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Metaphorical Representation of the Ambivalent Emotion Concept BENTEHA: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Пропонована стаття присвячена встановленню крос-культурної специфіки українського емоційного концепту (ЕК) БЕНТЕГА шляхом зіставлення його метафоричного профілю з профілями близьких до нього за змістом німецьких ЕК ANGST і SENNSUCHT. Зіставний аспект дослідження визначила «подвійна» природа ЕК БЕНТЕГА, оскільки він являє собою складний і дифузний феномен, що охоплює низку негативних і позитивних емоційних переживань (метафізичний страх, підсвідома тривога, зніяковіння, хвилювання, інтерес, збудження (сексуальний потяг), захопленість, любовний запал). Виявлено, що своїм «гірким» смисловим ракурсом БЕНТЕГА демонструє подібність до специфічного німецького ЕК ANGST, який виражає метафізичний страх (моторошність), тривогу та смутне передчуття, проте «солодкий» ракурс цього концепту уподібнює його до специфічного німецького ЕК SENNSUCHT, бо останній репрезентує «гірко-солодку» емоцію, у якій «солодкі» бентежні жадання та мрії тісно сплетені з їхньою «гіркою» перспективою нереалізації або навіть утопії.

Метафоричні профілі ЕК БЕНТЕГА, ANGST і SENNSUCHT, які змодельовані на основі аналізу кількісних даних (корпуси ГРАК-19 і DWDS-Kernkorpus 21) вихідних доменів (ВД) 14 концептуальних метафор, продемонстрували помітну різницю цих профілів у зіставлюваних ЕК за критерієм релевантності ВД. Нечисленні неповні збіги ґрунтуються на фрагментарній подібності БЕНТЕГА, з одного боку, з ANGST, а з другого боку, з SENNSUCHT. Установлено, що БЕНТЕГА значною мірою метафоризується в українській культурі то як тягар (ВД А BURDEN 'тягар'), то як солодощі (ВД FOOD 'їжа'), що чітко демонструє його амбівалентність. Проте найбільшу релевантність у цьому концепті виявляє ВД А BURDEN, що свідчить про домінування в його змісті негативних смислів. Уявлення про емоцію *бентега* як щось, чого важко позбутися, зумовило негативне сприйняття в українській культурі ЕК БЕНТЕГА в цілому. До того ж майже всі ВД останнього представлені метафорами, які концептуалізують тривогу й страх. На відміну від ЕК БЕНТЕГА, амбівалентний ЕК SENNSUCHT є більш позитивним, що ґрунтується передусім або на відсутності метафоризації виразно негативних ВД, або на їхньому низькому показнику (напр., AN OPPONENT/ENEMY 'суперник/ворог' або А BURDEN). Верифікація результатів щодо метафоричної репрезентації ЕК БЕНТЕГА, ANGST і SENNSUCHT на основі встановлення показників валентності ВД дала змогу підтвердити припущення, що SENNSUCHT є позитивнішим за БЕНТЕГА. У такий спосіб підтверджено також



більший позитив БЕНТЕГА порівняно з ANGST, оскільки останній демонструє майже стовідсоткову негативну валентність через домінування в його змісті підсвідомої тривоги та метафізичного страху.

Ключові слова: бентега, амбівалентність, емоційний концепт, концептуальна метафора, метафоричний профіль, мовний корпус, українська мова, англійська мова, німецька мова.

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Introduction

In the field of cognitive linguistics, there emerged the notion of the “emotion concept” (EC) [Kövecses, 1990; Wierzbicka, 1999] as a certain alternative to the basic emotion theory in psychology at end of the last century. The methodological alternative of these cognitive constructs to the search for universal—basic—emotions [Ekman, 1992] lies in the fact that in cognitive linguistics and other culture-oriented scholarly fields, ECs are regarded primarily as cultural [Underhill, 2015] or ethnopsychological [Ogarkova, 2013] concepts. The methodological grounds that facilitate the study of the cultural markedness of ECs on the basis of linguistic data is the spread of constructivist ideas, in particular the view that the perception and linguistic expression of emotions, including basic ones, differ in certain ways among members of different cultures, since culture affects the ways in which languages are used as a vehicle to express emotion [Doyle et al., 2021; Robinson, Altarriba, 2015]. This view is consistent with the conclusion that the linguistic designations of ECs cannot be used as culture-free analytical tools in analyses of any disciplinary orientation [Ogarkova, 2013, p. 47]. This applies to a particular extent to specific ECs, which have recently been the focus of multifaceted analysis by psychologists, anthropologists, and linguists. The relevance of studies devoted to specific EC is evidently preconditioned by the fact that their research can reveal new data on the cognitive and verbal conceptualisation and categorisation of human emotions. Moreover, the analysis of ethnically and linguoculturally marked ECs makes it possible to identify specific meanings that point to the distinctive features of the psychotype of a particular culture.

In Ukraine, for quite a long time, insufficient attention was paid to the study of emotions in language and culture. It was only from the second decade of the current century that this issue gained popularity among Ukrainian researchers [Fabian, 2023; Puhach, 2024; Zahnitko, Krasnobayeva-Chorna, 2020]. For the most part, studies addressing various aspects of this problem have been carried out within the framework of structural and semantic [Nikolaienko, 2021] or anthropocentric approaches [Girina, 2024; Mizin et al., 2019; Rohach, Lypych, 2024; Zahnitko, Krasnobayeva-Chorna, 2022]. It is noteworthy that within the latter tradition, two main approaches can be distinguished—linguocultural and linguoconceptological—which have largely emerged from the ideas of cognitive linguistics by adapting certain borrowed notions (e.g. the “concept” has been transformed into the “linguocultural concept”). Unlike linguocultural or linguoconceptological studies, the few works currently available that address the analysis of emotions (and the corresponding ECs) are based on the original “Western” variant of cognitive linguistics, where both the interpretation of ECs and the understanding of the nature of the metaphorical and metonymic conceptualisation of the emotions they represent rely on the ideas of the “pioneers” of this linguistic discipline, foremost among them M. Johnson, Z. Kövecses, G. Lakoff, and A. Wierzbicka [Borysov, 2005; Pinich, Morozova, 2024; Panasenکو et al., 2023].

