents in the United States and Ireland cognitively and affectively represent the homeland by analyzing students' essays. The study showed that American adolescents increasingly described the homeland in political terms such as government, liberty, and loyalty. In contrast, Irish adolescents framed it in psychological and cultural terms, including the rural landscape, friendliness, language, and national character. Bartmiński (1993, as cited in Bartmiński, 2018) compared homeland concepts across 12 European languages using a systematic ethnolinguistic approach that combines dictionary definitions, etymology, proverbs, questionnaires, and corpus data to reconstruct the concept's cognitive definition. The study demonstrated that each culture adapts the concept to its own needs; however, aspects such as protecting the common good, the state, home, and family are common to both Eastern and Western European conceptualizations. Recent studies have also applied empirical approaches to homeland concepts across an increasingly diverse range of language communities and contexts. Rudenka (2024) examined the cognitive representations of the Belarusian concepts RADZIMA, AJČYNA, and BAC'KAŪŠČYNA by combining

historical sources and survey data to trace both semantic changes and shifts in the concepts' frequency and stylistic usage. Applying a similar methodology, Kacprzak (2024) analyzed the Danish concepts HJEMLAND and FÆDRELAND and found that the Danish conceptualization is closely linked to everyday life, safety, democracy, and freedom. Together, previous research confirms that homeland concepts are productive sites for investigating both universal cognitive processes and culturally specific knowledge structures. A recurring finding in this literature is that dictionary definitions of homeland terms are insufficient to capture the full range of their cultural salience. Participant-centered empirical methods are therefore necessary to access the cognitive and affective structures that speakers bring to bear when using these terms (Bartmiński, 2018; Kacprzak, 2024; Rudenka, 2024; Wierzbicka, 1997).

Moreover, despite the complexity of homeland concepts, Wierzbicka (1997) argues that homeland concepts can be analyzed and compared in terms of universal semantic elements that structure attachment to land across cultures. These include PLACE, COUNTRY, BELONGING, GOOD FEELING, UNIQUENESS, SHAREDNESS, RECIPROCITY, and CONTINUITY. Cultural distinctiveness emerges from the configuration and emphasis of these elements. VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD are not equivalents, but they are comparable as culturally meaningful forms of place attachment (Sharifian, 2017a). Both draw on shared experiential foundations such as birth in a place, emotional ties to land, and positioning within a social world (Wierzbicka, 1997).

This study identifies universal and culture-specific elements associated with SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN among Hungarian and Turkish-speaking participants. It uses freelisting within a Cultural Linguistics framework to answer the following question: What are the categorical elements of VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD as reported by Turkish and Hungarian participants?

Cultural Linguistics has rarely applied freelisting to explore cultural categorizations, despite its suitability for revealing culturally patterned conceptual structures. Moreover, no previous study has examined VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD with this method. By identifying universal and culture-specific elements that structure these concepts, the study strengthens the empirical base of Cognitive and Cultural Linguistics. It offers a comparative account of how Hungarian and Turkish speakers conceptualize SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN.

#### **4. Methodology**

Within Cultural Linguistics, VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD are treated as cultural conceptualizations shaped by their historical, social, and linguistic contexts. Since cultural knowledge is distributed across members of a community, no single speaker possesses the complete structure of a cultural category. Conceptualizations must therefore be inferred from recurring patterns shared across individuals (Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b). To examine such shared conceptual

structures, cognitive studies have used various empirical methods, including metaphor elicitation tasks (e.g., Benczes & Ságvári, 2018a, 2018b; Musolff, 2021), prototypicality judgments (e.g., Murray et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2007), picture-based storytelling (Mäkinen et al., 2020), and similarity-judgment experiments (e.g., Masuda et al., 2017; Zhang, 2025).

The present study employed freelisting, a method widely used in anthropology and cognitive science to examine semantic domains and cultural knowledge (Quinlan, 2017). From a psycholinguistic perspective, freelisting reveals which elements speakers consider relevant to a conceptual domain and how categories are structured within a community (Bernard, 2006). In freelisting, participants list the words or ideas they associate with a concept, making the task simple, quick, and suitable for online data collection (Placek et al., 2023). The method requires minimal instruction and avoids rigid response structures while providing data on conceptual salience and semantic organization. By examining which items appear most frequently in participants' lists, researchers can identify culturally salient meanings, shared cognitive patterns, and individual variation more naturally than through highly structured questionnaires (Bernard, 2006; Stausberg, 2021).

