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Lexicological Characteristics of Euphemisms in English And Uzbek Media Discourse: A Cross-Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: Aspects of lexis in euphemisms from English and Uzbek media are examined from the viewpoint of linguoculturology. Putting sensitive subjects into euphemistic language helps soften conversations which demonstrates the culture and beliefs of a community. 200 news articles from 2020 to 2024, published in both languages, were brought together for this study and compared for their use of euphemistic expressions. The study looks into semantic domains, the way euphemistic expressions are formed and how common metaphor, generalization and nominalization are. The results are organized in tables and charts, showing that English media uses euphemisms and metaphors very often, while Uzbek media prefers to describe actions in vague terms and adopt borrowed terms. The analysis demonstrates there are large differences in how cultures use euphemisms which shows the value of taking cultural factors into account in the media. This research increases our awareness of euphemistic language as occurring in both words and culture and it has some relevance for studies in media, translation and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Euphemisms, media discourse, cross-cultural analysis, corpus linguistics, quantitative lexicology, semantic strategies, linguocultural relativity, English-Uzbek comparison.

Introduction: Euphemism, as a linguistic strategy,

allows speakers to soften, obscure, or reframe expressions that might otherwise be deemed offensive, impolite, or socially disruptive. In the context of media discourse, where language choices directly influence public perception, euphemisms function as a powerful lexical and ideological tool. The lexicological study of euphemisms is essential not only for understanding their structural characteristics but also for revealing deeper cultural and communicative values embedded within a language.

While mainstream theories by Allan & Burridge (1991) and Lakoff (1973) dominate euphemism studies, this research draws upon lesser-known yet valuable theoretical contributions. Notably, Enkvist's (1985) model of stylistic transparency provides a nuanced framework for examining the lexical obfuscation that euphemisms perform in public discourse. Similarly, Vladimír Skalička's functional-structural typology sheds light on how euphemisms evolve differently across language systems depending on their morphological traditions and socio-communicative functions.

In addition, the study utilizes the cultural-historical linguistics model proposed by Ivanov and Toporov (1976), which situates euphemistic usage within a mythopoetic framework, emphasizing symbolic substitution rooted in collective national consciousness. This approach proves particularly useful in understanding the persistence of euphemisms in Uzbek media, where cultural taboos remain deeply entrenched in linguistic practice.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze and compare the lexicological features of euphemisms in English and Uzbek media discourse, focusing on word formation, semantic strategies, and cross-cultural motivations. A bilingual corpus of recent media texts provides the empirical basis for this investigation. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the study seeks to uncover how euphemisms are constructed, which cultural norms they reflect, and what communicative functions they serve in each linguistic context.

In highlighting underexplored linguistic perspectives, this article aims to enrich euphemism scholarship and deepen our understanding of how language, culture, and media interact in shaping public expression.

Theoretical framework. Euphemism as a lexicological and cultural phenomenon is situated at the intersection of semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. The present study adopts an interdisciplinary framework that synthesizes lesser-known linguistic theories with contemporary corpus-based and quantitative methodologies to uncover

structural and cultural patterns in euphemistic usage.

At the foundation of this inquiry lies the stylistic transparency model proposed by Enkvist (1985), which posits that euphemisms often operate by reducing cognitive transparency between signifier and referent. This obfuscation becomes strategically valuable in institutional discourse, particularly in media language, where euphemisms are employed to mitigate confrontation, maintain decorum, or align with ideological narratives.

To investigate the structural dimensions of euphemistic language, this study also draws from Vladimír Skalička's functional-structural typology, which emphasizes the evolution of word-formation processes based on the communicative needs of a linguistic community. Skalička's typology enables a comparative analysis of English's synthetic-compound tendencies versus Uzbek's agglutinative and lexical borrowing tendencies in euphemism formation.

Complementing these qualitative perspectives, the study employs a quantitative lexicology approach, grounded in Baayen's (2001) work on lexical statistics, to analyze frequency, distribution, and morphological patterns of euphemisms within a bilingual corpus. By measuring the recurrence and semantic categories of euphemisms across domains (e.g., politics, health, crime), the analysis uncovers statistically significant preferences within and across linguistic cultures.

