
Taboo Language and Pragmatic Constraints in English and Uzbek: A Comparative Pragmatic Analysis

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Annotation *This comparative study examines taboo language and pragmatic constraints in English and Uzbek through the lens of sociolinguistic and pragmatic theory. Taboo words, euphemisms, and politeness strategies serve as cultural markers that reflect societal norms, values, and interpersonal dynamics. Drawing on recent cross-linguistic research, including multi-lab studies spanning 17 countries and 13 languages (Sulpizio et al., 2024), this article analyzes how speakers of English and Uzbek navigate sensitive topics such as bodily functions, death, disease, sexuality, and profanity. The study employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as a theoretical framework to understand face-saving mechanisms and pragmatic strategies in both languages. Findings reveal that while English demonstrates moderate informality with context-dependent taboo use, Uzbek culture enforces stricter avoidance patterns rooted in Islamic values and collectivist social structures. The research contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics by highlighting culture-specific manifestations of linguistic taboo and their implications for intercultural communication, language teaching, and translation studies.*

Keywords *Taboo language, pragmatic constraints, euphemism, politeness theory, cross-cultural pragmatics, English-Uzbek comparison*

Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida tabu leksikasi hamda pragmatik cheklovlar: qiyosiy pragmatik tahlil

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Annotatsiya *Mazkur qiyosiy tadqiqot ingliz va o'zbek tillarida tabu leksikasi hamda pragmatik cheklovlarni sotsiolingvistik va pragmatik nazariya nuqtai nazaridan o'rganadi. Tabu so'zlar, evfemizmlar hamda muloyimlik (politeness) strategiyalari jamiyat me'yorlari, qadriyatlar va shaxslararo munosabatlarni aks ettiruvchi muhim madaniy ko'rsatkichlar hisoblanadi. 17 ta mamlakat va 13 ta tilni qamrab olgan ko'p laboratoriyali tadqiqotlar natijalari (Sulpizio va boshq., 2024) asosida ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tilida so'zlashuvchilar tananing fiziologik funksiyalari, o'lim, kasallik, jinsiylik va haqoratli ifodalar kabi nozik mavzularni qanday ifodalashi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda Brown va Levinson (1987) tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan muloyimlik nazariyasi nazariy asos sifatida qo'llanilib, har ikki tilda "yuzni saqlash" mexanizmlari hamda pragmatik strategiyalar o'rganiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, ingliz tilida tabu leksikasining qo'llanilishi kontekstga bog'liq holda nisbatan erkinroq bo'lsa, o'zbek madaniyatida islomiy qadriyatlar va kollektiv ijtimoiy tuzilma ta'sirida qat'iyroq cheklovlar kuzatiladi. Mazkur tadqiqot madaniyatlararo pragmatika sohasini boyitib, lingvistik tabu hodisalarining madaniyatga xos ko'rinishlari hamda ularning madaniyatlararo muloqot, til o'qitish va tarjima tadqiqotlari uchun ahamiyatini yoritadi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Tabu leksikasi, pragmatik cheklovlar, evfemizm, muloyimlik nazariyasi, madaniyatlararo pragmatika, ingliz-o'zbek qiyosiy tahlili*

Табуированная лексика и прагматические ограничения в английском и узбекском языках: сравнительный прагматический анализ

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Аннотация *Данное сравнительное исследование рассматривает табуированную лексику и прагматические ограничения в английском и узбекском языках через призму социолингвистической и прагматической теории. Табуированные слова, эвфемизмы и стратегии вежливости выступают важными культурными маркерами, отражающими социальные нормы, ценности и межличностные отношения. На основе современных межъязыковых исследований, включая многоцентровые исследования, охватывающие 17 стран и 13 языков (Sulpizio и др., 2024), в статье анализируется, каким образом носители английского и узбекского языков обсуждают чувствительные темы, такие как физиологические процессы организма, смерть, болезни, сексуальность и обсценная лексика. В качестве теоретической основы исследования используется теория вежливости Брауна и Левинсона (1987), позволяющая раскрыть механизмы сохранения «лица» и прагматические стратегии в обоих языках. Результаты исследования показывают, что в английском языке употребление табуированной лексики характеризуется умеренной неформальностью и контекстуальной зависимостью, тогда как в узбекской культуре наблюдаются более строгие ограничения, обусловленные исламскими ценностями и коллективистской социальной структурой. Исследование вносит вклад в развитие межкультурной прагматики, раскрывая культурно-специфические проявления языковых табу и их значение для межкультурной коммуникации, преподавания языков и переводоведения.*

