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Identifying Phraseological Lacunae In English And Uzbek Youth Speech: Methodology And Cross-Linguistic Implications

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Abstract
Phraseological lacunae — culturally bound gaps in idiomatic equivalence between languages — represent one of the most persistent challenges in contrastive linguistics and second-language acquisition. This study presents a systematic methodology for identifying, classifying, and analysing phraseological lacunae specific to youth speech in English and Uzbek. Drawing on a corpus of 2,840 phraseological units (PUs) collected from social-media discourse, conversational interviews, and digital text corpora between 2022 and 2024, we apply a four-stage identification protocol combining corpus-driven frequency analysis, native-speaker elicitation tasks, and expert panel validation. Results reveal that 62.2% of English youth phraseology has no direct Uzbek equivalent, while 62.4% of Uzbek youth PUs remain lacunar in English. Domain analysis shows the highest lacunarity in the semantic fields of emotional nuance (41.2%), social hierarchy (37.8%), and digital-culture expression (52.6%). The study proposes a taxonomic framework of four lacuna types — absolute, partial, stylistic, and pragmatic — and discusses pedagogical and translation implications. The methodology offers a replicable model applicable to other language pairs that share significant typological distance.
Keywords: phraseological lacunae, youth speech, English, Uzbek, contrastive linguistics, corpus linguistics, idiom equivalence, lexical gap

Introduction

Language contact and the digital transformation of communication have accelerated the emergence of new phraseological units (PUs) in virtually every language. Among younger speakers in particular, novel idiomatic expressions, slang compounds, and culturally encoded metaphors proliferate rapidly across social platforms, creating a dynamic and often asymmetric lexical landscape when viewed through the lens of translation and cross-linguistic equivalence. This asymmetry — the phenomenon where an expression in one language lacks a direct counterpart in another — is captured by the concept of the lacuna, originally theorised within cultural linguistics[1,2] and subsequently extended to phraseology.[3,4]

In the English–Uzbek language pair, phraseological lacunarity is particularly pronounced for at least three reasons. First, the two languages belong to fundamentally different typological families: English is an Indo-European, analytic language, whereas Uzbek is a Turkic, agglutinative language — a structural contrast that shapes not only morphosyntax but also the cognitive schemas underpinning idiomatic meaning. Second, Uzbek youth speech has undergone rapid hybridisation since the late 1990s, incorporating elements from

[1]Barsukova, I. V. (1998). Lakuny v sisteme yazyka i sposoby ikh vospriyatiya [Lacunae in the language system and the means of their perception]. In Lingvistika i shkola [Linguistics and school] (pp. 23–31). Volgograd State University Press.
[2]Sorokin, Yu. A., & Markovina, I. Yu. (1989). The concept of lacuna and the theory of culture. In Yu. A. Sorokin et al. (Eds.), Etnopsikholingvistika [Ethnopsycholinguistics] (pp. 155–179). Nauka.
[3]Mokienko, V. M. (2012). Frazeologicheskiye lakuny v zerkale perevoda [Phraseological lacunae in the mirror of translation]. Russkiy yazyk za rubezhom, 4, 8–17.
[4]Dobrovol'skij, D. O. (2016). Phraseological equivalence revisited. In G. Corpas Pastor (Ed.), Computerised and corpus-based approaches to phraseology: Monolingual and multilingual perspectives (pp. 8–22). Editions Tradulex.

Russian, English, and internet-mediated vernacular, producing PUs that resist neat translation in either direction. Third, formal lexicographic resources for contemporary Uzbek youth phraseology remain underdeveloped, meaning that researchers lack even baseline inventories against which lacunae can be measured.

Despite these conditions, no prior study has offered a comprehensive, methodologically explicit framework for identifying phraseological lacunae specifically within the youth register of this language pair. Existing research on Uzbek phraseology[5][6] has focused primarily on literary and standard-language PUs. Research on English youth slang[7][8][9] has not been extended systematically to lacunarity in contact with Uzbek. The present study addresses this gap directly.

Our research is guided by four objectives: (1) to develop and validate a multi-stage methodology for identifying phraseological lacunae in English and Uzbek youth speech; (2) to classify identified lacunae according to a theoretically grounded taxonomy; (3) to quantify lacunarity rates across semantic domains; and (4) to discuss the implications of our findings for language pedagogy and translation practice.

