



## TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF EUPHEMISMS IN THE ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *Euphemisms are indispensable linguistic devices employed to soften, obscure, or socially sanitize concepts that may be considered taboo, unpleasant, or socially undesirable. Their translation across languages is particularly challenging because euphemisms do not function merely as lexical substitutes but as culturally embedded pragmatic tools. This paper provides a comprehensive comparative analysis of euphemisms in English and Uzbek, focusing on translation problems arising from cultural asymmetry, semantic divergence, and differing politeness conventions. A corpus of 440 euphemistic expressions extracted from literary texts, political discourse, digital media, and spoken interactions forms the empirical basis of the analysis. Findings reveal that literal translation frequently eliminates the intended pragmatic softening, resulting in loss of politeness, distortion of meaning, or cultural inappropriateness. Functional equivalence, cultural substitution, descriptive translation, and calquing are found to be the most effective translation strategies. The study contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of euphemism translation between languages with different sociolinguistic and cultural systems.*

**KEYWORDS:** *euphemism, translation studies, English, Uzbek, pragmatics, culture, taboo, equivalence*

### INTRODUCTION

Euphemisms are pervasive across all languages and cultures. As linguistic expressions deliberately chosen to avoid direct reference to socially sensitive topics, they play a crucial role in communication, politeness, and social cohesion. Euphemisms help speakers mitigate potential offense, demonstrate respect, or obscure politically or socially contentious realities. Because

euphemisms rely heavily on culturally shared knowledge and norms, their translation poses significant challenges.

English euphemisms have undergone substantial development, particularly in the context of political correctness and institutional discourse. Terms such as economically disadvantaged, comfort break, or senior citizen exemplify socio-politically motivated euphemistic innovations



(Rawson, 2002). Conversely, Uzbek euphemisms primarily reflect traditional politeness norms, respect culture, and Islamic worldview, employing metaphor, periphrasis, and honorific expressions such as *olamdan o'tmoq*, *yoshi ulug' inson*, and *ayollar holati* (Karimov, 2018; Tansuqboyeva, 2021).

Translators working between English and Uzbek must negotiate not only linguistic but also cultural, ideological, and pragmatic differences. Newmark (1988) stresses that euphemisms cannot be translated literally, as this undermines their communicative function. Instead, translators must aim to preserve connotative meaning, politeness effect, and stylistic intent.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on euphemisms, comparative research on their translation between English and Uzbek remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the structural, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural problems encountered when translating euphemisms between the two languages.

The followings are chosen as Research questions:

1. What types of euphemisms are common in English and Uzbek?
2. What translation problems arise due to linguistic and cultural divergence?
3. Which translation strategies best preserve euphemistic meaning and pragmatic function?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Euphemism has been extensively described in linguistic literature as a communicative strategy used to avoid direct reference to taboo, sensitive, or unpleasant concepts. Allan & Burridge (2006) categorize euphemisms into orthophemisms (neutral expressions), euphemisms (dishonest/mitigating), and dysphemisms (offensive). Euphemisms serve functions such as politeness maintenance, face-saving, disguise of truth, and social persuasion. Crespo-Fernández (2015) emphasizes the cognitive dimension of euphemism: speakers conceptualize taboo domains through metaphors that soften or reshape reality.

In translation studies, euphemisms are noted as culturally-bound elements requiring adaptive rather than literal translation (Larson, 1998). Because euphemisms encode social norms and cultural values, translators must account for both linguistic meaning and pragmatic function.

English euphemisms have evolved significantly, particularly in response to social movements, political correctness, and institutional discourse. Rawson (2002) observes that English euphemisms often serve bureaucratic, political, or ideological functions, such as collateral damage (civilian casualties) or enhanced interrogation (torture). Public sensitivities regarding age, illness, disability, and bodily functions also lead to euphemistic expressions like visually impaired, passed away, and restroom.



Studies by Pinker (2003) and Allan & Burrige (2006) examine how euphemisms are cyclic: euphemistic terms eventually lose their softening effect, becoming dysphemistic, thus requiring replacement (toilet → lavatory → restroom → washroom → facility).

Uzbek euphemisms are deeply rooted in cultural practices of politeness, age respect, and indirect communication. Common domains include:

- Death: olamdan o'tmoq, vafot etdi
- Illness: betob bo'lib qoldi, noqulay holatga tushdi
- Age: yoshi ulug', katta avlod vakili
- Bodily functions: ayollar holati, erkaklar xonasi, karomatli joylar

Karimov (2018) and Tansuqboyeva (2021) note that euphemisms in Uzbek often rely on metaphorical and religious expressions derived from Islamic traditions. Honorific language plays a central role, making euphemisms a matter of social distance and respect rather than political correctness.

