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AMBIVALENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF PATRIOT IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN LINGUACULTURAL TRADITION

This article examines the ambivalence of the concept of patriot, shaped by historical, political, and cultural contexts in British and American linguacultural traditions, with a focus on its semantic, pragmatic, and ideological dimensions in modern media discourse.

It has been found that the term “patriot” can be employed to express both admiration and condemnation, depending on the communicative context and the speaker’s intentions. It has been proven that in American media, the concept of patriot often evokes positive associations with national pride, revolutionary heritage, and civic duty. However, it can also carry contentious overtones, particularly when linked to political polarisation or nationalist extremism. The article reveals that in British media, patriot also fluctuates between respect for national identity and scepticism about excessive nationalism, especially in multicultural settings.

By analysing examples from contemporary American and British media, the article demonstrates how the word “patriot” is strategically used to construct national identity, legitimise political actions, or discredit opposing views. It has been determined that in American discourse, patriotism is often associated with civic values or loyalty to specific political ideologies; in British discourse, it embodies a broader historical and cultural interpretation, sometimes combined with post-imperial narratives or national scepticism.

The study examines the semantic shifts and context-dependent re-evaluation of patriot across both cultures by analysing its connotations in the media. The paper highlights how the term “patriot” functions as a linguistic marker of both unity and division, reflecting broader socio-cultural tensions and evolving national self-perceptions. The research also discusses how the ambivalence of patriot can evoke emotional responses and influence public opinion, thus functioning as a tool of manipulation and polarisation.

Key words: the term “patriot”, ambivalent meaning, semantic shifts, connotation, context-dependent re-evaluation of the concept of patriot, media.

Statement of the problem. In contemporary socio-political discourse, few concepts carry as much emotional and ideological weight as the concept of PATRIOT. Particularly in times of political upheaval, national crises, or cultural shifts, the invocation of patriotism becomes a powerful rhetorical tool. The term “patriot” has undergone a significant re-evaluation in the socio-political landscapes of both the United Kingdom and the United States. Once a universally celebrated label denoting loyalty to one’s country, the word *patriot* now evokes a wide range of reactions, from admiration to suspicion. As debates around nationalism, immigration, and democratic values intensify, the figure of the patriot becomes increasingly contested. In an era marked by political polarization, national identity crises, and ideological conflicts, the discourse surrounding patriotism has become increasingly complex. In both countries, the concept of PATRIOT serves as a focal point for debates on national values, belonging, and dissent. Despite their shared language and historical ties, British and

American societies, shaped by divergent historical and cultural trajectories, interpret the concept of PATRIOT in notably different ways. The meanings are often strikingly ambivalent, simultaneously carrying positive and negative connotations depending on context, intent, and audience. This study is motivated by the growing polarization and identity renegotiation observed in both countries. The central research problem lies in the ambivalent or even contradictory interpretations of this concept within British and American linguacultural traditions.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Ambivalence, as defined in both semantics and cultural studies, refers to the coexistence of contradictory feelings or interpretations attached to a concept.

In semantics, ambivalence refers to the coexistence of positive and negative meanings within a single lexical item. In linguistic terms, this often manifests in polysemy, metaphorical extensions, or context-dependent shifts.

In cultural studies, this ambivalence often reflects tensions in identity, ideology, and power. The term “ambivalence” may be emotionally charged yet ideologically divided, functioning as a symbol of both unity and discord. This duality is particularly evident in cultural keywords [18], i.e. terms that embody core societal values while simultaneously revealing internal tensions.

Linguaculture, defined by Farzad Sharifian [14, p. 111] as a blend of language and culture that emphasises how language reflects and shapes culture, specifically, how linguistic expressions carry culturally loaded meanings and values, serves as a useful framework for this investigation. Linguaculture helps explore the ways cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values are encoded in and communicated through national terms like “patriot”, which is a culturally specific construct with deep symbolic meaning. Linguaculture encompasses the interdependence of language and cultural meaning-making, recognizing that lexical items often reflect broader historical, political, and ethical frameworks, thereby providing an understanding of the dynamic interplay between semantics and socio-cultural context.