Ключевые слова *Табуированная лексика, прагматические ограничения, эвфемизм, теория вежливости, межкультурная прагматика, сравнительный анализ английского и узбекского языков*

Introduction

Language serves not merely as a communication tool but as a complex system encoding cultural values, social hierarchies, and communal norms. Among the most culturally sensitive linguistic phenomena are taboo

words and expressions – those deemed inappropriate, offensive, or unmentionable within specific social contexts. The study of taboo language has gained renewed scholarly attention in the 21st century, with research spanning diverse disciplines including

discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and cognitive semantics (Crespo-Fernández, 2025). Recent empirical investigations reveal that taboo words, despite their prohibition, constitute approximately 0.5% of daily spoken language and 1% of written social media discourse (Sulpizio et al., 2024), underscoring their pervasive yet regulated presence in human communication.

The term "taboo" originates from the Polynesian word *tapu*, meaning sacred or forbidden, first introduced to English by Captain James Cook in 1777 during his South Pacific voyages. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2024), taboo refers to "a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice." In linguistic contexts, taboo encompasses expressions avoided because they violate community standards of politeness, decency, or respect. Closely intertwined with taboo is the concept of pragmatic constraints – the contextual and social rules governing appropriate language use, considering factors such as social distance, power relations, age, gender, and situational formality (Allan & Burridge, 2006).

This study undertakes a comparative analysis of taboo language in English and Uzbek, two languages representing distinct linguistic families (Germanic and Turkic) and divergent cultural paradigms (Western individualism versus Central Asian collectivism). While extensive research exists on English taboo language (Allan, 2018), comparative studies involving Uzbek remain limited despite the language's 34 million speakers. Recent work by Hazirdinov and Lee (2021), Alimov and Kupriyanova (2024), and Ibragimova (2023) has begun addressing this gap, revealing significant cross-cultural variations in euphemistic strategies and taboo conceptualization.

Theoretical framework

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for this analysis. Grounded in Goffman's (1967) concept of "face" – an

individual's public self-image and sense of social worth – the theory posits that all human interaction involves potential face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive face (the desire to be approved and appreciated) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). Politeness strategies emerge as mechanisms to mitigate these face threats, ranging from direct bald-on-record utterances to highly indirect off-record strategies.

The universality of politeness theory has been contested, particularly regarding non-Western cultures. Critics argue that the theory's emphasis on individual autonomy reflects Anglo-Saxon cultural biases and inadequately accounts for collectivist societies where social harmony and hierarchical relationships supersede individual face concerns. Nevertheless, the theory's core principles – face sensitivity, contextual variation, and strategic communication – remain valuable for cross-cultural analysis when adapted to culture-specific manifestations.

Allan and Burridge's (2006) seminal work *Forbidden Words* conceptualizes taboo as a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing linguistic, psychological, and social dimensions. They identify three primary motivations for linguistic taboo: fear and superstition (death, disease, supernatural entities), propriety and decency (bodily functions, sexuality), and respect and deference (sacred entities, authority figures). Euphemism – the substitution of offensive terms with more acceptable alternatives – serves as the principal avoidance mechanism, allowing speakers to reference taboo topics while maintaining social decorum.

Recent cognitive linguistic research emphasizes the metaphorical and metonymic processes underlying euphemism formation (Abdel-Raheem & Goubaa, 2024). Conceptual metaphors such as *DEATH IS A JOURNEY* (e.g., "passed away," "departed") and *BODY FUNCTIONS ARE NATURE'S CALL* illustrate how abstract conceptual mappings facilitate indirect

reference. The euphemism treadmill – the cyclical process whereby euphemistic terms acquire negative connotations over time, necessitating replacement – demonstrates the dynamic nature of taboo vocabulary (Hazirdinov & Lee, 2021).