Against the background of recent trends showing the growing interest of Ukrainian linguists in the problem of expressing emotions in language and culture, there is an almost total absence of studies devoted to the research of those ECs that represent specifically Ukrainian emotions. As a result, a situation arises in which not only ordinary bearers of Ukrainian culture, but also psychologists, anthropologists, and linguists, are unable to clearly identify the emotions that are unique to Ukrainians. There is not even a basic list of specifically Ukrainian emotions. Paradoxically, these emotions exist in Ukrainian culture, yet they are largely ignored by Ukrainians themselves.

This also applies to researchers of emotions, who tend to overlook this issue. A striking example of such neglect is the emotion currently present in the Ukrainian-speaking environment, denoted by the lexeme *benteha*.

The relevance of this emotion is primarily due to the spread within the Ukrainian community of the expression *nepozbuvna benteha* ('persistent anxiety'), coined by O. Korol, the translator of J. Fowles' novel *The Magus* [Fowles, 2022]. The obscurity of this expression for the broader Ukrainian community has sparked a heated debate regarding the quality of the translation and the use of uncommon linguistic expressions in translation practice. The discussion grew so intense that the expression *nepozbuvna benteha* became an internet meme, sparking debate over how to translate literary works in a way that is both accessible to modern readers and faithful to the author's original style [Kovalchuk, 2017].

The controversies over this expression have focused attention on the specificity of the emotion *benteha* itself. Its primary significance lies in the Ukrainian-speaking context, because whereas people in other cultures may feel embarrassment, nervousness, restlessness, or anxiety, for Ukrainians it is pervasive—*benteha*. [SlovOpys, 2023]. Therefore, this emotion is part of the restless Ukrainian soul, as nothing agitates and calms it at the same time like *benteha*. In this way, the ambivalent—"bittersweet"—nature of *benteha* is revealed, as it combines both negative and positive emotional experiences. Nevertheless, psychologists dispute this "naïve" perception of the emotion, claiming it is exclusively negative. Alongside sorrow, melancholy, and distress, it belongs to the emotional cluster of sadness, conveying a state of anxiety and inner restlessness when a person senses that something is wrong but cannot determine the precise source of their anxiety [Shpolianska, 2024].

In linguistics, unlike in psychology, several issues remain open, particularly those dealing with the cross-cultural distinctiveness of the EC representing *benteha* and the question of its ambivalent nature (whether the positive or negative aspect prevails). A comprehensive and objective understanding of these issues can be achieved by examining the metaphorical conceptualisation of this emotion, as in contemporary language use human emotions are often understood or conceptualised in metaphorical terms [Ogarkova, Soriano, 2014]. At the same time, a fairly comprehensive understanding of the cross-cultural characteristics of the EC BENTEHA can be gained by comparing its metaphorical profile, represented through conceptual metaphors, with the profiles of two German-specific ECs that are close to it in meaning: the negative ANGST and the ambivalent ("bittersweet") SEHNSUCHT. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer the following **research questions (RQ)**:

RQ 1: Which conceptual metaphors are the most relevant in the metaphorical profiles of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST and SEHNSUCHT, and which of them clearly indicate the cultural specificity of the EC BENTEHA?

RQ 2: How differently are the compared ECs perceived in their respective cultures in terms of valence, and which of the ambivalent concepts is more positive—BENTEHA or SEHNSUCHT?

Aim, methods and material (language corpora)

The aim of the present study is to identify the cross-cultural specificity of the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA by constructing its metaphorical profile. This aim determines the cross-cultural focus of the research, since the cultural distinctiveness of any EC is most clearly revealed through comparison with ECs that are close to it in semantic content. Accordingly, the study is based on a comparison of the metaphorical profile of the EC BENTEHA with those of the German-specific ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT. Such profiles are constructed through the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotions *benteha*, *Angst*, and *Sehnsucht*. The choice of the German ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT to determine the cross-cultural specificity of the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA is motivated by the fact that, on the one hand, the subconscious anxiety and fear inherent in BENTEHA correlate with the metaphysical fear (eeriness), anxiety, and vague foreboding characteristic of the EC ANGST, while, on the other hand, the "sweetly disturbing" meanings of BENTEHA reveal similarities with the "sweet" fantasies, expectations, and dreams associated with the ambivalent EC SEHNSUCHT [Mizin, Kononenko, 2025].

The methodological validity of the notion of *conceptual metaphor* for the study of ECs is based on the conclusion supported by numerous studies, namely that the metaphors used to describe many

complex concepts shape individuals' understanding of these concepts [Hendricks et al., 2018]. At the same time, conceptual metaphors constitute knowledge structures that are stored in long-term memory and shape the ways in which humans perceive and conceptualize reality [Gibbs, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980]. Conceptual metaphor theory perceives metaphor not only as a figure of speech, but primarily as an underlying pattern of thought, where an abstract target domain (TD) is conceptualised in terms of another more concrete and readily comprehensible domain, the source domain (SD) [Kövecses, 1986; Lakoff, Johnson, 1980].