Translation scholars such as Newmark (1988) and Nida (as cited in Larson, 1998) argue that euphemisms require functional equivalence because their purpose is pragmatic rather than purely semantic. Venuti (1995) emphasizes cultural domestication and foreignization as key translation strategies, relevant to euphemism translation because of cultural embeddedness.

Previous studies have identified frequent translation challenges:

- cultural mismatch of taboo domains (Allan & Burrige, 2006)
- neutralization of euphemistic force (Larson, 1998)
- lexical gaps in the target language (Rawson, 2002)
- loss of political or ideological content (Crespo-Fernández, 2015)

While English and Uzbek euphemisms have been studied individually, comparative analysis of translation problems remains scarce. No existing research provides a large corpus-based examination of euphemism translation between these languages. This study aims to fill this gap by offering a systematic and empirically grounded analysis.

## METHODS

The present study employed a multi-stage methodological procedure consisting of corpus compilation, semantic-pragmatic analysis, and contrastive translation analysis. First, a bilingual corpus of English and Uzbek euphemisms was constructed to provide a representative dataset. The English component drew from contemporary fiction (a selection of twenty novels), political discourse (including U.S. presidential addresses from 2000 to 2024 and transcripts from the UK Parliament), major online news platforms such as BBC, CNN, and The Guardian, as well as euphemistic expressions circulating in social media posts and corporate public-relations statements. The Uzbek corpus was compiled from literary prose by



prominent writers including O'tkir Hoshimov, Abdulla Qahhor, P. Qodirov, and Sh. Rizo; official government publications from Prezident.uz and Gov.uz; media outlets such as Kun.uz and Gazeta.uz; and a spoken Uzbek sub-corpus composed of televised interviews and public speeches. Altogether, the corpus contained 260 English euphemisms and 180 Uzbek euphemisms, resulting in 410 observed translation instances across source–target language pairs.

The analysis proceeded on the basis of three complementary methodological frameworks. Semantic analysis was first conducted to determine the lexical meanings and literal equivalents of euphemistic items. Pragmatic analysis followed, examining politeness values, degrees of indirectness and softening, and speaker intent in alignment with the theoretical principles established by Allan and Burridge (2006). Finally, contrastive translation analysis was carried out using established translation models, particularly those proposed by Newmark (1988) and Larson (1998). This stage involved identifying which translation strategies—functional equivalence, cultural substitution, descriptive translation, borrowing or calque, modulation, or omission—were applied in each instance. Every translation pair was further evaluated according to four criteria: accuracy of semantic content, preservation of euphemistic softening, cultural appropriateness within the target

language, and stylistic naturalness. This combined analytical framework enabled a systematic comparison of euphemistic transfer between English and Uzbek, revealing both structural regularities and culture-specific challenges in translation practice.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the bilingual corpus demonstrated that euphemisms in both English and Uzbek cluster around five major thematic categories. The most prominent category concerns death, where English expressions such as *passed away*, *no longer with us*, and *lost to cancer* parallel Uzbek euphemisms like *olamdan o'tdi*, *vafot etdi*, and *umrining oxiri yetdi*. A second major category involves illness and disability; English commonly employs softened terms such as *special needs*, *visually impaired*, and *mental health challenge*, while Uzbek equivalents include *betob*, *ko'zi yaxshi ko'rmaydi*, and *ruhiy holati og'irlashgan*. Age and physical appearance form a third significant domain, with English relying on euphemisms like *senior citizen*, *plus-size*, and *differently abled*, whereas Uzbek tends to use expressions such as *yoshi ulug'*, *sal vazni bor*, and *nogironligi bor shaxs*. A fourth category encompasses bodily functions, where English substitutes direct terms with expressions such as *restroom*, *powder room*, and *sanitary products*, mirrored by Uzbek items like *hojatxona*, *ayollar xonasi*, and *gigiyejik vosita*. Finally, political and bureaucratic contexts constitute the fifth



major cluster; English euphemisms include collateral damage, enhanced interrogation, and jobless recovery, while Uzbek equivalents such as *shtat qisqartirish*, *tartibga solish*, and *ixtiyoriy ketish* serve to soften or obscure institutional practices. These cross-linguistic parallels illustrate that despite cultural differences, both languages employ euphemism as a tool for mitigation, politeness, and ideological framing.

