

# FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FORMATION OF TABOOS AND EUPHEMISMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK CULTURES

**D.B.Olimova,**

National University of Uzbekistan  
named after Mirzo Ulug'bek

## Abstract

This paper explores the socio-cultural and linguistic factors that influence the formation of taboos and euphemisms in English and Uzbek cultures. By comparing the fundamental values, religious beliefs, historical backgrounds, and communicative norms of the two linguistic societies, the study highlights similarities and differences in their approach to delicate topics. The results suggest that while general human concerns contribute to common taboo domains, cultural specificity deeply affects how these taboos are mitigated through euphemisms.

**Keywords:** taboo, euphemism, culture, English, Uzbek, linguistics

## Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of a society's values, beliefs, and social norms. Every culture contains linguistic forms that are either avoided or softened due to reason of discomfort or violate social expectations. Such expressions are known as taboos, and the replacements for them are called euphemisms. In the context of intercultural communication, understanding how different societies form and use euphemisms to handle taboos is crucial. This paper investigates the cultural, religious, and historical factors for the formation of taboos and euphemisms in English and Uzbek cultures, providing insights into the linguistic behavior of these societies.

## Materials and methodology

It is important to mention that linguists have long studied the phenomenon of taboo and euphemism. Allan and Burridge in 2006 emphasized that taboos arise from fear, shame, and disgust, often surrounding subjects such as death, sex, excretion, and religious blasphemy<sup>1</sup>. Euphemisms serve as socially acceptable substitutes that allow speakers to navigate these sensitive areas without offending listeners. Pinker noted that euphemisms in English often evolve due to psychological distancing and political correctness<sup>2</sup>.

In the Uzbek context, D.Yuldasheva pointed out that euphemisms are closely connected with religious values and notions of honor, particularly in familial and social settings.<sup>3</sup> Uzbek euphemisms are often more fixed and traditional, with less inclination to adopt modern or humorous expressions compared to English.

<sup>1</sup> Allan, K., & Burridge, K. *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge University Press, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Pinker, S. *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. Viking Press, 2007

<sup>3</sup> Yuldasheva, D. Euphemisms in Uzbek: A Sociolinguistic Perspective. *Journal of Uzbek Linguistic Studies*, 12(1), 2019, p 55–70.

Other studies by Ferguson and Lakoff also explored how social structure, gender roles, and religious influences affect language use in various cultures. While English euphemisms may show creativity and lexical play, Uzbek euphemisms reveal a more conservative approach grounded in respect, collectivism, and modesty.

This qualitative comparative study draws upon examples of taboo and euphemistic expressions from both English and Uzbek. Sources include literary works, media transcripts, religious and cultural texts, existing academic literature and dictionaries

Expressions were categorized into thematic domains: death, sex, bodily functions, religion, and insults. Each category was analyzed for frequency, form, and cultural significance.

## Results

Across both cultures, several thematic domains of taboo emerged including death: “Pass away” (English), “olamdan o’tmoq” (Uzbek); sexuality: “sleep with” (English), “yaqinlik qilmoq” (Uzbek); bodily functions: “relieve oneself” (English), “hojatga chiqmoq” (Uzbek); religion: Avoiding direct mention of God or sacred entities; insults and curse words.

It should be emphasized that some euphemization strategies exist in languages. English employs a wider variety of creative linguistic mechanisms such as metaphors: “kick the bucket” (death). The idiom “kick the bucket” has its own origin according to different sources. In **medieval slaughterhouses**, a **beam called a “bucket”** was used to hang pigs by their heels. When the animals were killed, they were said to “**kick the bucket**” in their death throes. In some dialects, *bucket* meant a wooden frame or beam. This theory is backed by sources like the **Oxford English Dictionary** and is cited in historical linguistic discussions.

Initialisms (refers to a **shortening of a phrase to its initial letters**) “the F-word”. In euphemisms, this technique is used to **conceal or soften offensive words** by replacing them with **their first letters**, especially when the full term is considered inappropriate in public discourse.

Another way of euphemization is using borrowing. In euphemism, **borrowed words** are used to replace direct, often harsh native expressions with **foreign-sounding terms** that carry **less emotional weight or social stigma**: “lavatory” from Latin origin means “toilet”.

