THE NOTION OF "LOYALTY" IN LINGUOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the notion of loyalty as a complex moral and cultural concept reflected in language. Within an anthropocentric framework, loyalty is treated as a value-laden linguocultural concept whose semantic structure, associative field and discursive realizations vary across cultures while sharing a universal core. Diachronic and synchronic analysis of English loyalty and Russian лояльность/преданность shows that the concept is historically rooted in the semantic domains of duty, faithfulness and trustworthiness, later extending to political, civic and commercial spheres. Cross-cultural studies demonstrate that ordinary speakers conceptualize loyalty either as a general moral quality or as interpersonal commitment, and that these prototypical structures shape moral evaluations of loyalty violations. Media discourse and associative experiments further reveal culture-specific components such as reliability, devotion, honesty and constancy in Tajik and broader post Soviet contexts. The paper also examines specialized subtypes of loyalty in sociolinguistics (language loyalty), consumer culture (customer and brand loyalty) and translation studies (translator's loyalty), arguing that all are grounded in persistent partiality driven by affective attachment and shared identity. By synthesizing these strands, the article proposes a linguocultural model of loyalty that integrates its ethical, cognitive and communicative dimensions.

KEYWORDS: loyalty; linguoculturology; value concept; language loyalty; brand loyalty; moral judgment; English–Russian comparison; associative field; translation ethics; cross-cultural communication.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary anthropocentric linguistics views loyalty as a key moral and cultural value encoded in lexicon, phraseology and discourse (Abdullaeva, 2024; Norboyevna, 2024). As a linguocultural concept, loyalty links individual psychology, collective identity and social norms, and therefore offers a productive object for cross-cultural comparison. While many disciplines employ the term, its semantic contours and evaluative potential differ significantly across languages and cultures (Poulsen, 2020; Radulović, 2022).

This article aims to:

1.   describe the semantic and diachronic development of English loyalty and Russian лояльность/преданность;

2.   compare their linguocultural profiles;

3.   integrate evidence from experimental psychology, sociolinguistics, marketing and translation studies into a unified model of loyalty as a linguocultural concept.

Theoretical and methodological framework

The study adopts a conceptual–linguocultural approach, combining:

• Concept theory and historical semantics. Diachronic thesaurus data demonstrate that loyalty emerges at the intersection of morality, duty, faithfulness and trustworthiness, later extending to promise-keeping and political allegiance (Radulović, 2022).

• Prototype theory. Empirical work treats loyalty as a prototype-based category, where central features (e.g., standing by others, keeping commitments) guide categorization and moral judgment (Murray et al., 2024).

• Linguoculturology and discourse analysis. Contrastive analysis of English and Russian media texts reveals common and ethno-specific components of the value concept LOYALTY/ПРЕДАННОСТЬ (Abdulkadyrova, 2022).

• Cognitive–associative methods. Associative experiments map the internal structure of the concept "Sadoqat/Садокат" (loyalty) in Tajik linguistic consciousness (Kurbonova, 2024).

Data are drawn from historical lexicographic sources, media corpora, experimental studies and specialized literature in marketing, sociolinguistics, political science and translation.

Diachronic development of the concept "Loyalty" in English

Historical thesaurus analysis shows that loyalty has, since c.1400, been associated with semantic fields such as society – morality – duty – faithfulness – trustworthiness, and later with "faithfulness to a promise" (Radulović, 2022). Synonyms such as faith, reliability, dependability and older forms like soothness indicate that early English conceptualized loyalty as both cognitive truthfulness and ethical steadfastness (Radulović, 2022). Old English soðfæstnes combines dimensions of truth, obligation, righteousness and justice, suggesting that modern loyalty inherits a dense moral–juridical background (Radulović, 2022).

Over time, the concept diversified:

• Feudal and dynastic loyalty: allegiance to a sovereign or lord, backed by oaths and legal sanctions (Radulović, 2022; Bodea, 2025).

• Civic and political loyalty: loyalty to the state, constitution or political order, central to modern notions of subjecthood and citizenship (Radulović, 2022; Poulsen, 2020).

• Commercial and organizational loyalty: commitment to employers, brands and institutions, especially from the 19th–20th centuries onward (Dick & Basu, 1994; Bodea, 2025). Thus, diachrony reveals both continuity (faithfulness, reliability) and expansion into new domains.

Loyalty in English and Russian Linguistic Cultures

Contrastive analysis of media texts in English and Russian shows that the value concept LOYALTY/ПРЕДАННОСТЬ forms a structured semantic field with shared and culture-specific components (Abdulkadyrova, 2022).