An important point for the present study is that conceptual metaphor enables individuals to construct analogies between different concepts, thereby facilitating a more detailed understanding of one concept through another [Kapranov, 2015; Oleniak, 2022]. With regard to ECs, metaphorical language plays a crucial role not only in the description and categorization of emotional experiences but also in their more precise delineation and even in their formation. This is explained by the existence of a correlation between emotions and human sensorimotor experiences, which is reflected in metaphorical language. Therefore, the conceptualisation of emotions is predominantly viewed through the lens of metaphorical and/or metonymic linguistic expressions [Gibbs et al., 2002; Kövecses, 2014].

From a methodological perspective, the present study is based on the assumption that, within a conceptual metaphor, insight into the content of the TD can be gained through the SD. This is made possible by the fact that individuals typically possess sufficient knowledge of the SD, as it is related to the understanding of the human body as well as to physical and subjective experience, whereas the TD is abstract in nature and therefore cannot be directly derived from physical experience. The SD is defined as any coherent organization of experience; consequently, such domains provide basic information on the basis of which lexical concepts can be conceptualized. The linguistic designations of the latter activate a set of domains (from the domain matrix), which constitutes the basis for the formation of the content of these concepts. Any concept representing a TD is multidimensional; therefore, speakers require several SDs to comprehend it [Kövecses, 2014]. This implies that any concept, including an EC, can be understood exclusively through the combination of several or even multiple metaphors, since each metaphor structures only one or a limited number of aspects of the concept.

The identification of the features of the metaphorical representation of the ECs *BENTEHA*, *ANGST*, and *SEHNSUCHT* based on the determination of their relevant SDs, relies on extensive empirical material provided by linguistic corpora. At the same time, the procedure for identifying such domains closely correlates with the usage-based analysis widely employed in cognitive linguistics. This approach involves a manual qualitative examination of a large number of corpus examples for relevant features, followed by quantitative modelling of the annotated metadata. This approach makes it possible to identify systematic linguistic patterns and subsequently to establish their underlying conceptual structure [Krawczak, 2025]. In other words, by searching for frequent, i.e., conventionalised, metaphorical associations of the keyword (the name of the EC) in the concordance lines of the relevant concordance, it is possible to determine the relevant SDs of a given EC and, in this way, to gain insight into the specific features of its metaphorical profile.

Given that nouns exhibit a greater propensity for metaphorisation [Reijnierse et al., 2019], and considering that ECs are objectified primarily through their nominative linguistic designations—namely, the nouns Ukr. *benteha* and Germ. *Angst* and *Sehnsucht*—the automatic compilation of concordances was carried out by entering precisely these keywords into representative corpora: the Ukrainian language corpus GRAC (General Regionally Annotated Corpus of the Ukrainian Language; GRAC-19 version) [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026] and the German DWDS-Kernkorpus des 21. Jahrhunderts (DWDS-Kernkorpus 21), which is part of the *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (DWDS) [Geyken, 2025]. Through manual selection of concordance material, three research samples were formed.

The inclusion of this German corpus is motivated, first, by the authors' attempt to ensure the comparability of the analysed corpora according to the main criteria—(1) type, (2) size, and (3) genre of the processed texts—since a serious problem of insufficient development of corpora of contemporary Ukrainian still persists. Second, it is justified by the methodological priority of these criteria for the present study.

1. Type and size. The search for a comparable German corpus was guided by the GRAC corpus, as it is arguably the most well-developed among the available corpora of contemporary Ukrainian. Moreover, it contains a large representative collection of texts accessible through an advanced interface that allows users to search for words, grammatical forms, and their combinations. Therefore, the type and size of GRAC do not currently constitute problematic parameters when it is compared with many German corpora, including those incorporated into DWDS, since the GRAC-19 version contains more than 2 billion tokens. It should be noted that corpus size is undoubtedly more important than corpus structuring for the study of emotion conceptualisation, as words denoting emotions are not highly frequent [Oster, 2010].

2. Genre. Genre affiliation of the texts processed in a corpus is considered even more important than corpus size, as genre affects the use of metaphors in terms of their frequency as well as their formal and functional characteristics [Semino, 2011]. It was precisely this factor that complicated the search for a German corpus comparable to GRAC-19, since the genre type of concordances in the latter is somewhat “mixed”: while the majority of concordance lines are drawn from literary fiction, the remaining lines represent news websites (newspapers and magazines), forums, and social media. The priority accorded to genre comparability between the corpora under comparison determined the choice of DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 for the present study. This is motivated by the fact that this corpus comprises four genres—*Belletristik* ‘fiction,’ *Zeitung* ‘newspaper,’ *Wissenschaft* ‘science,’ and *Gebrauchsliteratur* ‘functional literature.’ Of these, the first two are genre-compatible with GRAC-19, whereas the latter two are not and were therefore excluded from the automatic compilation of concordances. Notably, the prioritisation of genre comparability between the Ukrainian and German corpora relegated the existing discrepancy in their sizes to the background, since the size of DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 amounts to only 15406611 tokens. Nevertheless, this discrepancy is not crucial for the present study.

The size of the concordance for the query word *benteha* comprises 584 contexts (N=584), *Angst* 1920 (N=1920), and *Sehnsucht* 422 (N=422). However, each concordance contains technical flaws, primarily repetitions of concordance lines, which necessitated their elimination during sample construction. After this procedure, the sample sizes were as follows: *benteha* N=497, *Angst* N=1623, and *Sehnsucht* N=386. This number of concordance lines was further substantially reduced as a result of excluding cases of non-metaphorical or homonymous use of the keywords, as well as frequently recurring clichés or “dead” metaphors (e.g., *(keine) Angst haben*, *(keine) Sehnsucht haben*).