Previous studies on nationalism, patriotism, and identity [1; 3; 4; 12; 16] provide foundational insights into the symbolic power of patriotism.

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983) [1], underscores the nature of national consciousness and introduces the notion of nations as “imagined communities”, emphasizing the role of shared narratives in national identity.

Michael Billig’s research, *Banal Nationalism* (1995) [3], shows that banal nationalism reinforces national identity subtly, through language and symbols.

George Lakoff’s *Moral Politics* (2002) [12] explores the metaphorical underpinnings of political language and determines how metaphors shape political thought, including notions of nationhood and loyalty.

Recent studies [4; 16] highlight how patriotism can act as both a unifying and divisive force. While it can foster a sense of shared identity and loyalty to one’s nation, it can also lead to exclusion and conflict when expressed in a way that prioritizes national superiority or hostility towards other groups. These studies illustrate that “patriot” is not merely a neutral descriptor but a loaded term, wielded differently depending on cultural norms and political agendas.

This cultural divergence requires a closer examination of the semantic evolution and

contemporary interpretation of the concept of PATRIOT.

Task statement. The **purpose** of the article is to analyse the semantic shifts and cultural framing that have influenced the concept of PATRIOT in British and American linguacultural traditions.

According to the aim, the following **tasks** were set: to trace the historical and cultural development of the concept of PATRIOT in British and American cultural contexts; to explore the semantic ambivalence of the concept of PATRIOT in contemporary media discourse; to summarize the common and divergent features of the linguacultural representation of the concept of PATRIOT in British and American contexts, revealing implications of its ambivalence.

Outline of the main material of the study. The historical and cultural development of the concept of PATRIOT is quite different in British and American social and cultural contexts.

In the British context, the word *patriot* entered the English language from the French *patriote* in the 16th century, which is derived from the Latin *patriota* ‘fellow countryman’. Initially, it referred to someone devoted to the welfare of their fatherland. Its early British uses in the 17th century often referenced those loyal to Parliament during the English Civil War (1642–1651). The term “patriot” was a self-designation for both Royalists and Parliamentarians, each claiming a true loyalty to England [19]. Over time, especially after the decline of the British Empire, the concept of PATRIOT acquired a more ambivalent tone, combining layers of irony and scepticism. In the post-World War II period with its societal changes, when overt nationalism became increasingly viewed with suspicion or irony, British patriotism became more subdued, often associated with imperial nostalgia or conservative values, nationalism, or even xenophobia, particularly in multicultural Britain [7]. The colonial legacy and post-imperial multiculturalism further complicated its use.

In the American context, American patriotism, by contrast, was born from revolutionary fervour. The term “patriot” became a title of honour during the fight for independence. Gaining prominence during the Revolutionary War, the concept of PATRIOT symbolized resistance to British rule and love of liberty [10]. Over time, it became a defining pillar of American national identity, sacrifice, and democratic ideals. Since then, it has been closely tied to foundational myths and civic religion.

After the September 11 attacks, the concept of PATRIOT gained renewed prominence, often linked with support for military action, national security, heroism, and resilience. However, patriotism has also played a role in civil rights struggles, where activists either claimed or rejected the label to critique exclusionary national ideals. Figures in civil rights movements like Martin Luther King Jr. reclaimed patriotism to advocate for justice, further complicating its meaning [17]. In populist rhetoric, PATRIOT often becomes a marker of in-group identity.

The concept of PATRIOT does not exist in isolation; rather, it is often embedded in broader socio-political and cultural narratives. The mass media serve as a crucial discursive arena where the semantics of ideologically loaded terms, such as “patriot”, are continually negotiated, redefined, and contested. Comparative studies of political speeches and headlines from *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Fox News*, and *The New York Times* highlight the polarised framing of the term, with varying metaphorical structures such as “true patriot,” “patriot games,” and “fake patriotism.” Authentic examples from British [5] and American [8] media not only illustrate the ambivalence of the concept of PATRIOT, but also demonstrate how context, tone, and ideology affect its semantic load.