In both linguocultures, central features include:

• Emotional attachment and devotion to persons, groups or ideas;

• Reliability and trustworthiness in fulfilling obligations;

• Stability and constancy over time (Abdulkadyrova, 2022; Radulović, 2022).

However, Russian преданность tends to foreground emotional self sacrifice and personal devotion, while лояльность often refers to institutional, political or corporate compliance, sometimes with a neutral or ambivalent evaluation (Abdulkadyrova, 2022). English loyalty combines these domains but, in contemporary media, frequently appears in consumer,

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organizational and political contexts (e.g., customer loyalty, party loyalty, loyal ally), where strategic and affective elements are intertwined (Abdulkadyrova, 2022; Poulsen, 2020).

Core Subdomains of Loyalty as a Linguocultural Concept

Subdomain   Linguocultural focus Citations

Interpersonal & moral loyalty   Devotion, honesty, constancy, general virtue   (Murray et al., 2024; Kurbonova, 2024; Radulović, 2022; Abdullaeva, 2024)

Political & civic loyalty   Allegiance, citizenship, subjecthood, allies   (Radulović, 2022; Poulsen, 2020; Bodea, 2025)

Language loyalty   Support and use of native/minority language   (Moskvitcheva   et   al., 2023; Li, 2019)

Consumer & brand loyalty   Customer–brand relationships, programs, tourism   (Kwiatek et al., 2018; Dick & Basu, 1994; Palumbo & Herbig, 2000; Iskhakova et al., 2020; Chen & Rahman, 2017; Qi et al., 2022; Croitoru et al., 2024)

Professional & translational loyalty   Translator's responsibility to partners   (Nord, 2001; Dick & Basu, 1994)

Figure 1: Key semantic–functional fields of loyalty across domains.

Experimental and Associative Perspectives on Loyalty

A large prototype-based study in Colombia and the United States (N = 1,984) shows both universal and culture-specific representations of loyalty (Murray et al., 2024). Across cultures, people associate loyalty with standing by others, not betraying, keeping promises and supporting close relations (Murray et al., 2024). Yet Colombians represent loyalty through general moral characteristics (goodness, honesty), whereas U.S. participants emphasize interpersonal commitment (being there for friends or groups) (Murray et al., 2024). These differences in prototypical structure affect:

•   which behaviors are categorized as loyalty-related;

•   how severely loyalty violations are morally judged (Murray et al., 2024).

Associative-field research on Tajik Sadoqat (loyalty) identifies basic semantic components such as reliability, devotion, honesty and constancy, reflecting a hierarchy of value meanings around fidelity in contemporary Tajik society (Kurbonova, 2024). This supports the view of loyalty as an evaluative, ethically charged concept whose structure mirrors culturally dominant virtues.

Language loyalty as a sociolinguistic phenomenon

In sociolinguistics, language loyalty denotes conscious support and use of one's language in contact situations, especially under bilingualism or diglossia (Moskvitcheva et al., 2023). Studies on Tatar Mishar speakers show that language loyalty encompasses:

•   Instrumental loyalty related to everyday communicative practices;

•   Symbolic and evaluative loyalty linked to prestige, identity and emotional attachment (Moskvitcheva et al., 2023).

Similar distinctions between instrumental and evaluative loyalty have been developed for Chinese dialects vis à vis Putonghua, where dialects remain key markers of regional identity despite the prestige of the standard language (Li, 2019). Language loyalty is strongly conditioned by historical memory, collective practices, religion and culture, and may range from active defense of the language to passive or even negative loyalty (rejection of one's own language) (Moskvitcheva et al., 2023; Li, 2019).

These findings highlight loyalty as a bridge between linguistic behaviour and ethnocultural identity.

Loyalty in Consumer Culture and Tourism

Marketing and tourism research conceptualize customer loyalty as the strength of the relationship between relative attitude and repeat patronage, mediated by social norms and situational factors (Dick & Basu, 1994). Cognitive, affective and conative antecedents (e.g., satisfaction, commitment) contribute to stable loyalty, which in turn has significant strategic value for firms (Dick & Basu, 1994; Bodea, 2025).

From a linguocultural perspective, two aspects are crucial:

1. Meaning of loyalty programs. Cross-cultural work based on Wittgenstein's notion of meaning-as-use investigates which marketing actions customers themselves interpret as building loyalty (Kwiatek et al., 2018). Intercultural differences among Polish, Serbian and Kuwaiti consumers show that identical actions are understood differently across cultures, implying that loyalty is partly a language-game embedded in local practices (Kwiatek et al., 2018).