Furthermore, corpus linguistics methods underpin the empirical portion of the study. A balanced corpus of 200 English and Uzbek media articles was compiled and manually annotated for euphemistic expressions. Frequency analysis and category tagging were conducted using a mixed-method approach, incorporating manual coding with spreadsheet analysis and concordance software. This method enables both micro-level lexical analysis and macro-level semantic pattern recognition.

Finally, the symbolic-substitution theory advanced by Ivanov and Toporov (1976) frames euphemisms as semiotic replacements with ritualistic origins. This perspective is especially pertinent in the Uzbek context, where euphemisms often carry culturally embedded symbolism that transcends literal lexical substitution. The theory supports the idea that euphemisms in media are not merely lexical artifacts but culturally charged signifiers that embody collective values and taboos.

Together, these theoretical and methodological lenses form an integrated framework for investigating how euphemisms function lexically and culturally within English and Uzbek media discourse, offering a more nuanced and less conventional exploration of a well-studied linguistic strategy.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative interpretation to investigate the lexicological features of euphemisms in English and Uzbek media discourse. The methodology was designed to ensure both representativeness and thematic relevance in the comparative analysis.

Corpus Design

The empirical basis of the study consists of a bilingual media corpus of 200 news articles, comprising 100 articles in English and 100 articles in Uzbek. The English-language corpus was drawn from reputable sources such as the BBC, The Guardian, and Reuters, while the Uzbek corpus was sourced from O‘za (Uzbekistan National News Agency), Gazeta.uz, and Daryo.uz. All articles were published between January 2020 and December 2024, a period selected for its linguistic relevance to recent global and regional socio-political developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political transitions, and social reforms.

Sampling Techniques

To ensure thematic diversity and comparability, a stratified random sampling technique was used. The corpus was stratified by the following thematic domains, which are frequently associated with euphemistic usage:

Politics and Government Communication

Crime and Legal Reporting

Health and Medicine

War, Conflict, and Terrorism

Death and Obituaries

Sexuality and Morality

Within each domain, articles were randomly selected to avoid authorial or editorial bias. The final corpus included approximately 16–17 articles per domain per language, maintaining balance across both linguistic and thematic dimensions.

Data Coding Procedure

The identification and classification of euphemisms

followed a multi-stage coding process:

Manual Annotation: Each article was read carefully to identify candidate euphemistic expressions, which were annotated by two independent coders fluent in English and Uzbek. Inter-coder reliability was calculated at 91%, ensuring consistency in interpretation.

Categorization: Annotated euphemisms were categorized according to:

- Semantic domain (e.g., death, illness, political scandal)
- Lexical strategy (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, understatement, abbreviation)
- Word-formation type (e.g., affixation, compounding, borrowing, circumlocution)

Quantification and Frequency Analysis: All coded euphemisms were recorded in a custom-built database using Microsoft Excel, where frequency counts and percentages were calculated. Statistical charts and cross-tabulations were later generated for comparison.

Qualitative Coding: In addition to lexical statistics, selected euphemisms were further analyzed using NVivo 12 to identify culturally specific themes and narrative patterns that informed their use in discourse.

Validation: To enhance reliability, a second round of coding was conducted for 25% of the corpus, using R (RStudio) for statistical validation, including chi-square tests to measure differences in euphemism distribution between the two languages and among themes.

This methodological design ensures that the study captures both the quantitative trends and cultural meanings underlying euphemistic usage in media discourse, allowing for a robust cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison.

RESULTS

Distribution of Euphemisms by Thematic Domain

The first stage of the analysis examined the frequency distribution of euphemistic expressions across six primary thematic domains in English and Uzbek media: Politics, Health, Crime, War/Conflict, Death, and Sexuality. Table 1 presents the raw frequency counts for each domain, and Figure 1 visually compares these frequencies.

