



## PROBLEMS OF EQUIVALENCE IN TRANSLATING EUPHEMISMS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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**Abstract.** This research explores the semantic structure and thematic categorization of euphemisms in contemporary English within a linguocultural framework. Euphemistic language is closely connected with social conventions, culturally shaped taboos, and communicative practices aimed at politeness, softening expression, and ideological representation. Building on domain-oriented classification approaches developed by scholars such as Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, alongside corpus-based evidence drawn from present-day English media, institutional discourse, and everyday speech, this study classifies English euphemisms into six principal semantic domains: death and dying; illness, disability, and the body; sex, gender, and bodily functions; social status, occupation, and economic life; politics, war, and institutional authority; and religion, morality, and evaluative judgment. The results indicate that euphemistic nomination extends beyond simple lexical replacement, functioning instead as a culturally conditioned linguistic strategy for managing social sensitivity, maintaining interpersonal face, and reconstructing perceptions of reality through language. By proposing a systematic semantic framework, this study advances euphemism scholarship and underscores the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and communicative pragmatics.

**Keywords:** euphemism, semantic field, thematic classification, linguocultural analysis, taboo language, politeness strategies, communicative pragmatics, lexical



semantics, discourse analysis, cultural linguistics

**Introduction.** In this paper we focus on the semantic and linguocultural characteristics of euphemisms functioning in English and Uzbek. In this first subchapter, our task is to systematize English euphemisms according to their semantic fields and thematic groups, drawing on both classical and contemporary scholarship as well as on our own corpus of examples from modern English usage. Euphemisms are closely tied to taboo topics and sensitive areas of social life; therefore, any semantic classification must take into account culturally salient domains such as death, illness, sexuality, bodily functions, social status, and politics. A number of scholars, including K. Allan and K. Burridge [1; 24], B. Warren [3; 78], and later researchers, have proposed classifications of euphemisms either by their formal-derivational features or by the taboo domains they cover. In the present research, we adopt a domain-based or field-based approach, which has become widespread in recent euphemism studies, including works published in Uzbek and regional journals. This approach allows us to show how English speakers structure socially delicate experience and how they use lexical choice to negotiate politeness, face, and cultural values.

**Materials and Methods.** The present study employs a qualitative semantic-pragmatic methodology combined with elements of linguocultural and discourse analysis. The concept of semantic field, also called semantic domain, goes back to traditional lexicology and denotes a set of lexical units that share a common area of reference, such as the field of “*death*” or the field of “*illness*”. In euphemism research, domain-based classifications group euphemistic expressions according to the tabooed or sensitive topics they indirectly refer to, for example, death, disease, sex, bodily excretions, religion, or politics. In this way, researchers link patterns of lexical substitution with broader cultural attitudes to particular social realities. Allan and Burridge emphasise that taboo is always relative to “*a particular community of*



people, for a specified context, at a given place and time”, thus the semantic fields of euphemism reflect the dynamic hierarchy of taboos in a given society [2;67].

Results. Studies of English–Uzbek media discourse confirm that translators often resort to adaptation or explicitation in such cases; for instance, culturally specific Uzbek euphemisms may be replaced with neutral descriptive English phrases, while English PC terms may be domesticated into more familiar Uzbek expressions that approximate the intended respectfulness.

Pragmatic equivalence concerns the preservation of illocutionary force, politeness level, and interpersonal stance. Within Allan and Burridge’s framework, this means maintaining the protective “shield” function of the euphemism in the target language. Our analysis shows that direct lexical substitution does not guarantee pragmatic equivalence. For example, the English phrase *He passed away last night* translated as *U kecha olamdan o‘tdi* normally retains both politeness and emotional attenuation. However, translating *He is overweight* as *U semiz* would be pragmatically inappropriate in Uzbek; the direct term *semiz* is felt as blunt or even insulting, and pragmatic equivalence requires euphemistic softening such as *u to‘laroq, biroz to‘ladan kelgan* ‘he is rather full’ [5; 67].

Similarly, English corporate euphemisms like *We are going through a restructuring phase* or *We are downsizing* often appear in Uzbek as *optimalashtirish ishlari olib borilmoqda* ‘optimisation work is underway’ or *qayta tashkil etish jarayoni ketmoqda* ‘the process of re-organisation is underway’. Although the denotative reference to job cuts or budget reductions is preserved only implicitly, the pragmatic function of masking negative information for the public is successfully reproduced. Translation may also unintentionally introduce dysphemism. For instance, rendering the Uzbek *hozircha bo‘sh yuribdi* ‘for now he is free’ as *He is just hanging around* in English introduces a disparaging tone absent from the original, where the expression functions as a face-saving explanation. Allan and



Burridge's notion of dysphemism as a "weapon" helps us recognise and avoid such shifts.