The procedure for metaphor identification applied in this study relied, on the one hand, on the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group [Group, 2007], and, on the other hand, on metaphorical pattern analysis (MPA) [Stefanowitsch, 2004]. This methodological “mix” involved a careful examination of concordance lines containing the keywords *benteha*, *Angst*, and *Sehnsucht*, as well as the manual identification of all metaphorical instances associated with the target concepts BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT. Metaphors were identified by establishing a contrast between the contextual meanings of the analysed lexemes and their basic literal meanings. Using the applied procedure, 187 out of 497 contextual occurrences of the word *benteha* (37.63%) were identified as metaphorical; correspondingly, 514 out of 1623 occurrences of *Angst* (31.67%) and 191 out of 386 occurrences of *Sehnsucht* (49.48%) were classified as metaphorical. On the basis of this body of linguistic material, an attempt was made to classify the identified metaphors into conceptual categories representing domains that are regarded as sources of structural mappings onto the target domains BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT (Table 1).

It should be noted that the present study does not examine conceptual metaphors that are specific to the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT, but rather those that are considered most typical for the characterization of ECs in general [cf. Kövecses, 2020], since a key methodological requirement for comparative analysis is the comparability of the parameters used to examine the conceptual structures under investigation:

- 1) EMOTION IS A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER (BODY);
- 2) EMOTION IS A FLUID (IN THE BODY);
- 3) EMOTION IS A CONTAINER/BOUNDED SPACE;
- 4) EMOTION IS AN OPPONENT/ENEMY;

- 5) EMOTION IS AN ILLNESS;
- 6) EMOTION IS AN AUTONOMOUS FORCE;
- 7) EMOTION IS COLD;
- 8) EMOTION IS HEAT/FIRE;
- 9) EMOTION IS A LIVING THING (PERSON/PLANT);
- 10) EMOTION IS A WILD (CAPTURED) ANIMAL;
- 11) EMOTION IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT;
- 12) EMOTION IS FOOD;
- 13) EMOTION IS A GOAL;
- 14) EMOTION IS A BURDEN.

Among the cross-cultural characteristics of the metaphorical representation of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT is their valence, i.e., the positive, negative, or ambivalent perception of these concepts in the cultures under comparison. This is explained by the fact that valence is regarded as one of the most important criteria in the cross-cultural study of ECs. In Western cultures, valence is viewed as the difference in the perception of the (un)pleasantness of emotional experience [Ogarkova, 2013]. Therefore, the fact that the SDs of the conceptual metaphors under study are defined as structures of coherent experience provides a basis for comparing these domains in terms of valence. In this way, it becomes possible to determine which of the ECs under comparison is evaluated by representatives of the respective cultures as more desirable (pleasant, positive) or less desirable (unpleasant, negative).

In view of the considerations outlined above, the methodology of the present study involves the implementation of the following stages:

- 1) determining, by means of contextual analysis, the content of the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA and comparing this content with the main semantic clusters of the German ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT;
- 2) identifying, through the manual analysis of automatically generated concordances of the keywords *benteha*, *Angst*, and *Sehnsucht*, the specificity of the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotions represented by the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT, and thereby establishing their metaphorical profiles.
- 3) determining the cross-cultural specificity of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT by comparing their metaphorical profiles, as well as identifying culture-specific patterns of their perception in Ukrainian and German cultures on the basis of establishing the valence of SDs of the conceptual metaphors representing these ECs.

Results and discussion

The EC BENTEHA remains largely under-researched, as to date there is only one study devoted to elucidating the content of this concept [Mizin, Kononenko, 2025]. This is likely due to the above-mentioned degree of inertia among Ukrainian scholars with regard to the study of their own culture-specific emotions. Notably, explanatory and etymological dictionaries likewise fail to shed light on the meaning of the lexeme *benteha*. As a consequence of the etymological and lexicographic lacunarity of this lexeme, there is no clear understanding of its precise meaning in the Ukrainian-speaking community. Consequently, speakers of Ukrainian are unable to unequivocally characterise what they experience when undergoing the emotion represented by the EC BENTEHA, e.g.:

- (1) [...] *а вона дослухалася лише незрозумілої бентеги свого ества* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].
'[...] but she listened only to the incomprehensible anxiety of her being¹'.

Despite the elusive nature of *benteha*, there exists an intuitive awareness of the relevance of this emotion for Ukrainian culture, e.g.:

- (2) *Це маркер національної неопзбувної бентеги* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].
'This is a marker of national persistent anxiety';

¹ Hereinafter, the translation is ours (K.M., L.S.).

(3) *Я, звичайно, розумію, що у нас в якомусь генетичному коді зашите те, що нам треба туга і бентега* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].

'I understand, of course, that it is somehow encoded in our genetic code that we need longing and anxiety'.

The reason for the ambiguous perception of the EC BENTEHA among Ukrainians may lie in the fact that its semantic structure encompasses a wide range of emotional experiences, represented in the form of core and peripheral semantic clusters. One of the dominant clusters among these is formed by meanings related to bewilderment. It can be assumed that it is precisely these meanings that to some extent determine the ambivalent nature of the EC BENTEHA, since the emotion of embarrassment is considered ambivalent [Maire et al., 2019]. This also applies to the anxiety-related cluster, given that anxiety or apprehension may arise from the anticipation of potentially positive outcomes. However, when meanings of subconscious anxiety are expressed, the EC BENTEHA closely correlates with distinctly negative ECs such as VIDCHAI 'despair,' STRAKH 'fear,' NENAVYST 'hate,' and others, e.g.:

(4) *Прогнозую попервах неопзбувну бентегу, а то й панічний розпач, страх та ненависть вчителів-русистів* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].