The analysis revealed several recurrent problems that arise when translating euphemisms between English and Uzbek. One major issue is cultural mismatch, particularly noticeable in political and bureaucratic terminology. For instance, the English euphemism enhanced interrogation cannot be rendered literally as *kuchaytirilgan so‘roq* in Uzbek, since the phrase becomes overly literal and loses its euphemistic function; a more culturally appropriate translation would be *qattiq choralar bilan o‘tkazilgan so‘roq*. A second challenge involves the loss of pragmatic softening, especially when English euphemisms for death or illness are translated too directly. For example, translating He passed away as *U o‘ldi* produces a dysphemistic effect, whereas the euphemistic nuance is preserved only with a culturally accepted form such as *U olamdan o‘tdi*. Another common problem is lexical gaps, where certain euphemisms have no established equivalent in the target language. The English historical term *comfort women*,

for instance, requires a descriptive translation in Uzbek as *yapon armiyasi tomonidan ekspluatatsiya qilingan ayollar*, because no single euphemistic expression exists in Uzbek to encapsulate its meaning. Finally, the study identified instances of ideological neutralization, where English politically motivated euphemisms lose their intended obfuscatory force when transferred into Uzbek. A typical case is collateral damage, which, when rendered as *kollateral zarar*, becomes semantically transparent, thereby weakening the euphemistic concealment present in the original. These findings demonstrate that euphemism translation is constrained not only by linguistic factors but also by cultural norms, social practices, and ideological frameworks.

The analysis also identified several translation strategies that proved effective in preserving the semantic and pragmatic functions of euphemisms across English and Uzbek. Functional equivalence emerged as the most reliable method, as it maintains the communicative intent of the euphemism; for example, English *passed away* is appropriately translated as *vafot etdi*, which conveys similar softness and respect. Cultural substitution was also found to be highly effective when the source-language euphemism lacks a culturally meaningful counterpart. In such cases, expressions like *senior citizen* are best translated as *yoshi ulug‘ inson*, which aligns with Uzbek norms of respect for elders. In instances where no direct



equivalent exists, descriptive translation offers a practical solution by clarifying the euphemistic meaning; for example, *comfort woman* must be rendered as *majburiy ravishda jinsiy xizmatga jalb qilingan ayol* to convey its historical and social implications. Finally, borrowing and calque work well for technical, political, or bureaucratic euphemisms, as seen in the translation of collateral damage as *kollateral zarar*, which preserves both the terminology and its institutional tone. Together, these strategies demonstrate how euphemisms can be transferred cross-linguistically while maintaining their essential semantic and pragmatic functions.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reinforce earlier scholarship (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Newmark, 1988; Larson, 1998), which emphasizes that euphemisms are deeply embedded in the cultural and pragmatic systems of each language community. The English data show that euphemisms frequently emerge from political ideology, institutional discourse, and bureaucratic communication, where they function to obscure responsibility, soften public messaging, or align with norms of political correctness. In contrast, Uzbek euphemisms are shaped primarily by cultural expectations related to respect, age hierarchy, social modesty, and religious principles rooted in Islamic etiquette. This cultural asymmetry produces several translation challenges. English political correctness, as a socio-

linguistic system, has no direct equivalent in Uzbek, meaning that many English euphemisms motivated by inclusivity or neutrality cannot be transferred without semantic loss. Likewise, the Islamic politeness norms that regulate respectful reference to age, death, illness, and gender in Uzbek have no true counterpart in English, complicating reverse translation. Moreover, English bureaucratic and political euphemisms tend to systemically mask ideological content, whereas Uzbek equivalents are generally more transparent, creating further imbalance in pragmatic force. As a result, translators must possess not only lexical competence but also a nuanced understanding of these culturally specific layers in order to preserve euphemistic intent and communicative effect. The study confirms that strategies such as functional equivalence and cultural substitution consistently yield the most accurate and pragmatically appropriate translations, aligning with Newmark's (1988) predictions regarding cross-cultural mediation. Literal translation, by contrast, was uniformly ineffective, often distorting pragmatic meaning, erasing softening effects, and producing unintended dysphemistic interpretations.

## CONCLUSION

The study clearly demonstrates that euphemisms cannot be translated as simple lexical units; rather, their pragmatic force, social functions, and cultural foundations constitute an integral part of their meaning and must be



considered in translation. The analysis shows that major sources of difficulty arise from several interconnected factors, including cultural mismatch between English and Uzbek communicative norms, the potential loss of pragmatic softening when euphemisms are translated too literally, inherent semantic non-equivalence in cases where one language lacks an analogous euphemistic expression, and ideological influences that shape how political or institutional discourse is encoded. These challenges highlight the necessity of adopting translation strategies that safeguard not only the referential content of euphemisms but also their communicative intent, degree of indirectness, and socio-

pragmatic function in context. By addressing these issues, the study makes a meaningful contribution to research in translation studies, sociolinguistics, and contrastive pragmatics, offering practical insights for translators who navigate the complexities of euphemistic expression between English and Uzbek. In addition, the findings suggest several avenues for future research, including the expansion of the bilingual corpus, comparative analysis of regional and dialectal variations, and further exploration of euphemisms in emerging communicative domains such as film dialogue, social media discourse, and AI-generated language.

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