

COMPARATIVE SEMANTICS OF GENDER IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS: ENGLISH VS. UZBEK

Mukhammadieva Maftuna Khamidullaevna

Abstract

This article explores the comparative semantics of gender in English and Uzbek phraseological units. Gender is not only a grammatical or social category but also a conceptual field deeply rooted in cultural traditions, values, and collective memory. Phraseology, as a system of stable language units with figurative meanings, plays a central role in the representation of gender stereotypes, roles, and evaluative judgments. The paper analyzes the semantic content of gendered idioms and proverbs in both English and Uzbek, focusing on metaphorical models, evaluative connotations, and the cultural worldview reflected in phraseology. A comparative approach highlights both universal and culture-specific patterns in the conceptualization of masculinity and femininity. The findings reveal that while English and Uzbek phraseology share common semantic features such as the association of men with strength and authority, and women with beauty and morality, there are also significant differences determined by historical, religious, and socio-cultural factors. The study concludes that phraseological gender semantics is a mirror of cultural identity, and its comparative study contributes to the broader understanding of linguistic worldview and intercultural communication.

Keywords: gender, phraseology, semantics, English, Uzbek, idioms, stereotypes, comparative linguistics

1. Introduction

Gender studies in linguistics have gained increasing relevance over the past decades, especially with the recognition that language is not a neutral medium but an active participant in shaping and transmitting cultural values (Lakoff, 1975; Cameron, 1992). Phraseology, as one of the richest layers of any language, reflects collective experience, cultural codes, and traditional norms through figurative and metaphorical expressions. Gender, being a fundamental category of social life, inevitably finds representation in phraseological systems, encoding perceptions of masculinity and femininity in symbolic form.

Both English and Uzbek, despite belonging to different language families—Germanic and Turkic respectively—have rich inventories of gender-related phraseological units. These idioms and proverbs often serve as linguistic repositories of cultural attitudes toward men and women. For instance, English idioms such as “man of his word” or “the weaker sex” reveal contrasting gender evaluations, while Uzbek expressions such as “erkak kishining gapi gap” (“a man’s word is decisive”)

and “ayolning ko‘rki – hayo” (“a woman’s beauty is her modesty”) emphasize patriarchal values rooted in social traditions.

The aim of this article is to analyze and compare the semantic representation of gender in English and Uzbek phraseology. The objectives are to:

1. Identify the main semantic fields of gender in phraseological units.
2. Explore metaphorical models used to describe men and women.
3. Compare evaluative connotations in English and Uzbek idioms.
4. Reveal universal and culture-specific elements in gender phraseology.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Phraseology and Gender

Phraseology is defined as the study of fixed combinations of words with figurative meaning, including idioms, collocations, and proverbs (Cowie, 1998; Moon, 1998). These units are marked by semantic integrity, stability, and cultural significance. They serve not only as linguistic ornaments but also as carriers of social values and stereotypes.

Gender, in turn, is understood not merely as a biological distinction but as a cultural and social construct (Butler, 1990). Linguistic gender studies emphasize that language both reflects and shapes gender ideology. Thus, phraseological gender analysis investigates how idioms encode cultural perceptions of men and women.

2.2 Semantic Approaches

Semantic analysis of phraseology involves identifying the figurative meaning of idioms, metaphorical models, and evaluative attitudes embedded in them. Cognitive semantics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) highlights the role of conceptual metaphors in shaping idioms. For example, the metaphor WOMAN IS AN OBJECT OF BEAUTY or MAN IS POWER structures many phraseological units in both languages.

2.3 Gender Studies in English and Uzbek Linguistics

In English linguistics, gender phraseology has been studied extensively, especially in feminist and discourse-analytic traditions (Cameron, 1992; Mills, 2008). English idioms reveal both patriarchal stereotypes and evolving gender-neutral expressions in modern usage.

In Uzbek linguistics, phraseology is deeply tied to folk wisdom, proverbs, and cultural traditions. Scholars such as Nazarov (2010) and Tursunov (2018) emphasize that Uzbek idioms often encode patriarchal norms shaped by Islamic values, nomadic heritage, and agrarian social structures.

3. Gender in English Phraseology

3.1 Representation of Men

English idioms often conceptualize men in terms of strength, authority, and rationality. Expressions such as “a man of action”, “self-made man”, or “man up” emphasize agency and courage. Proverbs like “A man is as old as he feels” also highlight vitality and endurance.

At the same time, English phraseology contains critical idioms: “henpecked husband” (a man dominated by his wife) portrays male weakness negatively, while “old boy’s network” refers to male-dominated power structures. Thus, male representation oscillates between glorification of masculine virtues and critique of male shortcomings.