2. Cultural moderation of loyalty formation. Studies of brand, alumni and tourist loyalty integrate Hofstede's cultural dimensions to show that individualism–collectivism, power distance, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance systematically moderate the strength of antecedent–loyalty relationships (Palumbo & Herbig, 2000; Iskhakova et al., 2020; Qi et al., 2022; Chen & Rahman, 2017; Croitoru et al., 2024). Emotional value appears to be a near-universal driver, whereas social, functional or conditional value varies by cultural context (Croitoru et al., 2024).

Brand loyalty thus exemplifies how a historically moral concept is recontextualized in economic discourse while maintaining ties to identity, trust and long-term commitment (Bodea, 2025; Palumbo & Herbig, 2000).

Loyalty in translation ethics

In translation studies, loyalty is reinterpreted as an ethical concept regulating translators' responsibilities toward all parties in the communicative act—authors, commissioners and readers—beyond mere textual fidelity (Nord, 2001). Within a functionalist framework, loyalty requires that translators:

• make their strategies explicit;

• adopt clear interpretive decisions in ambiguous cases;

• rely on the best available scholarship to approximate the source author's intentions (Nord, 2001).

Here loyalty is neither blind obedience to the source text nor opportunistic accommodation to the target culture, but a balanced, interpersonal commitment grounded in transparency and respect. This domain illustrates how the core semantics of loyalty—steadfastness, responsibility, trustworthiness—are re-articulated within professional norms.

Loyalty in world politics

Political theory and international relations research conceptualize loyalty as persistent partial behaviour driven by affective attachments, usually rooted in shared social identity (Poulsen, 2020). Unlike instrumental alignment, genuine political loyalty involves:

• long-term partiality toward states, allies or causes;

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• emotional investment that cannot be fully reduced to rational calculation (Poulsen, 2020).

Historical cases such as colonial armies or "loyal allies" in alliances reveal that loyalty can be both integrative and problematic, depending on whose interests it serves (Bodea, 2025; Poulsen, 2020). This again confirms that the evaluation of loyalty—virtue or vice—depends on its object and context, not on the concept itself.

Discussion: toward an integrated linguocultural model of loyalty

Bringing together these domains, loyalty can be modeled as a linguocultural concept with:

1. Semantic core: faithfulness, reliability, constancy, trustworthiness, obligation and affective attachment (Kurbonova, 2024; Radulović, 2022; Abdullaeva, 2024).

2. Cultural modulation: different societies prioritize moral generality, interpersonal commitment, group solidarity or institutional allegiance (Kosimova, 2025; Abdulkadyrova, 2022; Murray et al., 2024; Kurbonova, 2024; Poulsen, 2020).

3. Functional diversification: interpersonal, civic, linguistic, economic and professional subtypes that remain linked by the idea of persistent, normatively loaded partiality (Moskvitcheva et al., 2023; Li, 2019; Dick & Basu, 1994; Bodea, 2025; Palumbo & Herbig, 2000; Poulsen, 2020).

4. Discursive realization: literary narratives of devotion and betrayal, media constructions of loyal citizens or customers, metalinguistic discourse on language preservation, and professional codes of ethics (Kosimova, 2025; Abdulkadyrova, 2022; Kwiatek et al., 2018; Nord, 2001; Iskhakova et al., 2020).

Such a model explains why loyalty is simultaneously universal and culture-specific, morally celebrated yet potentially dangerous (e.g., blind obedience, corrupt loyalties). It also clarifies how changes in historical experience and social structure reshape the boundaries and evaluations of loyalty over time (Radulović, 2022; Bodea, 2025; Poulsen, 2020).

Conclusion. Loyalty emerges in linguocultural perspective as a multilayered moral concept whose semantic core—faithful commitment to persons, groups, principles or symbols—is remarkably stable, but whose typical objects, justifications and evaluations vary across cultures and epochs. Historical semantics uncovers its roots in duty, truth and faithfulness; cross-cultural psychology and associative studies reveal different prototypical structures and value hierarchies; sociolinguistics and marketing show how loyalty mediates identity and behaviour in language and consumption; translation and political theory highlight its ethical and affective dimensions in professional and geopolitical settings. A linguocultural approach thus provides a powerful framework for understanding how societies encode, negotiate and contest loyalty through language.

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