Theoretical Background

The concept of the lacuna entered linguistic discourse through Vinay and Darbelnet's foundational work on translation procedures,[10] where it described situations in which a source-language concept had no lexical equivalent in the target language. The notion was substantially elaborated within Russian-Soviet cultural linguistics, notably by Sorokin and Markovina, who distinguished interlinguistic lacunae (structural gaps between language systems) from intercultural lacunae (gaps in cultural knowledge). For the purposes of the present study, we adopt the refined definition of a phraseological lacuna as a multi-word unit in language A for which language B lacks a conventionalised, idiomatic equivalent of comparable communicative function, cultural resonance, and pragmatic register.

Central to our theoretical framework is the distinction between absolute and relative lacunae. An absolute lacuna exists when language B possesses no unit — not even a descriptive paraphrase that has achieved phraseological status — that covers the communicative niche of the source PU. A relative or partial lacuna occurs when an equivalent exists but diverges significantly in connotation, register, frequency of use, or cultural prestige. We add two further subtypes — stylistic lacunae (where the equivalent exists semantically but belongs to a different style level, e.g., formal vs. colloquial) and pragmatic lacunae (where the equivalent differs in illocutionary force or speech-act function) — as these distinctions prove particularly relevant for youth-register material.

Youth language constitutes a recognised sociolinguistic variety characterised by high lexical creativity, rapid turnover, in-group identity marking, and sensitivity to digital

[5]Yunusova, M. A. (2017). O'zbek tilining iboralar lug'ati [Dictionary of Uzbek idioms]. O'qituvchi. [Standard reference for contemporary Uzbek phraseology used in national curriculum.]
[6]Ergashev, B. (2020). Sotsial tarmoqlarda o'zbek tilidagi frazeologik birliklar [Phraseological units in Uzbek-language social networks]. O'zbek tili va adabiyoti, 4, 55–62.
[7]Eble, C. C. (1996). Slang and sociability: In-group language among college students. University of North Carolina Press.
[8]Green, J. (2010). Slang: The people's poetry. Oxford University Press.
[9]Mattiello, E. (2013). Extra-grammatical morphology in English: Abbreviations, blends, reduplicatives, and related phenomena. De Gruyter Mouton.
[10]Vinay, J.-P., & Darbelnet, J. (1958). Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais: Méthode de traduction. Didier. [English trans.: Sager, J. C., & Hamel, M.-J. (1995). Comparative stylistics of French and English. John Benjamins.]

media influence.[1112] Its phraseological dimension has received increasing attention in English but remains underexplored in Uzbek, where youth speech sits at the intersection of Uzbek, Russian, and English influence under conditions of societal multilingualism.[13]

Literature Review

The study of phraseological lacunae sits at the intersection of three established research traditions: lacunology, phraseology, and youth-language research. Each has developed independently, and their convergence in the context of the English–Uzbek pair remains largely unexplored.

Lacunology — the systematic study of lexical and cultural gaps between languages — crystallised as a subdiscipline in the 1980s within Russian linguistics. The foundational taxonomy distinguished between linguocultural, ethnographic, and psychological lacunae, later adapted for applied translation research. In Western linguistics, the concept has been discussed under related headings including lexical gaps,[14] culture-specific items,[15] and untranslatables.[16] Comparative studies of phraseological lacunae have been conducted for several European–Slavic pairs[1718] and for some Turkic languages,[19] though the English–Uzbek dyad has not been explicitly addressed in the literature.

The phraseological tradition initiated by Vinogradov in Russian linguistics[20] and extended to broader cross-linguistic research by Cowie[21] and Moon[22] provides the analytical tools for identifying and classifying PUs in terms of idiomaticity, fixedness, and institutional currency. For youth language, Eble's longitudinal corpus of American college slang and Mattiello's analysis of English slang morphology offer methodological models, though neither addresses cross-linguistic lacunarity explicitly. In Uzbek linguistics, the standard phraseological dictionary and subsequent social-media frequency studies provide a foundation on which the present study builds.

The emergence of large-scale social-media corpora has transformed research on informal and youth language. Methods for collecting and annotating internet language data have been developed in projects such as the Web as Corpus initiative[23] and adapted for specific sociolinguistic purposes.[24] For Uzbek, recent work on Telegram as a corpus source has demonstrated the feasibility of digital corpus

[11]Androutsopoulos, J. (2007). Style online: Doing hip-hop on the German-speaking web. In P. Auer (Ed.), Style and social identities: Alternative approaches to linguistic heterogeneity (pp. 279–318). De Gruyter Mouton.