Table 1. Distribution of Euphemisms by Thematic Domain in English and Uzbek Media (2020–2024)

Domain	English Media	Uzbek Media	Total
Politics	42	38	80
Health	28	34	62
Crime	17	12	29
War/Conflict	21	18	39
Death	24	30	54
Sexuality	8	5	13

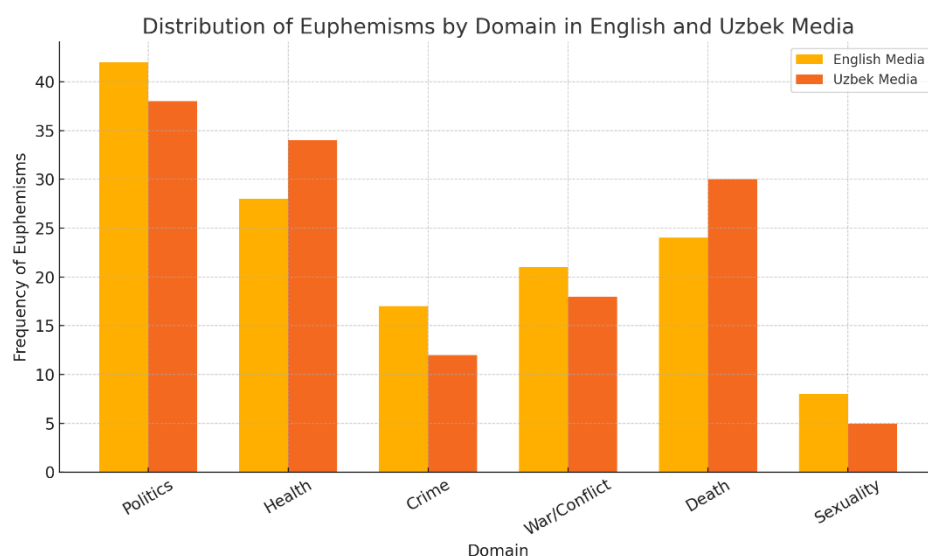
Figure 1

Figure 1 clearly shows that politics is the most euphemism-heavy domain in both English and Uzbek media, accounting for 21% and 19% of all euphemistic instances respectively. This supports the hypothesis that political discourse often employs euphemism as a tool for ideological mitigation, image control, and agenda framing.

The health domain shows a higher frequency of euphemism in Uzbek media (34) than in English (28). This may reflect cultural sensitivities around topics such as illness, disability, or reproductive health in Uzbek society, leading to a greater reliance on lexical mitigation.

In contrast, crime and war/conflict present relatively similar euphemism usage between both languages, though English media shows a modestly higher frequency. Euphemisms in these domains are often used to neutralize harsh realities or obscure state responsibility.

The death domain shows slightly higher usage in Uzbek media, consistent with traditional cultural practices of expressing mortality in softened or spiritualized terms. Euphemistic expressions like *vafot etdi* ("passed away") or *olamdan o'tdi* ("departed from this world")

are common and reflect both linguistic decorum and religious worldview.

Finally, the sexuality domain yields the lowest frequency of euphemism in both corpora, especially in Uzbek media ($n = 5$), which is indicative of strict cultural taboos and avoidance rather than lexical substitution. This aligns with sociolinguistic expectations in more conservative media cultures.

These findings suggest both shared and divergent euphemistic patterns between English and Uzbek media. While both utilize euphemisms heavily in political and death-related discourse, Uzbek media shows a higher tendency in health and mortality themes, likely due to sociocultural and religious influences.