Uzbek euphemisms rely more on elevated and poetic language: “olamdan o’tgan inson”; religious expressions: “rahmatli”, “joyi jannatda bo’lsin”; indirect idioms: “ko’z ochib yumguncha bo’ldi”.

Islamic beliefs strongly shape Uzbek euphemism use, especially regarding death, sexuality, and modesty. For instance, direct discussion of women’s body is highly discouraged. Moreover, social norms emphasize respect toward elders, women, and public figures. Euphemisms avoid shame and embarrassment, particularly in familial discourse. English euphemisms often serve to preserve individual comfort and personal dignity, focusing on political correctness, psychological sensitivity, and the avoidance of offense to marginalized or vulnerable groups. For example: instead of disabled, terms like “differently abled”, “physically challenged”, or “person with special needs” are used to emphasize personhood over condition.

The word *fat* is commonly replaced by euphemisms like “full-figured”, “plus-sized”, or “curvy”, which avoid potential body shaming.

In workplace contexts, *firing someone* is softened to “letting someone go” or “downsizing” to reduce emotional impact.

These expressions are driven by liberal values, media influence, and an emphasis on inclusive language, especially in Western public discourse. The influence of journalism, advertising, and



political correctness has led to a rapid expansion of such euphemisms, particularly in areas such as gender identity, race, disability, and mental health.

In contrast, Uzbek euphemisms tend to reflect collective cultural values, modesty norms, and religious respect, and are less susceptible to rapid change. They often prioritize social harmony, age hierarchy, and traditional morality over individual sensitivity. For instance: instead of *o'ldi* (died), euphemisms like “*olamdan o'tdi*”, “*ko'z yumdi*”, or “*rahmatli*” are used to express respect for the dead and reduce the harshness of the concept.

Talking about childbirth, the term *tu'g'di* is often softened to “*ko'zi yoridi*” or “*yengillashdi*”, particularly in polite or mixed-age company.

In marital speech, addressing one's spouse directly may be avoided in front of elders. Instead, expressions like “*o'g'lingiz*”, “*qizingiz*”, or “*keliningiz*” are used euphemistically to preserve family honor and etiquette.

Thus, while English euphemisms are dynamic, often shaped by modern ideologies and media-driven trends, Uzbek euphemisms remain rooted in stable social conventions, religious values, and long-standing communicative norms. This contrast illustrates how euphemisms mirror deeper cultural priorities: individual rights and expression in English versus collective respect and decorum in Uzbek.

### Discussion

The data highlight how the same human concerns manifest differently across cultures due to historical and social values. Uzbek euphemisms are more fixed, rooted in religious morality, and tied to concepts like shame and honor. English euphemisms are dynamic, often humorous or politically driven.

The study also found that **generational differences are significant** in the use and perception of euphemisms. **Younger Uzbeks**, especially those living in **urban areas** or with access to **Western media and internet culture**, are increasingly exposed to English euphemistic norms. This exposure results in the **emergence of hybrid euphemistic usage patterns** that blend traditional Uzbek forms with modern or borrowed English expressions. For example: where older generations may use “*xojatga chiqmoq*” or “*dasturxon orqasiga o'tmoq*” to refer to bodily needs, younger speakers may say things like “**rest-room**”, “**WC**”, or even the Uzbekified form “**rest-roomga chiqdi**”, especially in casual or mixed-language conversations. This generational transition illustrates a broader **sociolinguistic change**, where the **traditional collectivist and religiously-motivated euphemisms** of older generations are being **supplemented or replaced by individual-centric, psychologically nuanced, and Western-inspired euphemisms** among the youth.

### Conclusion

Euphemisms and taboos are vital markers of linguistic and cultural identity. Their study offers valuable insights into the psyche and values of a speech community. This research has shown that religious, historical, and social structures significantly affect how taboos are avoided in both English and Uzbek.

Understanding these differences is essential not only for language learning and translation but also for diplomatic, social, and intercultural interaction. Further comparative studies can expand to other Central Asian or European languages to deepen the understanding of euphemistic behavior across linguistic families.

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