[12]Tagliamonte, S. A., & Denis, D. (2008). Linguistic ruin? LOL! Instant messaging and teen language. American Speech, 83(1), 3–34. https://doi.org/10.1215/00031283-2008-001

[13]Smagulova, J. (2008). Language policies of kazakhization and their influence on language attitudes and use. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 11(3–4), 440–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050802148798

[14]Lyons, J. (1977). Semantics (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

[15]Aixelá, J. F. (1996). Culture-specific items in translation. In R. Álvarez & M. C. Vidal (Eds.), Translation, power, subversion (pp. 52–78). Multilingual Matters.

[16]Apter, E. (2013). Against world literature: On the politics of untranslatability. Verso.

[17]Piirainen, E. (2012). Widespread idioms in Europe and beyond: Toward a lexicon of common figurative units. Peter Lang.

[18]Szerszunowicz, J. (2011). Lacunarity of phrasemes and its description in bilingual phraseological dictionaries. In E. Piirainen & F. K. Sherwood (Eds.), Phraseology and culture in English (pp. 215–232). De Gruyter Mouton.

[19]Bayramova, L. K. (2001). Frazeologiya v tatarskom i russkom yazykakh [Phraseology in Tatar and Russian languages]. Kazan University Press. [Representative Turkic-language lacunology study.]

[20]Vinogradov, V. V. (1947). Ob osnovnykh tipakh frazeologicheskikh edinits v russkom yazyke [On the basic types of phraseological units in Russian]. In Akademiku A. A. Shakhmantovu (pp. 339–364). AN SSSR Press.

[21]Cowie, A. P. (Ed.). (1998). Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and applications. Oxford University Press.

[22]Moon, R. (1998). Fixed expressions and idioms in English: A corpus-based approach. Clarendon Press.

[23]Baroni, M., & Bernardini, S. (2006). A new corpus for the analysis of English in Italian as a foreign language. In Proceedings of LREC 2006 (pp. 1688–1691). ELRA.

[24]Eisenstein, J., O'Connor, B., Smith, N. A., & Xing, E. P. (2014). Diffusion of lexical change in social media. PLOS ONE, 9(11), e113114. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0113114

approaches for this language.[25] The present study integrates these digital corpus methods with established lacunological procedures to create a methodology suited to contemporary youth speech in both languages.

Methodology

The research employs a mixed-methods design comprising four sequential stages: (1) corpus construction and PU extraction; (2) cross-linguistic equivalence mapping; (3) lacuna identification and classification; and (4) expert validation. Table 1 provides an overview of the procedural architecture.

Three complementary data sources were assembled for each language to ensure register coverage and temporal currency. The English sub-corpus was compiled from: (a) Reddit threads in youth-oriented subreddits sampled from 2022–2024; (b) Twitter/X posts using youth-culture hashtags; and (c) transcripts of unscripted YouTube conversations among speakers aged 15–28. The Uzbek sub-corpus drew on: (a) Telegram channel messages from channels with documented youth demographics; (b) TikTok comment sections collected via the TikTok Research API; and (c) transcribed peer conversations recorded in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Kokand with informed consent.

All participants in the recorded conversations were aged 15–28, self-identified as native or dominant speakers of the respective language, and provided written consent. Data collection complied with the ethical guidelines of Kokand University (Protocol No. KU-ETH-2023-09). Text data were anonymised prior to analysis by replacing usernames and any personally identifying information with coded placeholders.

The final cleaned corpus comprised 1,240,000 tokens in English and 980,000 tokens in Uzbek. PU candidates were extracted using a combination of: (a) keyword-in-context (KWIC) searches anchored on known PU frames; (b) n-gram frequency analysis (2–5 grams) filtered for multi-word units appearing at least ten times per million tokens; and (c) manual review of frequency lists by two trained research assistants with expertise in the respective languages. This yielded 1,580 candidate PUs in English and 1,260 in Uzbek.