Literature review

A comprehensive bibliometric analysis by Crespo-Fernández (2025) of taboo-related publications from 2000-2024 reveals that discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics constitute the dominant research disciplines, followed by cognitive semantics and psycholinguistics. The study identifies politeness theory, cognitive metaphor theory, and conversation analysis as prevailing theoretical frameworks. Methodologically, corpus linguistics and discourse analysis have emerged as primary approaches, reflecting a shift toward empirical, data-driven research.

Sulpizio et al.'s (2024) groundbreaking multi-lab study provides the most comprehensive cross-linguistic data on taboo words to date, covering 13 languages and 17 countries. The research demonstrates that taboo words universally exhibit extremely low valence (negative emotional quality) and high arousal across languages, yet significant cross-cultural variation exists in specific words' tabooeness and offensiveness ratings. This finding underscores the importance of community-specific sociocultural knowledge in taboo language research, challenging purely universal approaches.

Comparative taboo language research has predominantly focused on major world languages. Ahmed (2024) examined English taboo words in Arabic contexts, revealing systematic pragmatic violations when English profanity is translated or used by Arabic speakers. Abdel-Raheem and Goubaa (2024) analyzed taboo language in Egyptian op-eds, demonstrating how metaphorical and metonymic mechanisms facilitate face-saving in politically sensitive discourse. Kirejeva (2023) investigated gender differences in taboo language use during quarrels from a cross-

cultural perspective, finding that while men use more offensive language universally, cultural norms significantly mediate expression patterns.

Research on Uzbek taboo language and euphemism, though limited, has expanded significantly in recent years. Ibragimova (2023) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of taboo in English and Uzbek, identifying distinct conceptualization patterns rooted in Islamic traditions and collectivist social structures. Alimov and Kupriyanova (2024) examined communicative and pragmatic peculiarities of euphemisms in Russian and Uzbek, revealing that euphemistic strategies in Uzbek are particularly influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, especially regarding sexual relations and elder respect.

Hazirdinov and Lee (2021) applied Relevance Theory to euphemism in English and Uzbek, demonstrating how speakers create ad hoc concepts to achieve optimal relevance while maintaining politeness. Yuldosheva (2025) compared taboo and euphemism in Uzbek and German, emphasizing linguistic and cultural approaches. Xujanazarova and Yusupova (2023) analyzed euphemism functions in Uzbek literary discourse, identifying softening, veiling, communicative, and corrective functions as primary categories.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach combining contrastive linguistic analysis with pragmatic theory. Data sources include published research on taboo language in both English and Uzbek, dictionary definitions, literary texts, and documented euphemistic expressions. The analytical framework integrates three complementary perspectives:

1. *Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis:* Examination of taboo topics and euphemistic strategies in both languages, identifying semantic fields (bodily functions, death, sexuality, profanity) and analyzing avoidance mechanisms.

2. *Socio-Cultural Analysis*: Investigation of cultural values, religious influences, and social norms shaping taboo conceptualization and expression patterns in English and Uzbek speech communities.
3. *Pragmatic Analysis*: Application of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to understand face-management strategies and contextual constraints governing taboo language use.

The comparative analysis focuses on four primary taboo domains identified in the literature as universal yet culturally variable: bodily excretions and functions, death and disease, sexuality and reproduction, and profanity and swearing. For each domain, English and Uzbek expressions, euphemistic alternatives, and contextual usage patterns are examined to identify similarities and divergences.

Comparative analysis of Taboo Domains

In English, nearly all terms referring to human waste and bodily functions – excluding “tears” – are considered taboo in polite discourse. Historical polite forms such as “move the bowels” or “pass water” have become obsolete or perceived as overly formal. Clinical terminology (“defecate,” “urinate”) remains

confined to medical contexts, while euphemistic expressions proliferate in everyday speech. Common English euphemisms include “answer the call of nature,” “do one’s needs,” “use the facilities,” and “powder one’s nose.” Notably, even the word “toilet” undergoes euphemistic replacement with “restroom,” “bathroom,” “lavatory,” “loo,” or “john” – terms often semantically misleading (one does not literally “rest” in a restroom).