'I predict persistent anxiety, and even panic, despair, fear and hatred among teachers of Russian language and literature'.

During the Russian-Ukrainian war, the feelings of anxiety and fear expressed by *benteha* are associated with an individual's mobilisation resources that help ensure survival, e.g.:

(5) *Місто втратило відчуття війни, місто втратило бентегу, назвемо це так* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].

'The city lost its sense of war, the city lost its anxiety, let's call it that'.

Since the EC BENTEHA is ambivalent, the negative component of its semantic structure may be balanced ("offset") by the positive meanings inherent in it, and vice versa. In numerous contexts, this concept carries an unequivocally positive charge; however, in some cases, determining whether the overall valence of its semantic structure is positive or negative proves to be rather difficult, e.g.:

(6) *Хай живе добре і вічне, а з ними – неопзбувна бентега* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].

'May the good and eternal live on, and with them – the persistent anxiety'.

One of the relevant components of the EC BENTEHA is a distinctly positive cluster comprising meanings related to sexual desire. Nevertheless, the sexual dimension of Ukrainian *benteha* remains largely unfamiliar to a considerable part of Ukrainian culture, which once again confirms the somewhat elusive nature of this emotion. It can be assumed that this cluster has developed, on the one hand, on the basis of the emotion of embarrassment and, on the other hand, on the basis of interest (in a sexual partner), e.g.:

(7) *Він аж захлинявся від ніжності, від гарячої душевної бентеги* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].

'He was overwhelmed with tenderness, with hot soulful desire'.

Overall, it has been established that the EC BENTEHA is represented by five core clusters conveying meanings of anxiety, agitation, fear, interest, and joy. As a consequence of this multidimensionality, representatives of Ukrainian culture tend to have a rather vague and often diffuse understanding of the EC BENTEHA. On the one hand, *benteha* is a "bitter" emotion, as it expresses uncertainty, anxiety, or sadness arising in response to difficult circumstances or internal conflicts. This emotion is characteristic of situations in which an individual worries not only about their own fate but also about the fate of others, or even that of an entire nation or a particular community. Consequently, *benteha* may function as a feeling of collective pain or empathy toward

the misfortune of others, transmitted through shared experiences typical of certain historical periods, including the current Russian-Ukrainian war. On the other hand, *benteha* represents a “sweetly disturbing” emotional experience, encompassing sexual desire expressed through attraction to a partner, arousal, or even a degree of amorous passion [Mizin, Kononenko, 2025].

Meanings of subconscious anxiety within the EC BENTEHA closely correlate with profound, metaphysical fear. These meanings conceptually align this concept with the German-specific EC ANGST, as the latter likewise expresses metaphysical fear (eeriness), anxiety, and a vague sense of foreboding. However, unlike EC BENTEHA, ANGST—in addition to metaphysical fear that gives rise to painful, oppressive, and indeterminate anxiety—may also denote physical fear [Becker, 2011]. Therefore, the similarity between ECs ANGST and BENTEHA is based solely on one semantic component of the latter, namely its “bitter” dimension. By contrast, through its “sweetly disturbing” meanings, the EC BENTEHA approximates the German-specific EC SEHNSUCHT, as the latter represents a “sweet-bitter” emotion in which “sweet” desires, aspirations, passionate (including sexual) impulses, hopes, and dreams are inextricably intertwined with the “bitter” prospect of their unattainability [Scheibe et al., 2011]. EC SEHNSUCHT encompasses emotions that can be grouped into the following semantic clusters: “*intense inner longing*,” “*passionate (sexual) desire*,” “*longing for alternative life changes*,” “*longing (nostalgia) for a particular life alternative, often utopian*,” and “*longing (sorrow, grief) for another person, often hopeless*.” In this emotional complex, the positive component (passion and longing) is immediately transformed into a negative one (sadness), since the prospects of personal fulfilment are neutralized by the very utopian nature of these aspirations. Obviously, any individual may experience such an emotional state in which harsh reality is temporarily replaced by “sweet” dreams, giving rise simultaneously to happy hope and sad hopelessness. It is precisely these “sweet” meanings—anticipation of positive events, joyful bewilderment in the presence of a sexual partner, and the pleasant sensation of amorous passion—that underlie the similarity between the ECs SEHNSUCHT and BENTEHA.

The similarities and differences in the semantic structure of the EC BENTEHA as compared to the ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT are clearly demonstrated through the metaphorical conceptualisation of these emotions (Table 1).

Table 1

Relevance of the source domains of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT

# & abbr.	Source domains	BENTEHA		ANGST		SEHNSUCHT	
		N=187	%	N=514	%	N=191	%
1 (SiC)	A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER (BODY)	13	6.95	53	10.31	21	10.99
2 (Fl)	A FLUID (IN THE BODY)	14	7.49	27	5.25	16	8.38
3 (C/BS)	A CONTAINER/BOUNDED SPACE	9	4.81	38	7.39	8	4.19
4 (O/E)	AN OPPONENT/ENEMY	7	3.74	29	5.64	5	2.62
5 (I)	AN ILLNESS	6	3.21	24	4.67	7	3.66
6 (AF)	AN AUTONOMOUS FORCE	15	8.02	78	15.16	37	19.37
7 (C)	COLD	5	2.67	4	0.78	0	0
8 (H/F)	HEAT/FIRE	16	8.56	23	4.47	10	5.24
9 (LTh)	A LIVING THING (PERSON/PLANT)	9	4.81	93	18.09	56	29.32
10 (WA)	A WILD (CAPTURED) ANIMAL	2	1.07	3	0.58	0	0
11 (PhO)	A PHYSICAL OBJECT	29	15.51	119	23.15	19	9.95
12 (Fo)	FOOD	8	4.28	4	0.78	4	2.09
13 (G)	A GOAL	0	0	3	0.58	2	1.05
14 (B)	A BURDEN	54	28.88	16	3.11	6	3.14

The data on SDs of 14 conceptual metaphors representing the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT (Table 1) reveal substantial differences in the metaphorical profiles of the compared ECs, indicating that the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotions they represent is characterized by more divergences than similarities. Thus, within the EC BENTEHA, the most salient SDs are A BURDEN (28.88%) and A PHYSICAL OBJECT (15.51%).