Stage	Procedure	Tool / Instrument	Output
1. Corpus Build	Data collection & PU extraction	AntConc 4.2; Python NLTK	2,840 candidate PUs
2. Equivalence Mapping	Bilingual concordancing; dictionary cross-check	Parallel KWIC; 4 dictionaries	Equivalence scores (0–3)
3. Lacuna Classification	Four-type taxonomy application	Annotation scheme; Cohen's kappa	Typed lacuna list
4. Expert Validation	Panel review; native-speaker ratings	Structured questionnaire (N=24)	Validated final dataset

Table 1. Four-stage methodology for phraseological lacuna identification

[25]Rashidova, N., & Tursunova, D. (2021). Telegram as a corpus source for Uzbek informal register analysis. Uzbek Language and Literature Studies, 6(2), 41–49.

Each English PU was assessed for Uzbek equivalents and vice versa using a three-step equivalence-mapping procedure. First, four bilingual resources were consulted: the standard Uzbek phraseological dictionary, the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms,[26] the Cambridge Idioms Dictionary,[27] and an unpublished contemporary Uzbek slang glossary compiled by the research team from corpus data. Second, native-speaker informants (n = 48, evenly split by language, aged 18–25) completed a gap-filling task. Third, each candidate equivalent was rated on a three-point scale: 0 = no equivalent; 1 = paraphrase only; 2 = partial equivalent; 3 = full equivalent. PUs receiving a score of 0 or 1 were provisionally classified as lacunar.

Provisionally lacunar PUs (n = 982 English; n = 786 Uzbek) were assigned to one of four lacuna types according to explicit decision criteria:

Absolute lacuna: No equivalent exists at any level — neither idiomatic nor descriptive — in the target-language youth register. Example: English "slay" (to perform or present oneself with exceptional confidence and style), which has no single Uzbek PU equivalent; Uzbek "gap ketdi" (an exclamation conveying sudden admiration), with no English counterpart.

Partial lacuna: A lexical equivalent exists but with systematic semantic, connotational, or register mismatch. Example: English "lowkey" maps partially to Uzbek "ozgina" but loses the hedging and understatement function distinctive of the English form.

Stylistic lacuna: An equivalent exists but belongs to a different stylistic stratum. Example: English "spill the tea" has a semantic Uzbek counterpart, but available Uzbek expressions lack the ironic-playful register of the English PU.

Pragmatic lacuna: An equivalent exists semantically but differs in illocutionary force or conversational function. Example: English "no cap" (sincerity marker) has partial Uzbek equivalents but these do not function as standalone discourse markers in the same way.

Classification was performed independently by two annotators, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Inter-rater agreement was calculated using Cohen's kappa prior to reconciliation ($\kappa = 0.81$, $p < .001$), indicating strong agreement — a threshold considered acceptable for phraseological annotation tasks.[28]

The classified lacuna list was reviewed by an expert panel of 24 participants: 12 Uzbek–English bilingual linguists (minimum MA in linguistics; minimum five years of professional experience with both languages) and 12 bilingual youth-language informants (ages 18–26, balanced by gender, residing in Uzbekistan). Panellists rated each classified lacuna on a five-point Likert scale across three dimensions: (a) accuracy of lacuna classification; (b) perceived communicative significance of the gap; and (c) likelihood of natural code-switching as a coping strategy. Items receiving a mean accuracy rating below 3.0 were re-examined and reclassified where warranted, affecting 4.2% of the lacuna list.

Results

Of the 1,580 English youth PUs, 982 (62.2%) were identified as lacunar in Uzbek at the conclusion of all four methodology stages. Of the 1,260 Uzbek youth PUs, 786 (62.4%) were lacunar in English. The overall lacunarity rates are broadly symmetrical, though the distribution across lacuna types and semantic domains differs

[26]Siefring, J. (Ed.). (2004). Oxford dictionary of idioms (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
[27]McCarthy, M., & O'Dell, F. (2006). Cambridge idioms dictionary (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
[28]Artstein, R., & Poesio, M. (2008). Inter-coder agreement for computational linguistics. Computational Linguistics, 34(4), 555–596. https://doi.org/10.1162/coli.07-034-R2

substantially between the two directions (see Table 2).

Language Direction	Total PUs	Lacunar PUs	Lacunarity Rate	Full Equivalents
English → Uzbek	1,580	982	62.2%	598 (37.8%)
Uzbek → English	1,260	786	62.4%	474 (37.6%)
Combined (unique)	2,840	1,426	50.2%	1,072 (49.8%)

Table 2. Lacunarity rates by language direction

The combined figure of 50.2% lacunarity for unique PUs indicates that only approximately half of identified youth phraseological units in either language have a conventionalised counterpart in the other. This figure is substantially higher than lacunarity rates reported for typologically closer pairs such as English–German (approximately 28%) or Russian–Ukrainian (approximately 18%), confirming the hypothesis that typological distance amplifies phraseological lacunarity.