#### 4.1 Participants

This study employed freelisting to investigate culturally salient associations with the concepts of SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN among native speakers of Hungarian and Turkish. Participants were recruited through institutional and professional networks in their respective countries. The Turkish group (n = 118) consisted primarily of teachers employed by the National Ministry of Education in Ankara and Istanbul. The Hungarian group (n = 121) comprised public high school teachers and university faculty from various disciplines in Budapest.

Inclusion criteria required that all participants be born and raised in their respective countries by native-born parents and currently reside there. Individuals who had spent more than six consecutive months abroad or who used a language other than their mother tongue were excluded. The two groups were comparable in size and demographics. Demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographics

	<b>n</b>	<b>Gender Distribution (%)</b>	<b>Age (Min- Max)</b>	<b>Age (M, SD)</b>
<b>HU</b>	121	Male 43% Female 52%	20–50	32.39, 7.90
<b>TR</b>	118	Male 44% Female 50%	18–48	33.52, 8.56

Note. HU = Hungarian participants; TR = Turkish participants. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

## 4.2 Procedure

Data was collected over three months via Qualtrics, with all materials administered in participants' native language. The participants first completed a brief demographic questionnaire including age, gender, cultural background, and language use. These variables were collected to ensure comparability between the two groups.

Following the demographic section, participants completed the freelisting task. They were instructed to write at least ten words or expressions in response to the prompt: "What words or phrases do you associate with SZÜLŐFÖLD | VATAN?" Examples using unrelated concepts were provided to illustrate the format. Participants were informed that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that they were free to list any associations that came to mind.

## 4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative techniques and proceeded in three stages: standardization, frequency analysis, and thematic categorization. All freelisting responses were compiled and alphabetized in Microsoft Excel to identify repetitions, word roots, and orthographic inconsistencies. To ensure that the analysis reflected conceptual rather than purely linguistic variation, morphological variants were grouped under a single lemma, close synonyms were unified, and spelling variants were removed. Standardization was performed independently by two native-language coders for each dataset. For Turkish, two Turkish PhD students in linguistics completed the coding; for Hungarian, two Hungarian language and literature teachers performed the same procedure. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until full agreement was reached.

Following standardization, the productivity of the freelisting task was assessed by calculating the total number of words, the mean number of words per participant, and the number of distinct words for each group.

A frequency analysis was then conducted to identify the most frequently listed associations. The standardization process substantially reduced the raw word count to a final set of distinct items and their frequencies, which served as the basis for the subsequent analysis (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Freelisting Task Productivity by Group

	<b>Group (n)</b>	<b>Total Associations</b>	<b>Mean per participant</b>	<b>Standardized Tokens</b>	<b>Distinct terms</b>
<b>SZÜLŐFÖLD</b>	HU - 121	643	531	389	75
<b>VATAN</b>	TR - 118	741	6.28	365	52

Note: HU = Hungarian participants; TR = Turkish participants. Distinct terms = number of unique items remaining after standardization.

The final stage of the methodology involved a qualitative analysis of the freelisting data, in which all responses were systematically grouped into broader themes based on their conceptual and semantic proximity. This thematic categorization was conducted to capture the full range of associations to provide a structured interpretation of the cultural domain represented in the data.

To ensure reliability and consistency in both translation and interpretation, the consensus-driven analysis involved collaboratively translating all responses into English and then developing thematic categories through discussion among four independent coders from Türkiye and Hungary. The identified themes emerged inductively from the data rather than being predefined (Sharifian, 2017b). Interpreting single-word associations for abstract concepts such as VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD required close attention to linguistic and cultural distinctions. The goal of this phase was to move beyond frequency counts and identify the cultural patterns and underlying schemas associated with each concept.

## 5. Findings

The freelisting data revealed partially overlapping cultural conceptualizations of VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD. Hungarian participants ( $n = 121$ ) generated 643 associations to SZÜLŐFÖLD, producing 75 distinct terms ( $M = 5.31$ ). Turkish participants ( $n = 118$ ) produced 741 associations to VATAN, yielding 52 distinct terms ( $M = 6.28$ ). This difference indicates a higher lexical consensus among Turkish respondents. The most frequently mentioned associations for each group are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Top 10 Associations by Group