The significantly higher proportion of the former domain compared to the ECs ANGST (3.11%) and SEHNSUCHT (3.14%) is primarily explained by the high frequency of the metaphorical collocation *непозбувна бентега* and its variants (e.g., *невидступна бентега* ‘persistent anxiety’). The perception of this emotion as something difficult to get rid of has largely shaped the overall negative evaluation of the EC BENTEHA in Ukrainian culture, as illustrated, e.g., by the following cases:

(8) *Щоб позбутися тієї бентеги, того невдоволення, він подався до пінакотеки палацу Барберіні* [Shvedova at al., 2017–2026].

‘To get rid of that anxiety, that dissatisfaction, he went to the Barberini Palace art gallery’.

The domain HEAT/FIRE (8.56%) also stands out in the EC BENTEHA, which can be explained by the fact that one of the central positions in the semantic structure of this concept is occupied by the cluster of sexual desire, predominantly associated with positive meanings, as illustrated, e.g., by the following cases:

(9) *Я вже вся палаю від бентеги* [Shvedova at al., 2017–2026].

‘I am already burning with desire’.

It is precisely the positive meanings associated with amorous passion (associations with sweetness) that underlie the relatively high values of the SD FOOD—4.28% (cf. the negligible percentages observed in the ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT), e.g.:

(10) *Моя солодка бентега* [Shvedova at al., 2017–2026].

‘My sweet desire’.

Overall, the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotion represented by the EC BENTEHA confirms its ambivalent nature: on the one hand, *benteha* functions as a burden, a wholly undesirable emotion (cf. the lacunarity of the metaphorical representation of the domain A GOAL); on the other hand, it is sweetly disturbing and alluring.

When the ECs under study are compared in terms of the relevance of SDs, only one similarity can be observed in the EC BENTEHA, and only with the EC ANGST: both exhibit high proportions of the domain A PHYSICAL OBJECT (BENTEHA 15.51%, ANGST 23.15%). The conceptualisation of the respective emotions as objects that can be transferred, received, sown, dulled, and the like intensifies the intensity, scope, and at the same time the diffuseness of the emotional nuances of deep anxiety and metaphysical fear that they express, e.g.:

(11) *Але річ не в ньому, а в тій бентезі, яку він посіяв у мою юнацьку душу* [Shvedova at al., 2017–2026].

‘But it’s not about him, it’s about the turmoil he sowed in my young soul’;

(12) *Daß unsere Angst abstumpfte, ist nicht wahr* [Geyken, 2025].

‘It is not true that our anxiety dulled our senses’.

In the ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT, two SDs are comparable in terms of their relevance—A LIVING THING (PERSON/PLANT) and AN AUTONOMOUS FORCE. In the EC SEHNSUCHT, the former domain displays the highest proportion (29.32%), which indicates the personified (“living”) embodiment and the existential nature of the associations linked to this concept in the German-speaking context, e.g.:

(13) *Mit jedem Schritt wuchs ihre Sehnsucht, sich einfach fallen zu lassen* [Geyken, 2025].

‘With every step, her longing to just let go grew stronger’.

Notably, ANGST and SEHNSUCHT are frequently conceptualised metaphorically as a powerful force that impels individuals to various actions, e.g.:

(14) *Eine bohrende Angst bewegt Giovanna, die Kinder in Sicherheit zu bringen* [Geyken, 2025].
'A nagging anxiety drives Giovanna to bring the children to safety';

(15) *Was ihn bewegte, war halb Sehnsucht, halb Verzweiflung, jedoch nichts, was ihn hätte umkehren lassen* [Geyken, 2025].

'What moved him was half longing, half despair, but nothing that would have made him turn back'.

It should be noted that, in the case of the EC BENTEHA, associations with an autonomous force are less salient (8.02%); however, it is precisely these associations that demonstrate how intense certain emotional nuances conveyed by *benteha* can be, e.g.:

(16) *Мою душу роздирали невимовна бентега* [Shvedova et al., 2017–2026].
'My soul was torn apart by indescribable anxiety'.

The ECs under comparison exhibit only minor differences with respect to the SD AN ILLNESS—БЕНТЕГА (3.21 %), ANGST (4.67 %), SEHNSUCHT (3.66 %). The relatively low frequencies indicate a limited relevance of conceptualising the emotions represented by these ECs as illnesses. The slightly higher value observed for the EC ANGST can presumably be attributed to the pathological nature of metaphysical fear, e.g.:

(17) *Viele Ärzte leiden noch an der Angst, ihre besondere Stellung einzubüßen* [Geyken, 2025].
'Many doctors still suffer from the anxiety of losing their special status'.