Table 3 presents the distribution of lacunar PUs across the four classification types for each language direction.

Lacuna Type	English → Uzbek (n)	E→U (%)	Uzbek → English (n)	U→E (%)
Absolute	312	31.8%	284	36.1%
Partial	274	27.9%	198	25.2%
Stylistic	231	23.5%	182	23.2%
Pragmatic	165	16.8%	122	15.5%
Total	982	100%	786	100%

Table 3. Distribution of lacunar PUs by type and language direction

Absolute lacunae constitute the largest single category in both directions (31.8% E→U; 36.1% U→E), with Uzbek showing a somewhat higher rate of absolute gaps when mapped onto English. This is consistent with the greater lexicographic maturity of English phraseology and the richer inventory of synonymous and near-synonymous expressions available to English users when attempting equivalence. Pragmatic lacunae are the smallest category in both directions, suggesting that discourse-marker functions are more frequently covered by analogous — if not idiomatic — structures in both languages.

PUs were coded for semantic domain using a modified version of the Roget thesaurus categories adapted for youth-register content. Table 4 presents lacunarity rates across the eight most populated semantic domains.

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Semantic Domain	Total PUs	Lacunar E→U	Rate E→U	Lacunar U→E	Rate U→E
Emotional nuance	420	173	41.2%	148	35.2%
Social hierarchy/status	390	147	37.7%	152	39.0%
Digital/internet culture	380	200	52.6%	176	46.3%
Appearance/aesthetics	310	108	34.8%	119	38.4%
Romantic/interpersonal	290	112	38.6%	98	33.8%
Authenticity/sincerity	270	108	40.0%	89	33.0%
Failure/embarrassment	240	76	31.7%	64	26.7%
Group identity/in-group	220	82	37.3%	78	35.5%

Table 4. Lacunarity rates across semantic domains (top 8 domains)

Figure 1. English→Uzbek Lacunarity Rate by Semantic Domain (%)

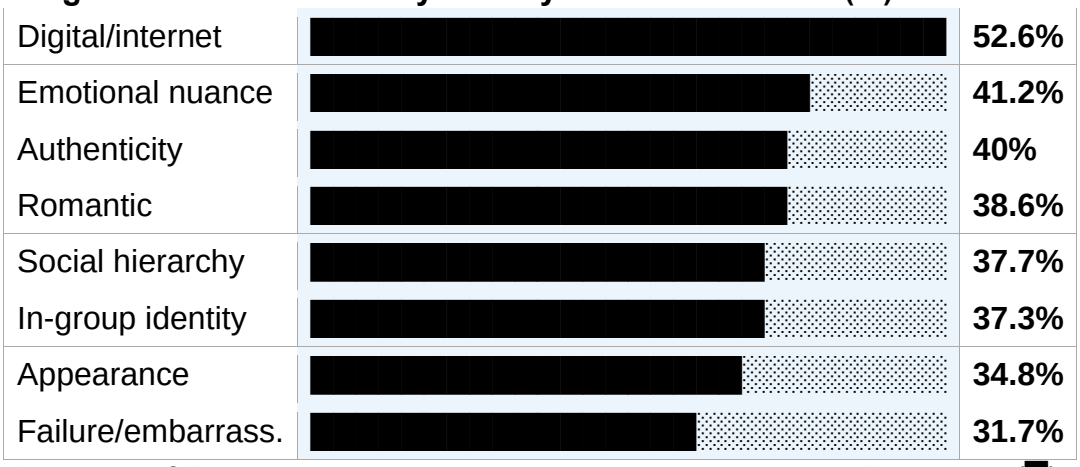

Figure 1. Bar chart of English→Uzbek lacunarity by semantic domain. Filled bars (▓) represent proportion of maximum observed value; unfilled bars (▒) represent remaining share.

The digital/internet-culture domain shows the highest lacunarity in both directions (52.6% E→U; 46.3% U→E), reflecting the rapid, uneven spread of digital terminology across languages and the lag in lexical borrowing and nativisation. The emotional nuance domain exhibits the second-highest lacunarity in the English-to-Uzbek direction (41.2%), which can be attributed to the finer-grained emotional vocabulary of English combined with distinct cultural display rules governing emotional expression in Uzbek youth culture. Social hierarchy lacunarity is symmetrically high (37.7% and 39.0%), reflecting differing social stratification schemas encoded in each language's PU inventory.