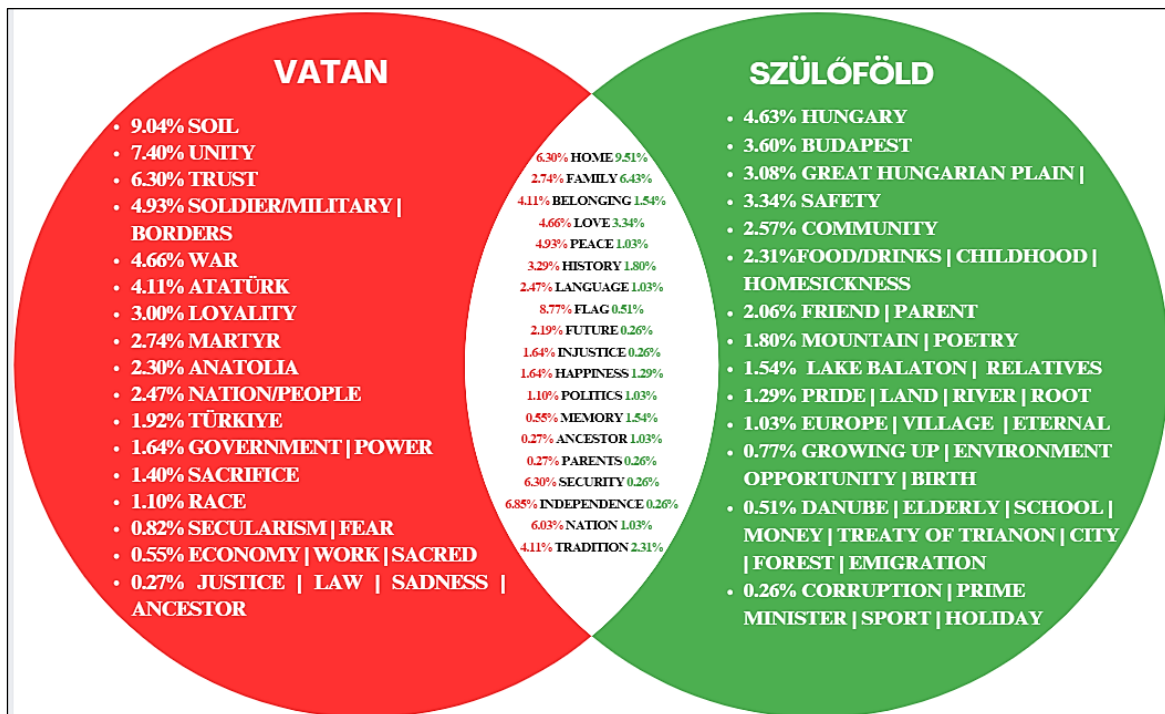
VATAN		Freq.	(%)	SZÜLŐFÖLD		Freq.	(%)
1	SOIL	33	9.04%	HOME	37	9.51%	
2	FLAG	32	8.77%	FAMILY	25	6.43%	
3	UNITY	27	7.40%	HUNGARY	18	4.63%	
4	INDEPENDENCE	25	6.85%	BUDAPEST	14	3.60%	
5	TRUST   HOME	23	6.30%	SAFETY   LOVE	13	3.34%	
6	NATION	22	6.03%	THE GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN	12	3.08%	

7	PEACE   SOLDIERS   BORDERS	18	4.93%	COMMUNITY	10	2.31%
8	LOVE   WAR	17	4.66%	FOOD/DRINKS   CHILDHOOD   TRADITION	9	2.31%
9	TRADITION   ATATÜRK   BELONGING	15	4.11%	LANGUAGE   FRIENDS   PARENTS	8	2.06%
10	STRUGGLE	14	3.29%	HISTORY	7	1.80%

Note. Percentages indicate the proportion of all standardized associations within each dataset. Frequencies reflect raw mention counts. Items at the same rank are tied.

Across both groups, only two associations appeared among the most frequent responses: HOME (HU: 9.51%; TR: 6.30%) and LOVE (HU: 3.34%; TR: 4.66%). Beyond these, Hungarian participants more often evoked concrete places and personal environments such as HUNGARY, BUDAPEST, SECURITY, and COMMUNITY. Turkish participants emphasized national symbols, territorial markers, and collective ideals, with SOIL, BORDERS, FLAG, UNITY, INDEPENDENCE, and TRUST most salient. These overlaps and differences are illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Overlapping and Distinct Associations of VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD



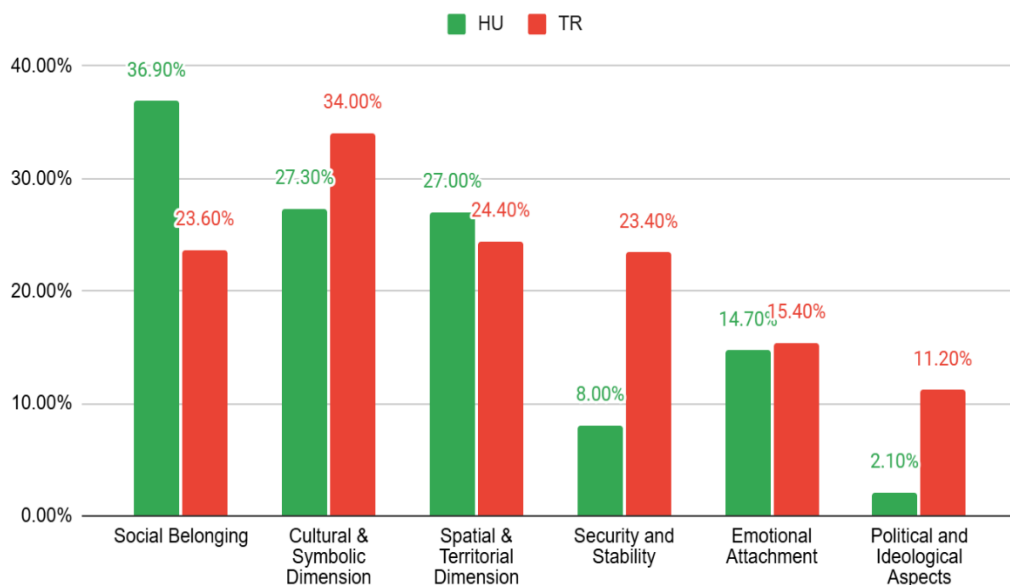
Hungarian responses framed SZÜLŐFÖLD through interpersonal ties, familiar places, and biographical experience. Associations such as FAMILY, COMMUNITY, FRIENDS, and PARENTS point to close social networks. Cultural meanings were grounded in everyday life, reflected in FOOD/DRINKS, TRADITION, LANGUAGE, POETRY, and MEMORY. Spatial associations referred to concrete locations and landscapes, including HUNGARY, BUDAPEST, THE GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN, MOUNTAIN, LAKE BALATON, DANUBE, and RIVER, alongside emotional terms such as SAFETY, CHILDHOOD, HOMESICKNESS, PRIDE, and HAPPINESS.

The Turkish dataset shows a different structure. The most salient associations indicate that VATAN is conceptualized through national identity, territorial security, and collective ideals. Spatial references such as BORDERS, ANATOLIA, and TÜRKIYE place the concept within a bounded political space. Cultural and heritage elements appear in TRADITION, HISTORY, and LANGUAGE. Emotional associations carry a moral tone, including LOYALTY, SACRIFICE, HAPPINESS, and SADNESS. Security-related terms such as SOLDIER/MILITARY, WAR, PEACE, and MARTYR emphasize collective defense.

Overall, elements tied to collective struggle, national ideology, and territorial sovereignty are more pronounced in the Turkish data. Elements grounded in personal biography, everyday life, and familiar environments are more characteristic of the Hungarian responses.

All responses were grouped into six thematic clusters: Social Belonging; Cultural and Symbolic Meanings; Spatial and Territorial Dimensions; Security and Stability; Emotional Attachment; and Political and Ideological Aspects. The distribution across clusters differs between groups (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Frequency of Thematic Clusters



Hungarian participants assigned most associations to Social Belonging (36.9%), followed by Cultural and Symbolic Meanings (27.3%) and Spatial and Territorial Dimensions (27.0%). Emotional Attachment, Security and Stability, and Political and Ideological Aspects received little emphasis.

Turkish participants prioritized Cultural and Symbolic Meanings (34.0%) and Security and Stability (23.4%), with notable attention to Political and Ideological Aspects (11.2%). Social Belonging, Spatial and Territorial Dimensions, and Emotional Attachment received less emphasis.

Beyond the quantitative patterns, the qualitative content of clusters shows cross-cultural differences. In social belonging, Hungarian responses emphasize personal relationships, whereas Turkish responses emphasize broader collective identity. Hungarians often list FAMILY, COMMUNITY, FRIENDS, and PARENTS; Turkish participants list NATION, PEOPLE, and TOGETHERNESS.

In cultural and symbolic terms, Hungarians focus on everyday practices, whereas Turks emphasize national symbols. Hungarian items include FOOD AND DRINKS, LANGUAGE, POETRY, IDENTITY, HISTORY, and TRADITIONS. Turkish items include FLAG, TRADITION, HISTORY, ATATÜRK, THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, and RELIGION.

