

DISCURSIVE SYSTEM OF TABOO AND EUPHEMIZATION IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

<https://doi.org/10.70728/phil.v05.i07.014>

Olimova Shakhnigor Olimovna

ORCID: 0009-0009-6038-357X

shaxnigorolimova888@gmail.com

University of Information Technologies and Management

Abstract: This article will provide a comparative study of the discursive system of taboo and euphemization in English and Uzbek from the perspectives of discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and pragmatics. The article proposes a comparative discursive model that illustrates the interaction between taboo concepts, euphemistic transformation, cognitive processes, and discursive implementation.

Keywords: taboo, euphemism, discursive system, discursive analysis, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, English, Uzbek, conceptualization, intercultural communication

Introduction. Language reflects not only objective reality but also the social, cultural, and cognitive principles through which reality is interpreted and communicated. Every linguistic community develops mechanisms that regulate the verbalization of socially sensitive concepts. Among these mechanisms, taboo and euphemization occupy a central position because they govern the relationship between linguistic expression, cultural norms, and communicative appropriateness. Rather than functioning as isolated lexical phenomena, taboo and euphemization constitute interconnected components of discourse organization. Traditional linguistic research primarily interpreted taboo as the prohibition of particular lexical items and euphemization as their socially acceptable substitutes. Such approaches emphasized vocabulary replacement while overlooking the dynamic processes through which speakers negotiate meaning during communication. Recent developments in discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics, however, suggest that euphemization should be examined as a discourse-driven phenomenon emerging from the interaction of conceptual knowledge, pragmatic intentions, contextual information, and cultural expectations.

Discourse is understood as language in use, embedded within social practice and communicative interaction. Consequently, euphemistic expressions cannot be interpreted independently of their discourse environment. The same lexical item may function as a euphemism in one communicative situation while remaining semantically

neutral in another. Therefore, the production and interpretation of euphemistic language depend upon discourse participants, communicative purposes, institutional settings, and culturally shared knowledge. English and Uzbek provide an appropriate basis for comparative investigation because both languages possess extensive systems of taboo avoidance while differing considerably in cultural traditions, religious values, communicative conventions, and politeness norms. English discourse generally reflects principles associated with individualism, personal privacy, and indirect interpersonal communication. Uzbek discourse, by contrast, demonstrates stronger orientation toward collectivism, social hierarchy, family relationships, and religious-cultural traditions. These sociocultural differences significantly influence the linguistic realization of taboo and euphemization. For instance, discussions concerning death rarely employ direct nomination in either language. English speakers commonly prefer expressions such as *pass away*, *depart this life*, or *no longer with us*, whereas Uzbek speakers frequently employ expressions equivalent to *passed into God's mercy*, *left this world*, or *returned to the Creator*. Although both languages avoid direct lexical reference to death, the conceptual motivations underlying these euphemisms differ substantially. English discourse often conceptualizes death through movement or transition, whereas Uzbek discourse frequently emphasizes spiritual continuity and religious belief.

Literature review. Similar differences emerge in family discourse. English speakers commonly use expressions such as *expecting*, *seeing someone*, or *special needs* to reduce communicative discomfort. Uzbek discourse, however, frequently employs culturally specific euphemisms grounded in traditional concepts of respect, family honor, and religious morality. Consequently, euphemization reflects not only universal communicative principles but also language-specific systems of conceptualization. Recent studies in cognitive linguistics further demonstrate that euphemistic expressions are generated through conceptual operations rather than arbitrary lexical substitution. Conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, frame activation, script-based reasoning, and pragmatic inference collectively enable speakers to reconceptualize sensitive realities without violating social expectations. These cognitive processes become particularly visible within discourse, where contextual information guides interpretation beyond literal lexical meaning.

From a discourse perspective, taboo and euphemization perform several communicative functions simultaneously. They preserve interpersonal harmony, reduce face-threatening acts, regulate institutional communication, protect emotional well-being, and reinforce cultural values. Consequently, euphemization functions not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a mechanism for maintaining social order through discourse. Despite considerable scholarly interest in euphemisms, comparatively little attention has been devoted to investigating taboo and

euphemization as components of a unified discursive system across genetically unrelated languages such as English and Uzbek. Most existing studies focus either on lexical classification or on isolated pragmatic functions without explaining how discourse structures regulate euphemistic behavior across multiple communicative domains.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining taboo and euphemization as interconnected elements of discourse organization. Rather than treating euphemistic expressions as independent lexical units, the study conceptualizes them as discourse-dependent constructions whose interpretation emerges through cognitive processing, pragmatic negotiation, and sociocultural context. The objectives of this research are:

- to identify the principal discourse domains in which taboo and euphemization occur in English and Uzbek;
- to determine the cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms responsible for euphemistic transformation;
- to compare the discursive organization of taboo avoidance across the two languages;
- to develop a comparative model explaining the interaction between taboo concepts, euphemistic strategies, and discourse realization.