In the ECs BENTEHA and SEHNSUCHT the domain A FLUID (IN THE BODY) displays fairly comparable frequencies, whereas the ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT share as many as three comparable domains, namely A SUBSTANCE IN A CONTAINER (BODY), HEAT/FIRE, and A BURDEN. Against the background of these similarities, notable differences emerge in the overall metaphorical representation of SDs across the concepts: while all domains are metaphorically instantiated in the EC ANGST, the other ECs exhibit lacunae—one in the EC BENTEHA (A GOAL) and two in the EC SEHNSUCHT (COLD and A WILD (CAPTURED) ANIMAL).

On the basis of the absence of metaphorisation of two distinctly negative SDs in the EC SEHNSUCHT and the low proportion of negative domains such as AN OPPONENT/ENEMY and A BURDEN, it can be assumed that this concept has a more positive semantic profile not only in comparison with the EC ANGST—which is already well established—but also in relation to the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA. Like БЕНТЕГА BENTEHA, SEHNSUCHT demonstrates an ambivalent semantic structure, combining positive and negative meanings across a number of SDs; however, unlike the former, it is capable of representing emotional nuances that individuals actively seek and wish to experience again, e.g.:

(18) *Und ich bekam Sehnsucht nach der Sehnsucht von einst* [Geyken, 2025].
'And I longed for the longing of yesteryear'.

This assumption can be verified by determining which of the two ambivalent concepts—BENTEHA in Ukrainian culture or SEHNSUCHT in German culture—is perceived as more positive. This can be achieved by establishing the valence indices of the SDs underlying the metaphors that conceptualise the respective emotions. Such an approach also makes it possible to assess the extent to which the EC ANGST, dominated by meanings of profound anxiety and metaphysical fear, is more negative in comparison with the EC BENTEHA, in which one of the core semantic clusters likewise encompasses similar meanings.

The valence indices of the SDs are determined manually by establishing the valence of each contextual occurrence of the key lexical items—*benteha*, *Angst* and *Sehnsucht*—in the samples analysed in the present study (Table 2).

Table 2

Positive (pc) and negative (nc) valence indicators of the source domains of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT

#	Source domains	Valence											
		БЕНТЕГА N=187				ANGST N=514				SEHNSUCHT N=191			
		Pc ²	% ³	nc	%	pc	%	nc	%	pc	%	nc	%
1	SiC	5	2.67	8	4.28	0	0	53	10.31	6	3.14	15	7.85
2	FI	6	3.21	8	4.28	0	0	27	5.25	7	3.66	9	4.71
3	C/BS	2	1.07	7	3.74	0	0	38	7.39	1	0.52	7	3.66
4	O/E	0	0	7	3.74	0	0	29	5.64	0	0	5	2.62
5	I	0	0	6	3.21	0	0	24	4.67	0	0	7	3.66
6	AF	5	2.67	10	5.35	0	0	78	15.16	8	4.19	29	15.18
7	C	0	0	5	2.67	0	0	4	0.78	0	0	0	0
8	H/F	7	3.74	9	4.81	0	0	23	4.47	4	2.09	6	3.14
9	LTh	1	0.53	8	4.28	0	0	93	18.09	13	6.81	43	22.51
10	WA	0	0	2	1.07	0	0	3	0.58	0	0	0	0
11	PhO	5	2.67	24	12.83	0	0	119	23.15	8	4.19	11	5.76
12	Fo	6	3.21	2	1.07	0	0	4	0.78	0	0	4	2.09
13	G	0	0	0	0	3	0.58	0	0	2	1.05	0	0
14	B	0	0	54	28.88	0	0	16	3.11	0	0	6	3.14
\bar{x}			19.77		80.21		0.58		99.38		25.65		74.32

The mean valence values presented in Table 2 as percentages for each SD to some extent confirm the assumption formulated above regarding the more positive profile of the EC SEHNSUCHT (25.65 %) as compared to the EC BENTEHA (19.77 %). It is evident that the positive meanings associated with sexual desire and concealed wishes do not compensate for the predominantly negative perception of *benteha* in the Ukrainian-speaking cultural context, where this emotion is conceptualised as an persistent burden. Moreover, the EC BENTEHA is further intensified by meanings of subconscious anxiety and metaphysical fear, which permeate a wide range of the domains identified. Similar meanings have resulted in an almost entirely negative profile of the EC ANGST in German culture. Overall, despite a specific combination of semantic components that, on the one hand, overlap with the ambivalent SEHNSUCHT and, on the other, with the predominantly negative ANGST, the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotion *benteha* has clearly demonstrated the cultural specificity of the EC it represents.

Conclusions

In the present study, the cross-cultural specificity of the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA is identified through a comparison of its metaphorical profile with those of the semantically related German ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT. The comparative dimension of the analysis is motivated by the “dual” nature of the EC BENTEHA, as it constitutes a complex and diffuse phenomenon encompassing a range of both negative and positive emotional experiences, including metaphysical fear, subconscious anxiety, embarrassment, agitation, interest, arousal (sexual desire), fascination, and amorous passion. It has been established that, in its “bitter” semantic facet, BENTEHA exhibits affinity with the German-specific EC ANGST, which conveys metaphysical fear (eeriness), anxiety, and a vague sense of foreboding. By contrast, the “sweet” facet of this concept brings it closer to the German-specific EC SEHNSUCHT, as the latter represents a “bitter-sweet” emotion in which “sweet,” unsettling desires and dreams are inextricably intertwined with the “bitter” prospect of their non-awareness or even their utopian nature.

² Here: pc – positive context; nc – negative context.

³ The sum of mean values approximates 100 %, but does not reach it, as the valence indices for each SD were rounded to the hundredths place.