In the spatial and territorial dimensions, Hungarians refer to familiar landscapes, whereas Turks refer to political territory. Hungarian responses include HUNGARY, BUDAPEST, THE GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN, MOUNTAINS, LAKE BALATON, and TISZA RIVER. Turkish responses include BORDERS, ANATOLIA, and TÜRKIYE.

In emotional attachment, Hungarians express personal and nostalgic feelings, while Turks express duty-oriented and moral emotions. Hungarian items include SAFETY, CHILDHOOD, HOMESICKNESS, MEMORY, and PRIDE. Turkish items include SECURITY, LOYALTY, DEVOTION, SACRIFICE, HAPPINESS, FEAR, and SADNESS.

For security and stability, Hungarians prioritize individual and socio-economic security, whereas Turks emphasize national defense. Hungarian items include OPPORTUNITY, MONEY, EMIGRATION, SCHOOL, and FUTURE. Turkish items include INDEPENDENCE, TRUST, SOLDIERS, WAR, MARTYRS, and PEACE.

In political and ideological terms, Turkish participants exhibit greater engagement, whereas Hungarian participants make fewer political references. Turkish responses include FREEDOM OF SPEECH, MEDIA, SECULARISM, LAW, DEMOCRACY, and JUSTICE. Hungarian responses include GOVERNMENT, CORRUPTION, and PRIME MINISTER.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study support a central premise of Cultural Linguistics that conceptualisation is shaped by the cultural and historical contexts of a speech community (Sharifian, 2017a).

The findings show that although both groups share a universal semantic core, the emphasis placed on the concepts differs. Both SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN contain

the universal elements identified by Wierzbicka (1997), such as PLACE, COUNTRY, BELONGING, GOOD FEELING, UNIQUENESS, SHAREDNESS, RECIPROCITY, and CONTINUITY. The presence of HOME and LOVE among the most frequent associations in both datasets further supports the claim that these universal components form a common foundation.

Beyond this shared core, the broader patterns differ. The Turkish data show that VATAN activates collective, political, and martial schemas. Frequent associations such as BORDERS, SOLDIER or MILITARY, WAR, and MARTYR indicate a cultural model in which the homeland is constructed as a territory that requires protection and sacrifice. This pattern reflects the development of cultural schemas through shared historical experience and their reinforcement through institutional discourse such as education, media, and national narratives (Sharifian, 2017a). The results closely align with earlier empirical research on Turkish conceptualizations of VATAN (Gündüz & Gündüz, 2020; Taşçıoğlu, 2018) and are partially consistent with findings on Tatar (Zagidulina et al., 2016) and Uzbek (Zoyirovna, 2025) conceptualizations, where the concept is similarly associated with devotion, duty, and communal responsibility.

The legacy of the War of Independence, the symbolic role of Atatürk, and the emphasis on territorial integrity contribute to a conceptualization in which VATAN is closely linked to collective struggle, national unity, and statehood. The prominence of LOYALTY, TRUST, and SACRIFICE suggests that VATAN functions as a moral commitment rooted in a collectivist orientation that prioritizes the nation as a supra-individual entity (Gündüz & Gündüz, 2020). The high degree of lexical consensus in the Turkish dataset reinforces this interpretation. Participants produced a relatively concentrated set of overlapping associations, suggesting that the relevant cultural schema is widely shared and socially reinforced. Cultural Linguistics proposes that cultural knowledge is distributed across members of a speech community but can become highly cohesive when repeatedly activated through public discourse (Sharifian, 2017b). The clustering observed in the VATAN data supports this view, as consistent exposure to national narratives appears to stabilize shared conceptual elements.

Cultural conceptualizations can vary in the degree to which they are shared among members of a speech community (Sharifian, 2017a). The lower lexical consensus in the Hungarian dataset indicates that SZÜLŐFÖLD is represented through more individualized mental schemas. Rather than activating a uniform semantic network tied to state-centered narratives, the concept draws primarily on memory and personal experience. This is reflected in the greater presence of idiosyncratic lexical items in the Hungarian dataset, suggesting that the concept is less semantically fixed and more abstract than VATAN, allowing broader associative flexibility (Bernard, 2006).