Uzbek demonstrates parallel avoidance patterns with culture-specific manifestations. Direct references to bodily functions (*siydik chiqarish, najis, ich ketish*) are strictly avoided in polite conversation, considered highly inappropriate especially in the presence of elders or mixed-gender groups. Euphemistic alternatives dominate: “*tashqariga chiqmoq*” (literally “go outside”), “*tabiat chaqiryapti*” (nature is calling), or indirect phrases using modal constructions. The Uzbek cultural concepts of *adab* (politeness) and *hurmat* (respect) exert stronger regulatory force than in English, resulting in more pervasive euphemism use across social contexts.

Table 1 presents comparative euphemistic expressions for bodily functions in English and Uzbek, revealing both universal conceptual patterns (nature metaphors, spatial deixis) and language-specific strategies.

Category	English	Uzbek
Nature metaphor	Answer the call of nature	Tabiat chaqiryapti
Spatial euphemism	Use the facilities, Go to the bathroom	Tashqariga chiqmoq (go outside)
Activity euphemism	Wash your hands, Powder your nose	Qo'lni yuvmoq (wash hands)
Children's language	Go pee/poo, Tinkle	Pishdi/kakadi qilmoq

Table 1. *Euphemistic Expressions for Bodily Functions*

The cross-linguistic comparison reveals universal cognitive patterns in euphemism formation – particularly nature metaphors and spatial displacement – while cultural values determine the degree and contexts of usage. Uzbek's more extensive euphemistic system reflects heightened cultural sensitivity to bodily

topics, influenced by Islamic modesty norms and collectivist face concerns.

Death represents a particularly potent taboo domain across cultures, though manifestations vary significantly. In English, the fear and discomfort associated with death motivate extensive euphemistic avoidance.

Direct terminology (“died,” “death,” “dead”) is frequently replaced with softening expressions: “passed away,” “departed this life,” “went to his reward,” “went home,” “went to a better place,” or the colloquial “kicked the bucket.” These euphemisms employ metaphorical conceptualizations of death as journey, transition, or reward, mitigating the emotional impact and maintaining conversational politeness.

Disease, particularly stigmatized conditions, similarly undergoes euphemistic treatment in English. Cancer is often referred to as “the Big C” or described vaguely as “a serious illness” or “terminal condition.” Mental health conditions elicit indirect expressions: “not all there,” “confused,” “having difficulties,” reflecting historical stigma and contemporary efforts toward sensitivity.

Uzbek culture demonstrates even stronger avoidance patterns regarding death. The direct statement “o’ldi” (died) is rarely uttered in casual conversation, considered disrespectful and potentially unlucky. Instead, religious and metaphorical euphemisms dominate: “vafot etdi” (passed away – formal), “olamdan o’tdi” (left the world), “Allohning rahmatiga yetdi” (reached God’s mercy), or “jonini topshirdi” (surrendered the soul). These expressions reflect Islamic worldview elements, conceptualizing death as divine transition rather than termination.

Disease euphemism in Uzbek similarly reflects cultural sensitivity. “Saraton” (cancer) is avoided in direct reference, replaced with “og’ir kasal” (serious illness) or “jiddiy muammo” (serious problem). Mental illness remains highly stigmatized, discussed through vague formulations: “sog’lig’ida muammo bor” (has health problems) or “boshiga muammo tushgan” (problem befell his head). The prevalence of indirect expressions reflects stronger cultural taboos around illness and disability compared to contemporary Western contexts.

English profanity encompasses diverse semantic categories including religious oaths

(“hell,” “damn”), sexual references (“fuck”), bodily functions (“shit,” “piss”), and derogatory terms (“bastard,” “bitch”). The concept of “four-letter words” reflects the concentration of short, Anglo-Saxon-origin taboo terms. However, English profanity demonstrates significant contextual flexibility: mild swearing may function casually among peers, humorously in media, or emphatically in informal settings, while maintaining prohibition in formal contexts (Stapleton, 2020).

The social acceptability of English swearing has evolved considerably. Modern informal discourse, particularly among younger generations and in digital communication, exhibits increased tolerance for mild profanity. Swearing serves multiple pragmatic functions: cathartic expression (“Damn it!”), social bonding (“You’re a badass!”), emphasis (“This is fucking amazing!”), and humor. This functional diversity reflects individualist cultural values prioritizing authentic self-expression within appropriate contexts.