The expert panel assigned high accuracy ratings to the lacuna classifications (mean = 4.12 / 5.0, SD = 0.67). Perceived communicative significance was rated highest for absolute lacunae (mean = 4.38) and lowest for stylistic lacunae (mean = 3.24), consistent with the observation that stylistic variants can be approximated even if imperfectly. Code-switching likelihood

was rated highest in the digital-culture domain (mean = 4.51), supporting the observation that digital-culture PUs are frequently borrowed unchanged rather than translated (Table 5).

Lacuna Type	Mean Accuracy Rating	Communicative Significance	Code-Switching Likelihood
Absolute	4.38 (SD 0.54)	4.38 (SD 0.61)	3.92 (SD 0.78)
Partial	4.21 (SD 0.68)	3.87 (SD 0.72)	3.54 (SD 0.83)
Stylistic	3.88 (SD 0.82)	3.24 (SD 0.91)	2.98 (SD 0.96)
Pragmatic	4.14 (SD 0.71)	4.02 (SD 0.68)	3.71 (SD 0.74)

Table 5. Expert panel mean ratings (1–5 Likert scale) by lacuna type

Discussion

The four-stage methodology developed here offers several advantages over prior approaches to lacuna identification. Earlier lacunological work relied primarily on dictionary comparison and individual researcher intuition, creating risks of false positives — labelling as lacunar what is simply absent from the consulted dictionaries — and false negatives, namely overlooking lacunae where approximate equivalents exist but fail at the register or pragmatic level. The combination of corpus-driven extraction, informant elicitation, and expert panel validation addresses all three error types: corpus methods ensure that only items with documented youth-register currency are included; elicitation captures the knowledge of real language users rather than lexicographers; and expert validation provides a check against systematic annotation bias.

The inter-rater reliability coefficient (κ = 0.81) compares favourably with similar annotation tasks in phraseological research. The post-validation reclassification rate of 4.2% is low, suggesting that the four-type taxonomy is sufficiently well-defined for consistent application. The taxonomy's granularity is its key methodological advantage: earlier frameworks treated lacunarity as a binary quality, whereas the present fourfold distinction allows researchers to differentiate gaps that require fundamentally different translator or teacher responses. Future research could explore automated classification using transformer-based multilingual models, which have shown promise in idiom-detection tasks.[29]

The overall lacunarity rate of approximately 62% in both directions is substantially higher than previous estimates for typologically distant language pairs derived from general-language corpora. This elevation likely reflects three compounding factors operating simultaneously: the register-specific nature of youth speech, which favours novel and culturally embedded expressions over translatable standard-language equivalents; the morphosyntactic and conceptual distance between English and Uzbek; and the rapid digitally mediated evolution of youth phraseology, which creates continuous new lacunae before nativisation can stabilise in the receiving language.

The asymmetry in absolute-lacuna rates — 31.8% E→U versus 36.1% U→E — deserves particular attention. Uzbek youth speech generates a higher proportion of

[29]Tayyar Madabushi, H., Kochmar, E., Schulte im Walde, S., & Korhonen, A. (2022). SemEval-2022 Task 2: Multilingual idiomaticity detection and sentence embedding. In Proceedings of the 16th International Workshop on Semantic Evaluation (SemEval-2022) (pp. 46–64). ACL.

fully unmatched PUs when mapped onto English than English does when mapped onto Uzbek. This finding is counterintuitive given the international dominance of English as a source of lexical borrowing. We interpret it as reflecting the productivity of Uzbek's agglutinative morphology and the culturally specific discourse traditions that generate PUs rooted in social structures — such as age-based respect registers and extended family hierarchy — for which English-speaking youth culture has no institutionalised idiomatic equivalent. These Uzbek-specific structures are not mere vocabulary gaps; they encode entire social practices that English lacks the cultural motivation to lexicalise at phraseological level.

Conversely, English digital-culture PUs show high lacunarity in Uzbek precisely because they encode evaluative norms and interactional practices — most strikingly around authenticity, social performance, and romantic rejection — that, while increasingly familiar to Uzbek youth through social media exposure, have not yet undergone the conventionalisation process required to achieve phraseological status in Uzbek. This distinction between cultural familiarity and linguistic idiomatisation is theoretically important: a concept can be known without being lexicalised, and lacunarity should be measured at the level of conventionalised form, not mere conceptual accessibility.