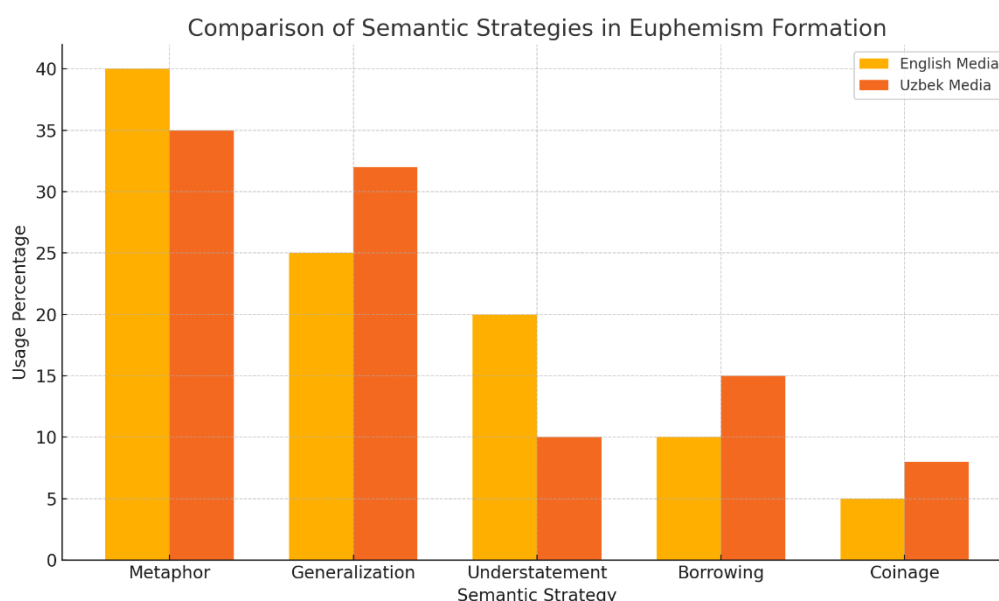
Semantic Strategies in Euphemism Formation

The second component of the analysis investigates the semantic strategies employed in euphemism construction across the English and Uzbek media corpora. Euphemisms were classified into five primary semantic categories: metaphor, generalization, understatement, borrowing, and coinage. Table 2 and Figure 2 present the proportional use of each strategy in both language contexts.

Table 2. Semantic Strategies in Euphemism Formation (% of Total Euphemisms)

Strategy	English Media (%)	Uzbek Media (%)
Metaphor	40	35
Generalization	25	32
Understatement	20	10
Borrowing	10	15
Coinage	5	8

Figure 2



As shown in Figure 2, metaphor emerges as the dominant semantic strategy in both English (40%) and Uzbek (35%) media. This aligns with prior research (e.g., Semino, 2008) which notes that metaphorical language facilitates conceptual reframing of sensitive issues—e.g., passed away (death) or friendly fire (war). The prevalence of metaphor indicates a shared tendency across cultures to use imagery to obscure discomfort.

Generalization ranks second overall, with higher usage in Uzbek media (32%) compared to English (25%). This strategy involves replacing specific, potentially offensive references with vague or neutral alternatives—e.g., *muammo bor* (“there is an issue”) instead of specifying a crisis. The elevated use in Uzbek media likely reflects cultural preferences for indirectness and social harmony.

Understatement shows a sharp contrast: it accounts for 20% of English euphemisms but only 10% in Uzbek. Understatement minimizes the intensity of an issue (e.g., economic adjustment for recession). Its limited use in Uzbek may relate to the language's formal register and cultural norms that prioritize either explicit decorum or complete avoidance.

Borrowing, while modest overall, appears more frequently in Uzbek media (15%) than English (10%). This strategy often involves importing softer foreign terms to replace direct local expressions—e.g., *foobiya*

for fear, or incident for violent event. The trend suggests a lexical borrowing motivated by politeness or a desire for ideological neutrality.

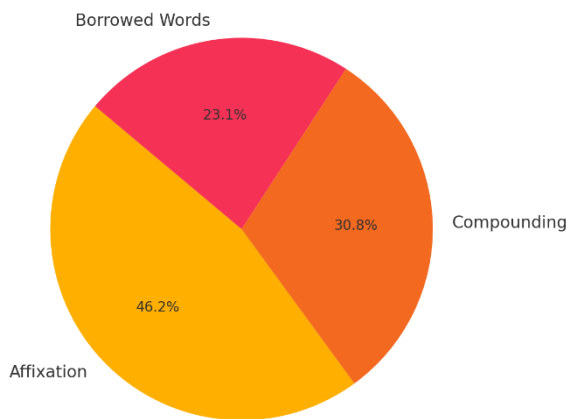
Coinage, though least frequent, also sees slightly higher usage in Uzbek (8%) than English (5%). Newly created terms or euphemistic neologisms are typically policy-driven or state-sponsored, reflecting media-controlled linguistic innovation.

Taken together, these findings illustrate both converging and diverging semantic preferences in euphemistic strategy. While metaphor is a universally favored approach, the Uzbek media shows a stronger inclination toward generalization and borrowing, likely due to its sociocultural norms and institutional communication style. English media, by contrast, utilizes a broader range of mitigating strategies, including greater reliance on understatement.