The metaphorical profiles of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST and SEHNSUCHT modelled on the basis of quantitative data obtained from the GRAK-19 and DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 corpora and comprising 14 conceptual metaphors (SDs), revealed substantial differences among the ECs under comparison with respect to the relevance of individual SDs. The few partial overlaps identified are grounded in the fragmentary similarity of BENTEHA, on the one hand, to ANGST, and, on the other, to SEHNSUCHT. It has been established that in Ukrainian culture BENTEHA is metaphorically conceptualised both as a burden (SD A BURDEN) and as something sweet (SD FOOD), which clearly reflects the ambivalent nature of this concept. Nevertheless, the SD A BURDEN demonstrates the highest degree of relevance, indicating the predominance of negative meanings in the semantic structure of this concept. The conceptualisation of *benteha* as something difficult to get rid of contributes to the overall negative perception of this emotion concept in Ukrainian culture. Moreover, almost all SDs of the latter are represented by metaphors that conceptualize anxiety and fear. In contrast to the EC BENTEHA, the ambivalent EC SEHNSUCHT proves to be more positively charged, which is primarily due either to the absence of metaphorisation of explicitly negative source domains or to their low salience (e.g., AN OPPONENT/ENEMY OF A BURDEN). The verification of findings concerning the metaphorical representation of the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST and SEHNSUCHT through the identification of source-domain valence indices made it possible to confirm the assumption that SEHNSUCHT is more positively charged than BENTEHA. This procedure also substantiated the relatively higher positive valence of BENTEHA compared to ANGST, as the latter exhibits an almost entirely negative valence due to the dominance of meanings associated with subconscious anxiety and metaphysical fear.

The prospects of the present study lie in further refining the corpus-based methodology, which would make it possible to identify and conduct an in-depth analysis of other culture-specific emotion concepts in Ukrainian culture.

List of abbreviations

DWDS – Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache
EC(s) – emotion concept(s)
GRAC – general regionally annotated corpus of Ukrainian
SD(s) – source domain(s)
TD(s) – target domain(s)

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Metaphorical Representation of the Ambivalent Emotion Concept *Benteha*: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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The proposed article is devoted to identifying the cross-cultural specificity of the Ukrainian EC BENTEHA by comparing its metaphorical profile with those of the semantically related German ECs ANGST and SEHNSUCHT. The comparative dimension of the study is motivated by the “dual” nature of the EC BENTEHA, as it constitutes a complex and diffuse phenomenon encompassing a range of both negative and positive emotional experiences, including metaphysical fear, subconscious anxiety, embarrassment, agitation, interest, arousal (sexual desire), fascination, and amorous passion. It has been established that through its “bitter” semantic dimension, the EC BENTEHA exhibits similarity to the German-specific EC ANGST, which conveys metaphysical fear (eeriness), anxiety, and vague foreboding. By contrast, through its “sweet” dimension, this concept exhibits similarities to the German-specific EC SEHNSUCHT, as the latter represents a “bitter-sweet” emotion in which “sweet,” unsettling desires and dreams are closely intertwined with their “bitter” utopian prospect.

The metaphorical profiles of the compared ECs were modelled on the basis of a quantitative analysis of SDs underlying 14 conceptual metaphors. The data were obtained through manual analysis of automatically generated concordances with the keywords *benteha*, *Angst*, and *Sehnsucht* extracted from the GRAC-19 and the DWDS-Kernkorpus 21 corpora. The analysis of the metaphorical conceptualisation of emotions represented by the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT has revealed substantial differences in the metaphorical profiles of the compared ECs in terms of the relevance of SDs. The few partial overlaps identified are based on fragmentary similarities between the EC BENTEHA, on the one hand, and the EC ANGST, and, on the other hand, the EC SEHNSUCHT. The fact that the EC BENTEHA is extensively metaphorised in Ukrainian culture both as a burden (SD A BURDEN) and as sweets (SD FOOD) clearly demonstrates its ambivalent nature. However, the high frequency of the metaphorical collocation *nepozbuvna benteha* and its variants (e.g. *nevidstupna benteha* ‘persistent anxiety’) has resulted in A BURDEN being the most relevant source domain in the EC BENTEHA (28.88%), which, in turn, indicates the dominance of negative meanings in the semantic structure of this concept. Conceptualising the emotion *benteha* as something difficult to get rid of has largely shaped the overall negative perception of this EC in Ukrainian culture. Moreover, almost all of its SDs are represented by metaphors that conceptualise anxiety and fear, although the metaphorical conceptualisation of these emotions is not as dominant as in the negative EC ANGST. In contrast to the EC BENTEHA, the ambivalent EC SEHNSUCHT is more positively charged, which is primarily due either to the absence of metaphorisation of explicitly negative SDs or to their low frequency (e.g. AN OPPONENT/ENEMY and A BURDEN).

The verification of the results of the metaphorical conceptualisation of emotions represented by the ECs BENTEHA, ANGST, and SEHNSUCHT, based on the assessment of the valence of SDs, made it possible to confirm the assumption that the EC SEHNSUCHT is more positive (25.65%) than the EC BENTEHA (19.77%). This indicates that the positive meanings associated with sexual desire and hidden longings do not compensate for the predominantly negative perception of the emotion *benteha* in the Ukrainian-speaking context, where it is conceptualised as a persistent burden. Moreover, the EC BENTEHA acquires a considerable degree of negativity due to meanings of subconscious anxiety and metaphysical fear, which “permeate” a wide range of the domains identified. Similar meanings have resulted in the almost entirely negative profile of the EC ANGST in German culture. Overall, despite a specific “overlap” of semantic components associated, on the one hand, with the ambivalent EC SEHNSUCHT and, on the other hand, with the negative EC ANGST, the metaphorical conceptualisation of the emotion *benteha* clearly demonstrates the cultural specificity of the EC it represents.

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