Let us consider examples from both British and American sources, each accompanied by a linguistic analysis that highlights semantic shifts, ambivalence, and connotative variation of the concept of PATRIOT.

British Media Usage. The British linguacultural tradition tends to approach patriotism with caution. However, positive semantic reinforcement is evident in the phrase from *The Times* (April 25, 2023): *King Charles praised the Ukrainian fighters as true patriots defending freedom and European values.* [11] By appending the modifier *true*, the phrase implies a hierarchy of authenticity, reinforcing the notion that not everyone who claims the title “patriot” deserves it. Here, *true patriots* are associated with heroism, resistance, and shared values. Furthermore, the statement demonstrates transcultural framing: although referring to Ukrainian fighters, the term “patriot” is employed by a British monarch, suggesting that PATRIOT still retains strong, noble connotations in official discourse.

Overt expressions of national pride are often seen as socially awkward or politically charged. Historical associations with imperialism and the British far-right contribute to the term’s ambivalence. In the statement *Being a patriot doesn’t mean supporting*

every war your government wages [2], the hedging phrase *doesn’t mean* introduces modality, signalling that the term “patriot” has been overstretched or misapplied. The statement aims to expand the semantics, allowing dissent within the parameters of patriotism, distinguishing it from blind allegiance, while recognising dissent as a form of love for one’s country. This aligns with the more pluralistic British traditions of political discourse, where criticism of government actions can still be framed within a patriotic context.

Multiculturalism and regional identities (e.g., Scottish, Welsh, Irish) further complicate a unified national identity. British discourse often treats overt patriotism with irony or reservation, reflecting a cultural scepticism toward grandiose national pride. For example, BBC News headline *Far-right groups claim to be patriots, but MI5 warns of domestic terrorism* [9] employs ironic juxtaposition, “patriots” versus “terrorists”, undermining the word’s positive connotation to highlight the dissonance between self-identification and state-assigned threat. This contributes to the semantic degradation of the term “patriot”, wherein *patriot* becomes linguistically destabilised. The clash of registers – the populist tone of “claim to be patriots” versus the institutional authority of MI5 “warns of terrorism” – further emphasises linguistic dissonance and credibility gaps in invoking “patriotism”.

Thus, the British interpretation of the concept of PATRIOT tends to be more reserved, and sometimes ironic. This reflects a broader cultural scepticism towards overt expressions of nationalism, shaped by the U.K.’s colonial history and contemporary multiculturalism. Public discourse often frames patriotism in terms of quiet service or civic duty, rather than overt displays. The socio-political implication underscores how PATRIOT can serve as a rhetorical mask for extremist ideology.

American Media Usage. The American linguacultural tradition embraces patriotism more openly, as a central cultural value. School rituals, sports events, and political speeches regularly incorporate patriotic expressions. For example, in his July 4th address on Independence Day [15], Donald Trump stated: *We will proclaim the ideals of our Founding Fathers, and we will teach our children to be proud of their history and their country and to respect our great American flag and always be a PATRIOT.* The use of capitalisation is deliberate, signalling a rebranding of PATRIOT as part of a political identity. This stylistic emphasis,

along with the rhetorical parallelism in the sentence, frames patriotism not merely as a value but as a loyalty test, reinforcing the moral high ground of being a “patriot”. The term “patriot” becomes ideologically exclusive, equated with loyalty to specific conservative ideals and values, implying that dissent from these principles signifies disloyalty. It conveys a semantic restriction: only those aligned with particular ideals and values can be labelled as patriots.