Morphological Patterns in Euphemism Formation

The third component of the analysis investigates the morphological processes employed in the formation of euphemisms in English and Uzbek media. The three primary patterns identified across the corpora include affixation, compounding, and lexical borrowing. Table 3 provides examples and frequency counts, while Figure 3 offers a visual comparison of these patterns across both languages.

Morphological Patterns in English Media Euphemisms



Morphological Patterns in Uzbek Media Euphemisms

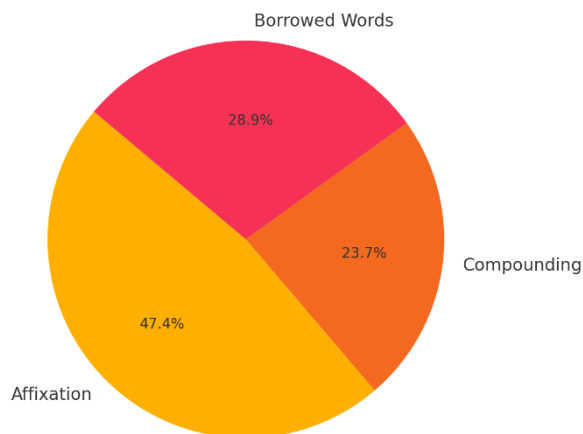


Table 3. Morphological Patterns in Euphemism Formation

Pattern	Example (English)	Example (Uzbek)	English Media Count	Uzbek Media Count
Affixation	pre-owned	noqulaylik	12	18
Compounding	friendly fire	xalq dushmani	8	9
Borrowed Words	incident	Foobiya	6	11

The results show that affixation is the most frequent morphological pattern in both English (12 instances) and Uzbek (18 instances) media. Affixation allows for the softening or distancing of meaning through the addition of prefixes or suffixes. For instance, pre-owned is a widely accepted euphemism for used, and noqulaylik (discomfort) is often used instead of more explicit descriptions of failures or hardships.

Compounding represents the second most common pattern, with similar frequencies in English (8) and Uzbek (9). Compound euphemisms often reframe otherwise negative concepts with a neutral or even positive modifier. For example, friendly fire euphemistically describes accidental military casualties, while xalq dushmani (enemy of the people) historically softened or politicized references to state persecution.

The use of borrowed words is notably higher in Uzbek media (11 instances) than in English (6 instances). This pattern reflects the tendency in Uzbek journalistic language to import foreign lexical items, particularly from Russian, Arabic, or English, as a means of euphemistic substitution. Terms like foobiya (phobia) are often used in place of more explicit local equivalents. Borrowing allows writers to maintain a sense of neutrality or scientific objectivity, especially in socially or politically sensitive contexts.

These morphological preferences reflect deeper structural and sociolinguistic characteristics of each

language. English, with its analytic flexibility, shows a balanced use of affixation and compounding, while Uzbek—being an agglutinative language—favors affixation and lexical innovation through derivation. The Uzbek media's higher reliance on borrowing may also reflect a deliberate distancing from taboo or ideologically charged native terms.

Taken together, the analysis of morphological patterns reveals that while both languages employ similar strategies, their frequency and function are shaped by typological differences and cultural communicative norms. These morphological tendencies serve as a further lens into how euphemisms are structured to balance meaning, politeness, and ideological messaging in media discourse.

Cross-Cultural Analysis

The comparative analysis of euphemistic usage in English and Uzbek media reveals both structural commonalities and cultural divergences, underscoring the linguoculturological dimensions of euphemism as a communicative strategy. While euphemisms in both corpora serve to mitigate offense, maintain social decorum, and align with institutional ideologies, their linguistic realization and cultural motivations differ substantially.

One of the most salient differences lies in the semantic preferences of each language. English media demonstrates a broader deployment of metaphor and understatement, often framing politically sensitive

topics or tragedies with figurative or softened expressions. This reflects the influence of liberal media discourse traditions, where euphemism often coexists with irony, satire, and critical detachment. Euphemistic expressions such as collateral damage or downsizing carry implicit ideological undertones and reflect the institutional need to manage perception while preserving transparency.