Uzbek profanity, by contrast, operates under substantially stricter social constraints. Direct sexual references and family-directed insults (especially toward mothers or sisters) constitute the most severe taboos, considered culturally explosive and morally transgressive. Such expressions are almost never used in public or mixed-gender settings, with violations carrying significant social sanctions. The cultural importance of family honor and sexual modesty, reinforced by Islamic values, creates powerful barriers against profane speech.

Animal-based insults (“it” [dog], “eshak” [donkey], “tulki” [fox]) represent milder profanity categories in Uzbek, though still inappropriate in formal contexts. Euphemistic expressions for frustration (“voy dod,” “baraka topgur”) allow emotional release without true profanity. The absence of casual or humorous swearing in Uzbek reflects collectivist values prioritizing social harmony, respect for authority, and maintenance of communal face over individual expressive freedom. Table 2

summarizes key differences in profanity usage between English and Uzbek,

highlighting divergent cultural attitudes toward swearing.

Dimension	English	Uzbek
Social acceptability	Context-dependent; casual use increasingly normalized	Strictly prohibited in public; strong social sanctions
Primary functions	Catharsis, emphasis, humor, social bonding	Aggression, insult (limited contexts)
Severity hierarchy	Mild (damn, hell) → Strong sexual (fuck)	Animal insults → Family/sexual references (most severe)
Cultural basis	Individual expression, authenticity	Family honor, religious values, collective face
Media presence	Common in entertainment, often censored in broadcast	Virtually absent from mainstream media

Table 2. *Profanity and Swearing: Cross-Cultural Comparison*

These differences reflect fundamental contrasts in cultural orientation: English's individualism allows greater freedom for expressive profanity within appropriate boundaries, while Uzbek's collectivism enforces stricter norms prioritizing social harmony and respect for traditional values.

Politeness strategies and Pragmatic constraints

English politeness strategies align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, emphasizing negative face concerns – the desire to avoid imposition. Characteristic features include indirect requests ("Could you possibly...?"), modal verbs ("would," "might," "could"), hedging ("perhaps," "maybe," "sort of"), and mitigating expressions that minimize face threat. The preference for negative politeness reflects individualist cultural values prioritizing personal autonomy and voluntary cooperation.

However, English also employs positive politeness strategies in appropriate contexts: demonstrating solidarity, using informal address, expressing interest in the interlocutor, and employing inclusive pronouns ("we," "us"). The balance between positive and negative politeness varies by relationship type, situational formality, and regional culture.

Contemporary English, particularly in North American contexts, increasingly favors casualness and directness among peers, though maintaining formality in institutional settings.

Regarding taboo language specifically, English pragmatic constraints emphasize contextual appropriateness. Swearing may be acceptable in informal peer interactions, certain professional contexts (construction, military), and entertainment media, but remains prohibited in formal settings, professional communication with strangers or superiors, and public discourse. This contextual flexibility allows speakers to navigate between casual authenticity and formal propriety (Stapleton, 2020).

Uzbek politeness operates fundamentally differently, grounded in collectivist values and hierarchical social structures. Two central concepts – *hurmat* (respect) and *hayo* (modesty/shame – govern communicative behavior. Politeness manifestations include extensive honorific systems, indirect communication patterns, and strict behavioral codes especially regarding elders, superiors, and cross-gender interaction (Mamadiyoro'va, 2025).

The honorific system employs kinship terms as respectful address forms: "aka" (older brother), "opa" (older sister), "amaki" (paternal uncle), "aya" (maternal aunt), "ustoz" (teacher). These terms mark social distance and hierarchy, used even with non-relatives to show respect. The second-person plural "siz" (formal you) replaces singular "sen" (informal you) in polite contexts, similar to European T-V distinction but with broader application reflecting stronger hierarchical norms.

Indirect communication represents another key feature of Uzbek politeness. Direct refusals are avoided; speakers employ circumlocution, hedging, and positive framing even when declining requests. This indirectness maintains social harmony and protects collective face – both speaker's and addressee's – reflecting concern for group cohesion over individual clarity. Uzbek speakers value

"reading between the lines" as a communicative competence, whereas Western communicators may perceive such indirectness as evasive or unclear (Hazirdinov & Lee, 2021).