Research Methodology. By integrating discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and comparative linguistics, this study aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of the discursive system governing taboo and euphemization in English and Uzbek.

The present study employs a qualitative comparative research design integrating discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics to investigate the discursive system of taboo and euphemization in English and Uzbek. The interdisciplinary framework enables the study to explain euphemistic language not only as a lexical phenomenon but also as a dynamic discourse strategy shaped by communicative goals, cognitive processing, and sociocultural conventions. Unlike traditional semantic investigations, which classify euphemisms according to lexical meaning, the present research examines how taboo concepts are transformed into acceptable discourse through multiple cognitive and pragmatic mechanisms. Therefore, the principal object of investigation is discourse realization rather than isolated lexical items.

The corpus consists of authentic English and Uzbek texts representing five major discourse domains:

- family discourse;
- religious discourse;
- medical discourse;

- institutional discourse;
- everyday conversational discourse.

The English corpus was compiled from contemporary novels, newspapers, spoken conversation corpora, parliamentary debates, medical communication, and television dialogue. The Uzbek corpus includes literary texts, newspapers, public speeches, religious sermons, television programs, online discussions, and naturally occurring conversational data.

More than 650 discourse fragments containing taboo-related expressions were initially collected. Following contextual evaluation and elimination of repetitive examples, 482 discourse units were selected for detailed analysis.

The distribution of the corpus is presented below.

Discourse Domain	English	Uzbek
Family discourse	82	86
Religious discourse	47	61
Medical discourse	53	48
Institutional discourse	56	39
Everyday discourse	55	55
Total	293	289

The corpus allows systematic comparison of discourse-specific euphemistic strategies across culturally distinct linguistic communities.

The analysis was conducted in four consecutive stages:

The first stage involved identifying taboo concepts occurring in each discourse domain.

During the second stage, euphemistic realizations replacing these concepts were identified.

Analysis and results. The third stage examined cognitive mechanisms responsible for conceptual transformation, including conceptual metaphor, conceptual metonymy, frame activation, script activation, and pragmatic inference.

Finally, discourse functions were analyzed by considering speaker intention, hearer interpretation, communicative setting, social hierarchy, and cultural expectations.

The following analytical methods were employed:

- descriptive analysis;
- comparative discourse analysis;
- cognitive semantic analysis;
- pragmatic interpretation;
- contextual analysis;
- conceptual modeling.

These complementary methods provide a comprehensive account of the interaction between taboo, euphemization, and discourse organization.

The analysis demonstrates that euphemization is unevenly distributed across discourse domains. Family discourse contains the highest proportion of euphemistic expressions, followed by medical and religious discourse. This distribution reflects differences in communicative sensitivity rather than lexical frequency.

Topics involving death, illness, sexuality, pregnancy, aging, disability, divorce, infertility, and financial hardship consistently triggered euphemistic language in both English and Uzbek.

However, the mechanisms responsible for euphemization differed considerably.

English discourse primarily relies upon indirect conceptualization.

Uzbek discourse more frequently incorporates cultural symbolism, religious reference, honor-related expressions, and traditional etiquette.

These findings suggest that discourse structure determines both the selection and interpretation of euphemistic constructions.

Family discourse demonstrates the greatest diversity of euphemistic strategies because interpersonal relationships require emotional sensitivity and long-term communicative cooperation.

For example,

English

They're expecting their first child.

The literal expression *pregnant* is replaced by the conceptual process of expectation.

The discourse emphasizes anticipation rather than biological condition.

Similarly,

He's seeing someone.

does not explicitly mention romantic involvement.

Instead, the discourse foregrounds social interaction while backgrounding intimacy.

In Uzbek family discourse,

Ularining xonadoniga farzand nasib qildi.

instead of

Farzand tug'ildi.

The discourse highlights divine blessing rather than biological childbirth.

Another example is

Qizining baxti ochildi.

instead of

Qizi turmushga chiqdi.

Marriage is conceptualized through prosperity and happiness rather than legal union.

Conclusion/Recommendations. These examples illustrate that English family discourse tends toward psychological indirectness, whereas Uzbek discourse integrates cultural and religious conceptualizations.

References

1. Allan, K., & Burridge, K. Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. - 2006.
2. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. - 1987.
3. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. - 1980.
4. Langacker, R. W. Foundations of Cognitive Grammar. Vol. 1. Stanford: Stanford University Press. - 1987.
5. Fillmore, C. J. Frame Semantics. In Linguistics in the Morning Calm. Seoul: Hanshin Publishing. - 1982.
6. Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities. New York: Basic Books. - 2002.
7. van Dijk, T. A. Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. - 2008.