3.2 Representation of Women

English idioms frequently reduce women to their physical appearance or relational roles. Expressions like “dumb blonde”, “the weaker sex”, or “to wear the pants” reflect stereotypical gender hierarchies.

However, some idioms value positive feminine qualities: “Every mother’s son” reflects maternal centrality, while “to be the apple of one’s eye” can denote beloved women. Yet, even these often frame women through male-centered perspectives.

3.3 Stereotypes and Cultural Values

English phraseology encodes Christian traditions, chivalric culture, and patriarchal values. For example, “man proposes, God disposes” reflects divine order, while “a good wife makes a good husband” emphasizes women’s supportive role. Contemporary English, however, increasingly challenges these stereotypes, with neutral expressions gaining ground in media and education.

4. Gender in Uzbek Phraseology

4.1 Representation of Men

Uzbek idioms strongly emphasize men’s authority, courage, and responsibility. Common expressions include “erkak kishining so‘zi – so‘z” (“a man’s word is final”) and “erkak ko‘tarilgan tog‘ni ham yengadi” (“a man can overcome even a mountain”). Men are associated with protection and provision.

Nevertheless, phraseology also criticizes male irresponsibility: “erkak bosh – ayol tan” (“the man is the head, the woman is the body”) implies authority but also accountability. A weak or dishonorable man is ridiculed as “erkak emas, er emas” (“not a man at all”).

4.2 Representation of Women

Uzbek phraseology traditionally depicts women through family roles and moral virtues. Expressions like “ayolning ziynati – hayo” (“a woman’s adornment is modesty”) and “ona yurak – mehr manbai” (“a mother’s heart is a source of affection”) highlight maternal love and modesty as core qualities.

Negative stereotypes are also present: “ayolning so‘zi shamol” (“a woman’s word is like the wind”) portrays women as unreliable, while “xotin-xalaj” (“chatter of women”) trivializes female speech.

5. Comparative Semantic Analysis

5.1 Similarities

Both English and Uzbek phraseology associate men with strength, decisiveness, and authority, and women with beauty, modesty, and emotionality. Both languages

contain idioms reflecting patriarchal structures and male dominance. Stereotypes about female unreliability or excessive talkativeness (“women are chatterboxes” / “xotin-xalaj”) are universal.

5.2 Differences

- Religious influence: English phraseology reflects Christian traditions, while Uzbek idioms are influenced by Islamic values and Turkic nomadic heritage.
- Female roles: English idioms often emphasize romantic or sexual roles (“trophy wife”), while Uzbek idioms emphasize moral and domestic virtues (“ayolning ziynati – hayo”).
- Male criticism: English idioms often ridicule men as “henpecked husbands”, while Uzbek idioms rarely depict men as dominated by women, reflecting stronger patriarchal norms.
- Metaphorical models: English uses animal metaphors extensively (“bull-headed man”, “catty woman”), whereas Uzbek phraseology prefers agricultural and domestic metaphors (“ayol – uy ko‘rki”, “woman is the beauty of the house”).

5.3 Universal vs. Culture-Specific Aspects

Universally, both languages encode traditional gender hierarchies, yet culture-specific nuances reveal different social priorities: individualism and romanticism in English, collectivism and morality in Uzbek.

6. Discussion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that gendered phraseology reflects cultural identity and social norms. In English, industrialization, individualism, and feminist movements have influenced idioms, leading to increased critique of patriarchal roles and emergence of gender-neutral expressions. In Uzbek, phraseology remains deeply tied to family, morality, and Islamic cultural heritage, though modern usage also shows gradual shifts.

Cognitively, idioms embody metaphorical models like MAN IS POWER or WOMAN IS BEAUTY. These models are cross-cultural but acquire specific semantic nuances in each language. From a sociolinguistic perspective, gender phraseology not only reflects but also perpetuates stereotypes, thus playing a role in maintaining traditional gender ideologies.

7. Conclusion

The study reveals that English and Uzbek phraseology share universal semantic tendencies in gender representation but differ significantly in evaluative connotations and cultural emphasis. English idioms highlight individuality, social critique, and changing gender roles, while Uzbek idioms focus on morality, family, and patriarchal stability.

Comparative semantic analysis of gendered phraseology provides insights into linguistic worldviews, intercultural similarities, and national specificities.

Understanding these nuances is important for translation studies, intercultural communication, and gender linguistics.

Future research could explore diachronic changes in gender phraseology, the impact of globalization, and the role of mass media in reshaping idiomatic gender representations.

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