The concept of PATRIOT is often infused with religious overtones (*God bless America*), military respect, and narratives based on freedom. However, this widespread occurrence also exposes the term to politicisation and manipulation. PATRIOT may symbolise progressive protest or conservative nationalism, depending on the speaker. For example, an NPR (National Public Radio) Article is headlined: *Who gets to be called a patriot in America?* [13] Framed as a rhetorical question, this NPR headline engages in deictic ambiguity, asking who has the power to assign the label “patriot”. The headline introduces a relational meaning, implying that “patriot” is not a self-evident label, but one that is assigned selectively, often based on race, politics, belief systems, or ideology. Pragmatically, it challenges dominant narratives and encourages readers to interrogate who defines patriotism and on what ideological grounds, to re-evaluate what qualifies someone as a “true American”. This is a clear case of pragmatic ambiguity, where the meaning is shaped not by the denotation of the word, but by the social and ideological contexts in which it is used.

Fox News Headline *Capitol rioter seen as a patriot by supporters, traitor by others* [6] demonstrates a highly polarised semantic field where “patriot” is set in direct contrast to “traitor”, two lexemes traditionally seen as antonymic, underlining opposed connotations of the same act depending on ideological stance. The ambivalence is heightened by ideological alignment: for some, the January 6th rioters were defenders of constitutional liberty; for

others, they were rebels against democracy. The term “patriot” thus becomes ideologically bifurcated. Moreover, the headline reflects a semantic shift where *patriot*, historically positive, takes on ironic or even euphemistic tones. The concept of PATRIOT is no longer universally affirming but instead serves as a litmus test of political worldview, especially in Trump-era rhetoric, where PATRIOT has become code for anti-establishment loyalty or resistance to perceived government overreach.

However, such a perception of the concept of PATRIOT in the American linguacultural tradition can border on exclusionary, as seen in debates over immigration, protests, and national loyalty.

Thus, the American linguaculture imbues the concept of PATRIOT with strong emotional resonance, often linked to faith, freedom, and military valour. The term “patriot” is central in political rhetoric, civic rituals, and even consumer branding. It is frequently invoked to delineate “real Americans” from perceived outsiders. The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception of PATRIOT. Depending on ideology, news outlets may glorify or vilify individuals labelled as patriots.

Comparative semantic observations (Table 1) of linguacultural representations of the concept of PATRIOT reveal that in American corpora [8], *patriot* frequently collocates with *hero*, *veteran*, *freedom*, *bravery*, *service*, and *God*, indicating both valorisation and suspicion. In contrast, the British National Corpus [5] demonstrates less frequent usage, often with a more reserved, critical or ironic tone, accompanied by *so-called*, *old-fashioned*, *tabloid*, *Brexit*, *loyalist*, and *flag*. Media examples further illustrate this duality. In U.S. news headlines, *patriot* is often valorised (e.g., *True Patriots Stand for Freedom*), while in the U.K., it may appear in sceptical contexts (e.g., *Are These Patriots or Nationalist Provocateurs?*).

Commonalities in British and American linguacultural traditions exist, such as the term’s emotional power and its capacity to unite or divide.

Table 1

**Comparative semantic observations of linguacultural representations
of the concept of PATRIOT in British and American media**

Feature	British Usage	American Usage
Frequency of Politicised Use	Present, but more likely in critiques or elite discourse	High, often in populist rhetoric
Semantic Range	Broad, but more often controlled in tone	Broad (<i>hero</i> → <i>extremist</i>)
Evaluative Ambivalence	Present, but often countered with irony or critique	Very high (esp. post-2016)
Synonymy & Contrast	Patriot vs. nationalist/extremist	Patriot vs. traitor
Contextual Anchoring	Dissent, monarchy, EU values	Flags, military, constitution

Yet the *divergences* are shaped by history: Britain's colonial guilt and ironic detachment contrast with America's foundational myth of liberation and moral exceptionalism.