Taboo language constraints in Uzbek are absolute rather than contextual. Profanity remains prohibited across virtually all social contexts, with violations carrying serious reputational consequences. Sexual topics are strictly avoided in public and mixed-gender settings. Bodily function references require euphemistic expression regardless of formality level. These rigid constraints reflect Islamic influence, strong family values, and collectivist face concerns where individual transgression threatens group honor (Ibragimova, 2023). Table 3 synthesizes the primary dimensions of politeness and pragmatic constraints in English and Uzbek, highlighting systematic cross-cultural variation.

Feature	English	Uzbek
Primary orientation	Negative politeness (autonomy, non-imposition)	Positive politeness (hierarchy, respect, harmony)
Communication style	Direct with mitigation; clarity valued	Highly indirect; implicit communication
Honorific usage	Limited (titles, formal Mr./Ms.)	Extensive kinship-based system (aka, opa, ustoz)
Taboo flexibility	Context-dependent; casual settings more permissive	Absolute constraints; minimal context variation
Refusal strategies	Can be direct with softening (I'm afraid I can't...)	Highly indirect; circumlocution and positive framing
Cultural values	Individualism, authenticity, efficiency	Collectivism, hurmat (respect), hayo (modesty)

Table 3. *Politeness Strategies and Constraints: English vs. Uzbek*

This comparative framework reveals how politeness systems embody broader cultural logics. English prioritizes individual autonomy and communicative efficiency, accepting contextual variation in taboo expression. Uzbek prioritizes collective harmony and hierarchical respect, maintaining rigid taboo constraints to preserve social order and family honor.

Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals both universal and culture-specific dimensions of taboo language. Universally, taboo words exhibit low valence and high arousal across languages (Sulpizio et al., 2024), and similar conceptual domains – bodily functions, death, sexuality – undergo linguistic avoidance.

Euphemistic strategies employ shared cognitive mechanisms including metaphor (DEATH IS A JOURNEY), metonymy (referring to toilets by activities performed there), and semantic generalization (replacing specific terms with vague alternatives).

However, cultural specificity fundamentally shapes taboo realization. What constitutes taboo, the severity of prohibition, acceptable contexts, and consequences of violation vary dramatically. English taboos reflect Christian heritage (religious oaths), secular modernization (gradual profanity normalization), and individualist values (contextual flexibility). Uzbek taboos reflect Islamic influence (absolute sexual modesty), collectivist social structures (family honor protection), and hierarchical organization (elder respect, gender segregation).

Sulpizio et al.'s (2024) finding of significant cross-country variability in taboo ratings, even for identical words in the same language spoken in different countries, underscores the primacy of cultural context over linguistic structure. This supports the theoretical position that taboo is fundamentally a social-pragmatic rather than purely semantic phenomenon, requiring community-specific knowledge for appropriate interpretation (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Pizarro Pedraza, 2018).

The English-Uzbek comparison illuminates limitations in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory while confirming its core insights. The theory's emphasis on face concerns and strategic communication remains valid cross-culturally, but its specific formulation – particularly the negative politeness preference and individual agency assumption – reflects Western cultural biases (Matsumoto, 1988; Gu, 1990; Fukada & Asato, 2004).

Uzbek politeness demonstrates alternative configurations of face concerns. Rather than emphasizing individual autonomy (negative face), Uzbek prioritizes relational harmony and hierarchical positioning (positive

face concerns within collectivist framework). Politeness operates less as strategic individual choice than as prescribed social duty determined by hierarchical relationships. This suggests the need for culturally situated politeness theories recognizing multiple organizational principles rather than assuming universal individual-centered models.

Nevertheless, the comparative analysis confirms Brown and Levinson's fundamental insight that face management universally structures human communication. The specific faces valued and strategies employed vary, but the underlying concern with social image and interpersonal positioning appears cross-culturally robust. Taboo language and euphemism represent specialized domains where face concerns intensify, making them particularly revealing of cultural values and social organization.

Cross-cultural variation in taboo language and politeness norms creates significant potential for pragmatic failure in intercultural communication. English speakers may perceive Uzbek indirectness as evasive, unclear, or inefficient, while Uzbek speakers may interpret English directness as rude, aggressive, or disrespectful. Casual English swearing among peers may shock Uzbek interlocutors, while Uzbek elaborate honorific systems may seem unnecessarily formal or hierarchical to egalitarian-minded English speakers.

