

## Semantic Fields in Vulgar Expressions across Cultures: English and Uzbek

Zamira Khakimova Khurram kizi

PhD student, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: [zx.hakimova@uzswlu.uz](mailto:zx.hakimova@uzswlu.uz)

**Abstract.** This study offers a comparative linguocultural analysis of vulgar and taboo expressions in English and Uzbek, examining how semantic fields of profanity reflect underlying cultural values, social norms, and communicative practices. Using corpora compiled from films, television subtitles, social media discourse, and colloquial programming, vulgar expressions were categorized into seven semantic domains and analyzed for frequency and usage patterns. Findings show that English profanity is dominated by sexual and excretory vocabulary, reflecting secular, individualistic cultural orientations and the historical erosion of religious taboos. In contrast, Uzbek vulgarity centers on personal and kinship-based insults, highlighting the importance of familial honor and collectivist social structures; sexual profanity commonly appears in mother-insult constructions, and religious profanity is largely avoided. Nonverbal insults likewise exhibit culturally specific patterns, with gestures differing in meaning and offensive intensity across the two cultures. Gendered patterns also emerge: Uzbek men employ harsher, dominance-oriented curses, while women tend to use softer or positive “blessing-type” expressions. Overall, the study demonstrates that profanity functions not merely as linguistic aggression but as a culturally meaningful system of emotional expression, social regulation, and identity construction.

**Key words.** *vulgar language; taboo lexicon; profanity; linguoculturology; English–Uzbek comparison; semantic fields*

**Introduction.** Taboo lexicon, despite social stigmatization, serves critical sociolinguistic functions including emotional expression, social identity construction, and pain management. Vulgar-offensive in language<sup>1</sup>Linguocultural research demonstrates that profane vocabulary reflects societal values and norms, with considerable cross-cultural variation in both content and severity. While English profanity has received substantial scholarly attention, comparative studies with non-Indo-European languages remain limited. Uzbek, a Turkic language embedded in predominantly Islamic cultural contexts, presents a compelling comparative case. This study addresses this gap by systematically comparing semantic fields of vulgar expressions across these linguistically and culturally distinct communities.

**Methods.** We compiled specialized corpora from contemporary media sources. The English corpus comprised subtitles from 50 films and television episodes' social media posts, and dialogue from popular series. The Uzbek corpus included movies, social media posts, and dialogue from colloquial programming.

Vulgar expressions were operationalized as lexical items considered rude or taboo in formal contexts. Terms were categorized into seven semantic fields: sexual references, excretory/bodily functions, general personal insults, kinship insults, religious profanity, animal metaphors, and group-based slurs. Frequency distributions were computed and analyzed cross-culturally.

**Results.** In English, the **sexual references** field was the most prominent by frequency. Variations of “*fuck*” (used as a verb, noun, intensifier, etc.) were the single most common vulgar term in our English corpus, appearing far more often than any other word. Sexual vulgarities (including terms for genitalia or sexual acts) accounted for roughly 40% of all English taboo word occurrences. Many served emphatic or cathartic purposes, as in examples like “*That movie was fucking amazing*” (intensifier) or “*Oh, fuck! I forgot my keys*” (cathartic expletive after a mistake). The second-largest category was **insults to persons**, about 25% of

<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary Online (n.d.) Vulgar <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vulgar>

occurrences. These included generic insults (e.g., “*idiot, asshole, bitch*”), with “*bitch*” and “*asshole*” being frequent especially on social media when users directed anger at others. The **excretory/bodily** category (around 15%) was also notable – words like “*shit*” were common both literally (complaining “*this is shit*”) and in idiomatic phrases (“*get your shit together*”, “*bullshit*”). **Profane religious terms** (about 10%) still appeared, though less dominant; expressions like “*goddamn*” or “*Jesus Christ!*” (as an exclamation) were present in movies and tweets, reflecting residual cultural usage even among secular speakers. Slurs and derogatory epithets constituted roughly 5% of our English vulgar corpus – these were relatively infrequent but highly offensive instances (e.g., racist or homophobic slurs appearing in heated social media contexts or edgy TV dialogues). Finally, **animal metaphors** (e.g., calling someone a “*pig*” or “*cow*”) and **soft vulgarities** (milder terms like “*crap, piss off*”) made up the remainder. English examples illustrate each category: for instance, calling someone “*a dirty pig*” combines an animal insult with a sense of disgust (bodily connotation).