Contextual representations of the concept of PATRIOT in British and American media reveal that the semantic field of PATRIOT is characterised by profound ambivalence. In both cultures, PATRIOT retains traditional *positive* meanings such as: love and loyalty to one's country, civic responsibility, defence of democratic values and ideals. In political campaigns, the term is used to rally public support, promote unity, and signal integrity. Yet, PATRIOT also carries *negative connotations*, and it is increasingly associated with xenophobia and jingoism, ethnocentric or exclusionary nationalism, political radicalism or populism, particularly in the context of extremist groups. Terms, such as "patriot militia" or "patriot act", have been associated with exclusionary or authoritarian tendencies.

The ambivalence surrounding PATRIOT has significant implications (Table 2).

Table 2

**Summary table of ambivalence implications
of the concept of PATRIOT in British
and American media**

Usage Type	Positive Interpretation	Negative Interpretation
Political	Defender of democracy	Radical nationalist / insurrectionist
Cultural	Loyal citizen with critical thinking	Blind follower of the state
Media	Symbol of unity and shared values	Divisive label used for political gain
Commercial	Ethically motivated consumerism	Superficial slogan for profit

1. *Patriot as Hero vs. Patriot as Extremist*

Positive usage (heroic connotation) emphasises loyalty, sacrifice, and national pride: *He's a true patriot who served his country selflessly in the military*. [8]. Negative usage (extremist connotation) is often employed to legitimise radical or violent actions, especially in far-right or militia rhetoric: *The attackers claimed they were patriots defending the Constitution*. For example, the January 6th Capitol rioters in the U.S. were referred to by some media outlets and individuals as *patriots fighting for freedom*, while others called them domestic terrorists. The word patriot was central to this ideological split.

2. *Patriotism vs. Nationalism*

Positive connotation (inclusive/constructive patriotism) reflects progressive or liberal values

of critical engagement: *True patriots are those who criticise their country when it goes wrong in order to make it better*. [8] Negative connotation (exclusionary nationalism) reflects xenophobia, nativism, or ethno-nationalism: *Patriots know this country is for Americans only*. [8] For example, in U.K. debates on Brexit, *patriot* was used both to praise those defending sovereignty, and to condemn those perceived as anti-immigrant or isolationist.

3. *Patriot as a Branding Tool*

Commercial/neutral usage is represented in advertising, appealing to consumer nationalism: *Buy American – be a patriot!* [8] Ironical or critical usage suggests cynicism, manipulation, or empty symbolism: *Patriotism has become a marketing gimmick*. [8] For example, Fox News commentators may use *patriot* to signal cultural loyalty, while late-night comedians may critique that usage as overused or politically manipulative.

4. *Patriotism and Political Allegiance*

Claimed by right-wing figures, the term "patriot" aligns patriotism with conservative values: *Patriots support strong borders and the Second Amendment*. [8] Reclaimed by left-wing figures, it aligns patriotism with social justice and reform: *Fighting for healthcare and justice is an act of patriotism*. [8] For example, during U.S. election campaigns, candidates from both parties brand themselves and their supporters as "true patriots", redefining the term to match ideological goals.

Socio-politically, the ambivalence implications of the concept of PATRIOT in the British and American linguacultural traditions can lead to miscommunication across cultural contexts. An American expressing patriotic sentiment may be perceived as earnest, while a Brit might interpret the same expression as jingoistic. A statement considered patriotic in the U.S. might be seen as nationalistic or even troubling in the U.K. What is considered patriotic protest in one culture (e.g., kneeling during the anthem in the USA) may be seen as disrespectful in another, or vice versa. Within each culture, the term's ambiguity allows it to be co-opted by divergent political ideologies. Both cultures share a historical root and employ the term "patriot" in expressions of loyalty and identity. However, the divergence lies in emotional intensity and socio-political framing. British discourse is more ambivalent, while American usage is more polarised, either idealised or weaponised.

This disconnect affects diplomacy, media interpretation, and intercultural dialogue.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for media literacy and for navigating the cultural politics of language. In media discourse, the term is increasingly weaponised. Politicians may invoke the concept of PATRIOT to legitimise policies or marginalise opponents. Journalists might frame protest groups as “patriots” or “extremists”, depending on ideological conformity. The term “patriot” is often weaponised to delineate in-groups and out-groups. Depending on political orientation, *patriot* may be used to valorise dissent or condemn it. This reflects broader trends in media framing and political polarisation.