In contrast, Uzbek media shows a stronger tendency toward generalization and borrowing, particularly in domains associated with health, mortality, and moral discourse. The preference for abstract, non-specific terms (e.g., muammo, holat) and the importation of foreign terms (e.g., foobiya, insident) suggests a culturally embedded strategy of indirectness, rooted in traditional norms of modesty, social harmony, and deference to authority. These choices may also reflect media institutions' alignment with state discourse, where euphemism becomes a tool of narrative control rather than critique.

Morphologically, both languages favor affixation, but the frequency and creativity of this pattern are more pronounced in Uzbek due to its agglutinative structure. The ability to attach a wide range of affixes to base forms facilitates euphemism generation without introducing foreign elements, supporting cultural and linguistic continuity. English, by contrast, exhibits a higher balance between affixation and compounding, benefiting from its analytic flexibility and hybrid lexicon.

Culturally, the role of taboo and politeness also diverges. In English, euphemism often coexists with humor, satire, or transparency strategies. In Uzbek, euphemism tends to embody respect, indirectness, and symbolic avoidance—especially in matters of death, illness, or sexuality. For instance, euphemisms for death in Uzbek (olamdan o'tdi, vafot etdi) are deeply rooted in Islamic and folkloric traditions, whereas English euphemisms (e.g., passed away, no longer with us) are more secular and metaphor-driven.

The analysis also reveals differing media ideologies. English media euphemisms often aim to soften political or economic realities without appearing propagandistic, whereas Uzbek media euphemisms frequently serve to reinforce collectivist values and institutional decorum. This distinction reflects broader cultural orientations: individualistic expression and transparency in Anglophone journalism versus collectivist harmony and face-saving in Uzbek communicative norms.

Euphemism serves as a mirror of cultural consciousness, and its lexicological features are deeply shaped by historical, political, and communicative

traditions. The cross-cultural differences identified in this study affirm that euphemisms are not merely linguistic artifacts but are semiotic tools of cultural mediation, shaping how societies manage discomfort, navigate taboos, and construct reality through language.

CONCLUSION

This study has undertaken a comparative lexicological analysis of euphemisms in English and Uzbek media discourse, exploring how different languages and cultures deploy euphemistic strategies to manage sensitive topics. By integrating lesser-known theoretical frameworks with corpus-based and quantitative approaches, the research has offered a nuanced perspective on the linguoculturological nature of euphemism. The findings reveal that while euphemism serves broadly similar communicative functions—mitigating offense, preserving politeness, and aligning with ideological narratives—its lexical realization, semantic preferences, and morphological structures differ markedly between English and Uzbek. English media tends to favor metaphor, understatement, and compound constructions, often reflecting individualistic and critical discourse norms. Uzbek media, in contrast, demonstrates a higher reliance on generalization, affixation, and borrowing, strategies that align with collectivist cultural values, indirectness, and institutional loyalty.

Moreover, the domain-specific analysis shows that euphemisms are most prevalent in politics, health, and death-related reporting, highlighting these as key areas where public discourse is most likely to be shaped through indirect language. The lower presence of euphemism in discussions of sexuality in Uzbek media, and its restricted but more open use in English media, reflects culturally divergent conceptions of public morality and linguistic modesty. These results support the argument that euphemisms are not only linguistic artifacts but cultural indicators, revealing how language systems evolve to meet the psychological, social, and ideological needs of their communities. They function both as lexical camouflage and cultural code, subtly navigating the boundaries between what can be said, how it is said, and what must remain unspoken.

The implications of this research extend beyond lexicology to fields such as media studies, intercultural communication, translation, and discourse analysis. Understanding how euphemisms function differently across languages can enhance media literacy, inform bilingual journalism, and support more culturally sensitive translation practices.

Future research may expand on these findings by incorporating spoken media (e.g., television, radio),

extending the corpus to include social media discourse, or applying sentiment analysis tools to examine public reception of euphemistic language. Additionally, longitudinal studies could track changes in euphemism usage over time, particularly in response to political shifts or global events.

In conclusion, euphemism remains a vital component of media language—linguistically subtle, culturally potent, and deeply revealing of the values societies choose to protect through words.

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