The Uzbek corpus showed a different ranking of vulgar semantic fields. **Insults to persons (general)** emerged as the most frequent category in Uzbek usage. Terms equivalent to “*idiot, stupid, immoral*” (e.g., “*ahmoq,*” “*tentak,*” “*haromi*”) were encountered regularly in impassioned dialogues and online arguments. Notably, some of these insults carry strong weight in Uzbek culture despite mild English glosses (for example, “*haromi,*” literally “illegitimate,” is a grave insult). The second major category was **sexual references**, but with an important qualitative difference: Uzbek sexual vulgarities were often used in **kinship-insulting phrases** rather than standalone. A common pattern was invoking someone’s mother or sister in a curse. Overall, if we combine direct sexual terms and these kinship-related sexual insults, they accounted for roughly 30% of Uzbek vulgar usage. In informal Uzbek, speakers sometimes even code-switch to Russian for extreme sexual profanity (e.g., using Russian “*blya(t)*” or “*suka*” in the midst of Uzbek sentences), reflecting the

influence of Russian *mat* swearing culture. The **excretory/bodily functions** field was less prominent in Uzbek compared to English. Words for feces or similar (such as slang for “shit”) appeared but were not among the top offenders. Instead, **animal terms and other metaphors** formed a noticeable category in Uzbek abuse. Calling someone names like “*it*” (dog), “*kaltakesak*” (lizard), or “*eshak*” (donkey) was seen in our corpus, often to belittle someone’s intelligence or behavior. Animal insults in Uzbek did not always have direct English counterparts (for example, “*eshak*” meaning “donkey” implies someone stubborn or foolish). **Religious profanities** were nearly absent in Uzbek data – reflecting a cultural and religious norm to avoid casual use of sacred terms. Unlike English, one would rarely hear “*Xudo ursin*” (“God strike [me/you]”) or other invocations used as swear words, except perhaps in folkloric curses rather than modern slang. Finally, explicit **slurs** (e.g., ethnic insults) were extremely rare in the Uzbek corpus we examined, possibly due to the public sensitivity of such statements; people may refrain or such insults may be more often conveyed in Russian or kept out of written form.

**Discussion.** Findings reveal both universal and culture-specific aspects of taboo language. Universally, vulgar expressions function as emotionally charged vocabulary for catharsis, aggression, and in-group bonding across both languages. However, semantic preferences diverge substantially, reflecting cultural values. English profanity's sexual/excretory focus reflects historical taboos around bodily functions in relatively individualistic, increasingly secular societies. Uzbek vulgarity's emphasis on personal and familial honor insults aligns with collectivist values and Islamic ethical frameworks that strongly regulate interpersonal respect. The near-absence of religious profanity in Uzbek demonstrates protective boundaries around sacred concepts, contrasting with English's declining religious taboos.

The studies presented by Simone Sulpizio, Fritz Gunther and others, provide unprecedented cross-linguistic data, many languages remain unrepresented due to cultural sensitivity around taboos. Still, the work helps close the gap between well-



studied and neglected languages and shows that cross-linguistic research on taboo language is feasible and valuable. Because taboo language has strong psychological and sociocultural dimensions, the findings are relevant not only to linguistics and psycholinguistics but also to fields such as psychology, neuroscience, gender studies, sociology, and anthropology<sup>2</sup>.