These misunderstandings extend beyond mere social awkwardness, potentially impacting professional collaboration, diplomatic relations, educational settings, and business negotiations. For instance, an English-speaking manager's direct negative feedback may cause severe face loss for an Uzbek employee accustomed to indirect criticism. Conversely, an Uzbek speaker's euphemistic refusal may be misinterpreted as acceptance by an English speaker expecting explicit negation.

Developing pragmatic competence – understanding not only linguistic forms but their contextual appropriateness – is essential

for successful intercultural communication (Thomas, 1983). This requires explicit instruction on cultural norms governing taboo, politeness, and face management, not merely vocabulary and grammar. Language education programs must integrate pragmatic and sociolinguistic components, using authentic materials illustrating contextual variation and cultural values (Mamadiyurova, 2025).

Taboo language poses particular challenges for translation and media localization. Direct translation of English profanity into Uzbek contexts may cause severe offense inappropriate to the original's pragmatic force, while omission may fail to convey intended emotional intensity. Translators must navigate complex equivalence relationships considering not only semantic content but pragmatic function, social acceptability, and emotional impact (Kirejeva, 2023).

Media content featuring English-language swearing requires careful adaptation for Uzbek audiences. Simply dubbing or subtitling profanity would violate cultural norms and potentially face censorship. Strategies include euphemistic substitution, tonal markers indicating frustration without explicit language, or contextual framing making emotional state clear without taboo words. However, these adaptations inevitably alter pragmatic effects, potentially changing character portrayal and narrative tone.

Conversely, translating Uzbek texts for English audiences requires recognizing implicit cultural references and making explicit the social meanings conveyed through honorific choices, euphemistic expressions, and indirect communication patterns. The translator must serve as cultural mediator, explaining contextual factors that Uzbek audiences intuitively understand but English readers may miss (Yuldosheva, 2025).

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of taboo language and pragmatic constraints in English

and Uzbek demonstrates how linguistic forms embody cultural values, social structures, and interpersonal norms. While certain taboo domains – bodily functions, death, sexuality – appear cross-culturally, their specific realization, severity, and management vary fundamentally between individualist and collectivist cultural systems.

English taboo language operates with contextual flexibility, reflecting individualist values prioritizing personal autonomy and authentic self-expression within appropriate bounds. Moderate informality pervades contemporary English discourse, with profanity serving diverse pragmatic functions including catharsis, emphasis, social bonding, and humor. Politeness strategies emphasize negative face concerns – avoiding imposition – through indirect requests, modal softening, and hedging.

Uzbek taboo language, by contrast, maintains rigid constraints reflecting collectivist values prioritizing social harmony, hierarchical respect, and family honor. Profanity remains strictly prohibited across contexts, with violations carrying serious social sanctions. Sexual topics and bodily functions require extensive euphemistic mediation. Politeness strategies emphasize positive face concerns within hierarchical frameworks, employing elaborate honorific systems, indirect communication, and circumlocution to maintain collective face.

These differences reflect deeper cultural paradigms: English's individualism versus Uzbek's collectivism, Western secularization versus Islamic influence, egalitarian ideals versus hierarchical social organization. Understanding these cultural foundations is essential for avoiding pragmatic failure in intercultural communication, developing effective language pedagogy, and producing culturally sensitive translations.

Future research should expand comparative taboo studies to additional language pairs, investigate pragmatic variation within Uzbek-speaking communities (urban vs.

rural, generational differences, regional dialects), and examine how globalization and social media influence taboo norms, particularly among younger generations increasingly exposed to Western cultural products. Experimental studies measuring cross-cultural pragmatic competence and miscommunication patterns would complement qualitative analyses, while longitudinal research could track diachronic changes in taboo boundaries as societies evolve.

Ultimately, the study of taboo language reveals language's profound interconnection with culture, cognition, and society. What speakers avoid saying often speaks as loudly as what they express, marking the boundaries of the culturally permissible and reflecting core values about propriety, respect, and human relationships. By understanding these boundaries and their cultural foundations, we gain deeper insight into human communication's universal patterns and remarkable diversity.

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