Conclusions. This study has traced the complex and often contradictory meanings of the term “patriot” in the British and American linguacultural traditions. Both utilise *patriot* as a rhetorical tool, but the tone, implication, and sociocultural baggage differ significantly. The semantic ambivalence of the concept of PATRIOT reflects deeper cultural values and anxieties in British and American societies, broader tensions within each society’s relationship to national identity, historical memory, and political values.

The findings demonstrate that while PATRIOT remains a potent symbol, its interpretation is far from uniform. This underscores the importance of context in linguistic and cultural analysis. While

rooted in the shared language, the term “patriot” has evolved differently across contexts, revealing contrasting approaches to national identity, belonging, and dissent. Understanding these differences contributes to greater media literacy, intercultural awareness, and political discourse analysis. It challenges simplistic readings of patriotic language and encourages more nuanced interpretations. Ultimately, this work contributes to our understanding of how language shapes and reflects the cultural imagination, revealing not only what we say, but who we are when we say it.

The findings are relevant for linguists, translators, and discourse analysts interested in ideologically charged vocabulary, cultural semantics, and media language. The article contributes to the broader understanding of how contested political terms evolve and operate within different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Further research could expand the comparative analysis to include other English-speaking cultures (e.g., Canada, Australia) or post-colonial cultures, or examine adjacent concepts, such as TRAITOR, NATIONALIST, and FREEDOM FIGHTER. A deeper exploration of visual and multimodal representations of patriotism (flags, anthems, slogans) would also enrich the analysis.

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Ніконова В. Г. АМБІВАЛЕНТНІСТЬ КОНЦЕПТУ ПАТРІОТ У БРИТАНСЬКІЙ ТА АМЕРИКАНСЬКІЙ ЛІНГВОКУЛЬТУРНІЙ ТРАДИЦІЇ

У статті досліджено амбівалентність концепту патріот, сформованого під впливом історичних, політичних і культурних чинників у британській та американській лінгвокультурній традиції, з акцентом на його семантичному, прагматичному та ідеологічному вимірах у сучасному медійному дискурсі.

З'ясовано, що термін «патріот» може використовуватися як для вираження захоплення, так і для засудження – залежно від комунікативного контексту та намірів мовця. Доведено, що в американських медіа концепт патріот часто викликає позитивні асоціації з національною гордістю, революційною спадщиною та громадянським обов'язком. Водночас він може набувати суперечливих конотацій, особливо у зв'язку з політичною поляризацією або проявами націоналістичного радикалізму. У статті розкрито, що в британському медійному просторі концепт патріот також коливається між пошаною до національної ідентичності та скепсисом щодо надмірного націоналізму, особливо в мультикультурному контексті.

У результаті аналізу прикладів із сучасних американських і британських медіа у статті продемонстровано, як слово «патріот» стратегічно використовується для конструювання національної ідентичності, легітимації політичних дій або дискредитації опонентів. Визначено, що в американському дискурсі патріотизм часто асоціюється з громадянськими цінностями або лояльністю до певних політичних ідеологій, тоді як у британському втілено ширше історико-культурне тлумачення, подекуди поєднане з постімперськими наративами або національним скепсисом. У дослідженні виявлено семантичні зрушення та контекстуальну переоцінку концепту патріот у двох культурах шляхом аналізу його конотації в медійному дискурсі. У роботі підкреслено, що термін «патріот» постає мовним маркером як єдності, так і розколу, відображаючи ширші соціокультурні напруження та трансформації національного самосприйняття. Також розглянуто, як амбівалентність концепту патріот може викликати емоційний відгук і впливати на громадську думку, виступаючи інструментом маніпуляції та поляризації.

Ключові слова: термін «патріот», амбівалентне значення, семантичні зрушення, конотація, контекстуальна переоцінка концепту патріот, медіа.