Nonverbal expressions are a crucial component of interpersonal communication, especially in expressing emotions and evaluative attitudes. Insulting nonverbal behaviours in Uzbek and English cultures differ due to distinct sociocultural norms. In Uzbek interaction, rude facial expressions and threatening hand gestures are typically perceived as strong insults, while in English-speaking contexts, gestures such as showing the middle finger, invading personal space, or using marked sarcastic intonation frequently fulfil this function. Culture-specific gestures may be opaque or misinterpreted by members of another culture, which increases the risk of pragmatic failure in intercultural encounters. Therefore, the interpretation of nonverbal insults requires not only linguistic competence but also developed intercultural awareness<sup>3</sup>.

Acceptability contexts also differ markedly. English-speaking societies have undergone significant informalization, normalizing casual profanity in media and conversation. Uzbek society maintains stricter prohibitions, confining vulgarity to same-gender informal contexts. Gender differences are more pronounced in Uzbek, where female swearing remains highly stigmatized. These patterns support cross-cultural pragmatic theories positing that individualistic cultures emphasize bodily taboos while collectivist cultures prioritize honor-based prohibitions. Offensive

<sup>2</sup> Sulpizio, S., Günther, F., Badan, L., Basclain, B., Brysbaert, M., Chan, Y. L., Ciaccio, L. A., Dudschig, C., Duñabeitia, J. A., Fasoli, F., Ferrand, L., Filipović Đurđević, D., Guerra, E., Hollis, G., Job, R., Jornkokgoud, K., Kahraman, H., Kgoro-Lotshwao, N., Kinoshita, S., ... Marelli, M. "Taboo Language across the Globe: A multi-lab study" Behavior Research Methods, February 2024, P-3810

<sup>3</sup> Хайдарова М. "O'ZBEK VA INGLIZ MULOQOTIDA HAQORATNING NOVERBAL VOSITALAR ORQALI IFODA ETILISHI" *Свет науки*, 2025 P-85-86

intensity is culturally calibrated—direct translations misrepresent pragmatic force, complicating translation and intercultural communication.

According to R.Gulomova, curse words in Uzbek society are shaped by cultural norms and gender roles: women tend to use softer, even positive “blessing-type” curses, while men use harsher expressions linked to dominance and emotion. The study argues that swearing is not only linguistic aggression but also a cultural practice that reveals social values, emotional behavior, and traditional beliefs. Overall, curse words function as meaningful cultural tools reflecting how Uzbeks express emotions and negotiate social relationships<sup>4</sup>. The distinction between positive (blessing-type) curses and negative or abusive forms is particularly important because it highlights that swearing in Uzbek culture cannot simply be interpreted through Western frameworks of profanity; instead, it represents a broader system of emotional expression, social regulation, and community values. The study is limited by its small survey size, yet it successfully demonstrates how linguistic behavior reflects deeper cultural norms—especially gendered expectations of politeness, strength, and social hierarchy. Overall, the research contributes meaningfully to understanding how language indexes cultural identity and interpersonal dynamics.

**Conclusion.** This comparative analysis demonstrates that vulgar lexicons serve as cultural indices, mapping societal values regarding sacredness and profanity. English profanity emphasizes bodily/sexual domains, while Uzbek profanity targets social honor and kinship respect. Despite functional similarities in emotional expression and social marking, semantic content and acceptability norms are profoundly culture-dependent. Future research should expand to additional media forms, conduct perception surveys measuring offensiveness ratings, include more languages for broader typological comparison, and investigate bilingual code-switching patterns in

<sup>4</sup> Uzoqova, M., & Gulomova, R. “THE USE OF CURSES AMONG WOMEN AND MEN IN UZBEK SOCIETY AND THEIR DIFFERENCES” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Innovations*, 1(3), 235–239. Retrieved from <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/jmsi/article/view/102563>

profanity use. Understanding taboo language provides insight into implicit cultural norms and facilitates more effective intercultural communication.

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