The exceptionally high lacunarity of the digital/internet-culture domain (52.6% E→U; 46.3% U→E) invites a dynamic rather than static view of lacunarity. Many items classified here as absolute lacunae may, within a few years, develop established loan translations or nativised equivalents in the target language as digital communication continues to drive cross-linguistic convergence. Longitudinal follow-up studies using the same corpus methodology would allow researchers to track the closure of these gaps over time, yielding data on the mechanisms and timescales of lacuna resolution — a dimension of phraseological change that remains almost entirely unstudied.

Several limitations constrain the generalisability of these findings. First, the study is cross-sectional, capturing a snapshot of youth phraseology that is inherently dynamic; the rapid turnover of youth slang means that some PUs identified as lacunar at the time of data collection may have acquired equivalents by the time of publication. Second, while substantial in size, the Uzbek corpus is geographically concentrated in three urban centres and is therefore likely to underrepresent rural speech varieties and regional dialect variation, which may exhibit different patterns of lacunarity. Third, the expert panel is exclusively composed of participants residing in Uzbekistan; diaspora Uzbek communities in Russia, Germany, South Korea, and elsewhere develop distinct hybrid registers that may partially fill lacunae absent from domestic varieties. Fourth, the PU extraction procedure, despite using frequency thresholds and manual review, cannot guarantee complete coverage of low-frequency but culturally significant expressions. Future work should address these limitations through longitudinal corpus expansion, regional stratification of data collection, integration of diaspora speakers, and exploration of lower-frequency PU strata.

For English-language pedagogy in Uzbekistan, the high lacunarity rates documented here underscore the risk of teaching phraseology through one-to-one equivalence mapping. Learners who internalise English PUs as having direct Uzbek counterparts are likely to encounter persistent comprehension and production errors, particularly in informal and digital communication contexts. We recommend

that language instructors explicitly foreground lacunarity as a concept from intermediate level onward, introducing learners to descriptive paraphrase strategies, metalinguistic awareness of cultural encoding, and autonomous corpus exploration.

For translation practitioners working with youth-register texts — subtitles, social-media localisation, youth literature — the four-type taxonomy offers a practical decision framework: absolute lacunae require creative equivalents or explanatory footnotes; partial lacunae require register calibration; stylistic lacunae require upward or downward style adjustment; and pragmatic lacunae require attention to the illocutionary function rather than the propositional content of the source PU. These distinctions parallel strategies recommended in general translation studies[30][31] but provide operationally clearer guidance for the phraseological domain, where existing frameworks offer insufficient granularity for the register-sensitive decisions that youth-language material demands.

Conclusion

This study has presented a validated, four-stage methodology for identifying and classifying phraseological lacunae in English and Uzbek youth speech, applied to a corpus of 2,840 PUs collected from digital and conversational sources between 2022 and 2024. Key findings include a lacunarity rate of approximately 62% in both language directions; a distribution in which absolute lacunae predominate; the highest lacunarity in the digital-culture and emotional-nuance semantic domains; and an asymmetry in absolute-lacuna rates that reflects structurally distinct cultural encodings in the two languages.

The methodology developed here is explicitly replicable and scalable. Researchers working with other typologically distant language pairs — particularly those involving Turkic, Sino-Tibetan, or Dravidian languages paired with Indo-European languages — can adapt the four-stage protocol to their specific corpora and annotation needs. The four-type taxonomy provides sufficient granularity for both theoretical analysis and practical application without imposing excessive complexity on the annotation process.

From a broader perspective, phraseological lacunae are not merely linguistic curiosities. They are windows onto the cultural schemas, social structures, and communicative practices that languages encode differently. In the case of English and Uzbek youth speech, the patterns of lacunarity documented here reveal a complex interplay of digital globalisation, typological constraint, and cultural specificity that merits continued investigation by linguists, educators, and translation scholars working at the intersection of language, culture, and digital communication.

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Data Availability Statement - The anonymised PU inventory, annotation scheme, and expert-panel questionnaire are available from the author upon reasonable request. Raw social-media data

[30]Venuti, L. (1995). The translator's invisibility: A history of translation. Routledge.

[31]Baker, M. (2011). In other words: A coursebook on translation (2nd ed.). Routledge.

cannot be shared publicly owing to platform terms of service.

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