Moreover, the morphological transparency of SZÜLŐFÖLD appears to facilitate access to schemas grounded in personal experience of family, land, and locality. Associations such as CHILDHOOD, PARENTS, VILLAGE, FRIEND, MEMORY, HOMESICKNESS, and references to specific landscapes such as THE GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN, LAKE BALATON, and DANUBE suggest a conceptualization of SZÜLŐFÖLD as a place of origin with familiar surroundings.

Taken together, the freelisting patterns indicate that VATAN is categorized as a national-political entity tied to collective ideals. In contrast, SZÜLŐFÖLD is categorized as a personal place associated with family, childhood, and familiar landscapes. Cultural conceptualizations are dynamic, historically situated, and distributed across members of a speech community. The contrast shows how two terms that may be translated as "homeland" encode distinct cultural models. These findings underline the importance of examining culturally grounded concepts within their linguistic and historical contexts, as emphasized by Wierzbicka (1997) and Sharifian (2017a, 2017b).

## **7. Conclusions**

This study examined how Hungarian and Turkish speakers conceptualize SZÜLŐFÖLD and VATAN by combining the strengths of free listing with the framework of Cultural Linguistics. The results revealed systematic differences in internal organization, salience patterns, and lexical consensus across the two conceptual domains, providing empirical support for cultural conceptualizations.

The Turkish data indicate a cohesive, widely shared cultural model reflected in concentrated, overlapping associations. The clustering of items suggests that VATAN occupies a culturally central and socially reinforced domain shaped by historical narratives and collective discourse practices (Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b). In contrast, the Hungarian data display greater lexical dispersion and experiential diversity. The prominence of childhood, kinship, memory, and landscape associations indicates that SZÜLŐFÖLD is conceptualized primarily through personal biography. This variability is consistent with the claim that cultural conceptualizations vary in the extent to which they are shared within a speech community (Sharifian, 2017a, 2017b).

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of integrating free listing with Cultural Linguistics. Free listing provides a structured map of salience and consensus, while Cultural Linguistics offers an interpretive framework for how linguistic structure and collective or individual orientations shape conceptual domains. The findings show that VATAN and SZÜLŐFÖLD, despite superficial translational equivalence, belong to different cultural domains and reflect distinct ways of construing homeland (Wierzbicka, 1997, 2023).

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. As Ouyang (2017) argues, individual and community-shared homelands operate at multiple levels, including the family, local community, and nation, and their meanings vary

across social groups within the same culture. This layered nature means that any single study captures only part of the range of possible conceptualizations. In the present case, this limitation is reinforced by the relatively homogeneous sample, since all participants were highly educated bachelor graduates. Although Cultural Linguistics maintains that cultural knowledge is distributed across a speech community, patterns of salience and consensus may vary by educational background and social position. The observed overlap in associations, particularly in the Turkish dataset, may therefore also reflect similar educational experience and exposure to institutional discourse. The findings do not capture the full complexity of SZÜLÖFÖLD and VATAN across demographic groups.

Methodological constraints further limit interpretation. While free listing is effective in identifying salience and degrees of lexical consensus, it provides limited insight into the reasoning behind participants' responses. When applied to abstract or emotionally complex concepts, associations may be variable, condensed, or underspecified (Placek et al, 2023; Stausberg, 2021). Cross-cultural research also raises issues of translation and semantic equivalence that may affect the preservation of cultural nuances (Wierzbicka, 2023). Taken together, these conceptual, demographic, and methodological factors indicate that the results should be interpreted as structured tendencies within a particular sample rather than as exhaustive representations of national conceptual systems.

These limitations create directions for future research. Extending the framework to related lexical items in Turkish and Hungarian would allow more precise mapping of the homeland domain. In Hungarian, HAZA often foregrounds the political nation or state, similar to VATAN, whereas SZÜLÖHAZA emphasizes ancestral or inherited belonging. In Turkish, MEMLEKET typically refers to one's hometown or place of origin, while GURBET denotes being away from one's homeland and conveys longing and displacement. Investigating these concepts would clarify how different lexical choices activate distinct cultural schemas within the broader field of homeland.

Future studies should also examine variation within cultures by including participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, rural and urban settings, and political orientations. Such comparisons would allow a closer assessment of how cultural knowledge intersects with social experience. Methodologically, combining free listing with complementary qualitative approaches, such as metaphor analysis, narrative elicitation, or in-depth interviews, could yield richer insights into the experiential dimensions of abstract concepts. Finally, longitudinal research could examine how conceptualizations evolve in response to political change, migration, or generational shifts, thereby addressing the dynamic, historically situated nature of cultural meaning.

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