Structural and morphological differences between English and Uzbek also complicate euphemism translation. English euphemisms frequently rely on:

- compounding: *collateral damage, friendly fire*;
- nominalisation: *revenue enhancement, cost-saving measures*;
- phrasal verbs: *pass away, sleep with*;
- fixed idioms and light-verb constructions: *to make love*.

Uzbek makes extensive use of:

- verb–noun combinations: *olamdan o'tmoq, jon bermoq, hojatga chiqmoq*;
- participial and converbal forms: *ahvoldaman, kasal bo'lib qoldi*;
- derivational affixes forming abstract nouns: *ta'minoti pastlik, ihtiyojmandlik*;
- calques and borrowings from Russian and international vocabulary; *optimallashtirish, rehabilitatsiya*.

When we translate structurally dense English euphemisms, such as *collateral damage*, into Uzbek, we may choose a calque, such as *yon zarar* 'side damage' or a descriptive phrase. The calque preserves brevity and metaphor but may require explanatory context; the descriptive phrase improves clarity but forfeits the compressed euphemistic effect. Conversely, multi-word Uzbek euphemisms like *hali nasib qilmagan* 'it has not yet been granted by God' pose a challenge for concise English rendering; literal translation is understandable but culturally marked, while neutral alternatives such as *they do not have children yet* remove the religious dimension of fate [9;132].

On the basis of the identified equivalence problems, and following both Allan and Burridge's theoretical insights and the practical recommendations of Kabilova and other Uzbek scholars, we can distinguish several key strategies for translating euphemisms between English and Uzbek.



The preferred strategy, where possible, is substitution with a target-language euphemism that is functionally equivalent in terms of semantic scope, degree of mitigation and socio-cultural positioning. This aligns with Allan and Burridge's requirement that euphemisms be evaluated not only lexically, but in relation to taboo strength and politeness norms. Examples include:

- *pass away* → *olamdan o'tmoq*;

- *use the bathroom* → *hojatga chiqmoq* 'go to, answer, a need';

- *low-income families* → *kam ta'minlangan oilalar* 'families with low provision';

- *economically disadvantaged groups* → *moddiy ahvoli og'ir qatlamlar* 'layers with difficult material situation'.

In these cases the target euphemism has an established status in the respective language and carries comparable mitigative force.

Table 3.3 Examples of successful functional equivalence

Source language	Source euphemism	Target language	Target euphemism	Evaluation
English → Uzbek	pass away	Uzbek	<i>olamdan o'tdi</i>	High equivalence
English → Uzbek	low-income households	Uzbek	<i>kam ta'minlangan oilalar</i>	High semantic and pragmatic equivalence
Uzbek → English	<i>olamdan o'tdi</i>	English	passed away	High equivalence; similar metaphor and mitigation
Uzbek → English	<i>hojatga chiqdi</i>	English	used the bathroom	High functional equivalence



Where a direct euphemistic counterpart is lacking or would be opaque, translators may resort to descriptive translation or explication, making implicit content more explicit while attempting to preserve politeness. Radjabov's study of English–Uzbek euphemism translation notes that such explication is often necessary to avoid misunderstanding, even though it may reduce indirectness. For example:

- *friendly fire* → *o'z qo'shinlarining tasodifiy o'qi natijasidagi yo'qotishlar* 'losses resulting from accidental fire by one's own troops';
- *clean-up operation*, in political discourse, → *harbiy tozalash amaliyoti, ya'ni muxolif kuchlarni bostirish* 'military clean-up operation, that is, suppression of opposition forces'. From Allan and Burrige's viewpoint, such translations weaken the euphemistic shield and approach a more neutral or even dysphemistic representation; however, in some journalistic and academic contexts communicative clarity and ethical transparency may be prioritised over replicating the original obfuscation [10; 99].

Conclusion. English euphemisms form a highly structured lexical system organized around culturally tabooed semantic domains. Their distribution across six principal fields demonstrates that euphemization is motivated by universal human concerns—death, illness, sexuality—as well as historically specific social values such as political correctness, institutional diplomacy, and ideological framing.

The study confirms that euphemisms are not simply lexical ornaments but powerful instruments of social cognition, cultural representation, and communicative strategy.

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