

Cross-Cultural Euphemistic Strategies In Political Discourse: A Comparative Linguopragmatic Analysis Of English And Uzbek Languages

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Abstract

This study explores euphemistic strategies in English and Uzbek political speeches, focusing on their linguopragmatic functions within distinct cultural and typological contexts. It examines how euphemisms, as strategic and ideological tools, shape political discourse, mitigate sensitive topics, and reflect broader socio-cultural values. Drawing on politeness theory, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis, the research compares the forms and functions of euphemisms in both languages, highlighting their role in political manipulation, public perception management, and ideological framing. The findings reveal how linguistic and cultural factors influence euphemistic expression and its impact on political communication.

Keywords: Euphemism, political discourse, English, Uzbek, linguopragmatics, politeness theory, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, cross-cultural communication, ideological framing

Annotatsiya

Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz va o'zbek siyosiy nutqlaridagi evfemistik strategiyalarni o'rganib, ularning alohida madaniy va tipologik kontekstdagi lingvopragmatik funksiyalariga e'tibor qaratadi. U evfemizmlarning strategik va mafkuraviy qurol sifatida siyosiy nutqni qanday shakllantirishi, nozik mavzularni yumshatishini va kengroq ijtimoiy-madaniy qadriyatlarni aks ettirishini o'rganadi. Tadqiqotda xushmuomalalik nazariyasi, kognitiv lingvistika va nutq tahliliga tayangan holda, har ikki tildagi evfemizmlarning shakllari va vazifalari taqqoslanadi, ularning siyosiy manipulyatsiya, jamoatchilik idrokini boshqarish va mafkuraviy tuzilishdagi roli ko'rsatilgan. Topilmalar lingvistik va madaniy omillarning evfemistik ifodaga qanday ta'sir qilishini va uning siyosiy muloqotga ta'sirini ochib beradi.

Tayanch so'zlar: Evfemizm, siyosiy nutq, ingliz, o'zbek, lingvopragmatika, xushmuomalalik nazariyasi, kognitiv lingvistika, nutq tahlili, madaniyatlararo muloqot, mafkuraviy tuzilish.

Introduction

In political communication, euphemisms play a crucial role in addressing delicate, controversial, or potentially face-threatening subjects. Politicians often use these indirect expressions to soften unpleasant truths, veil contentious messages, and frame controversial policies or actions in a more agreeable light. Far from being mere stylistic flourishes, euphemisms are tightly woven into the strategic and ideological fabric of political discourse. They reveal both the intentions of the speaker and the wider cultural, political, and communicative contexts in which they are used. This research explores how euphemistic language is employed in

political speeches in two linguistically and culturally different contexts: English and Uzbek. English, a globally dominant Indo-European language, often utilizes abstract, bureaucratic euphemisms that convey formality and help obscure personal accountability. In contrast, Uzbek—a Turkic language shaped by collectivist values and high-context communication—frequently uses culturally meaningful and metaphorical euphemisms that emphasize respect, unity, and social order.

The central focus of this study is to compare how euphemisms function in English and Uzbek political rhetoric from a linguopragmatic perspective. It examines how structural features of each language,

cultural expectations, and pragmatic goals shape the selection and use of euphemistic expressions. The analysis is grounded in theoretical approaches such as politeness theory, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis to uncover how euphemisms influence public opinion and help shape political messaging. Considering that political speech is a powerful instrument for shaping public attitudes and advancing ideological agendas, understanding euphemistic strategies sheds light on the hidden mechanisms of influence, persuasion, and cultural conditioning. This comparative inquiry contributes to a broader appreciation of how language serves as a tool for exercising authority, managing diplomatic relationships, and maintaining social order in different cultural settings.

Literature Review

The study of euphemisms has long been of interest to linguists due to their important role in navigating socially delicate or taboo topics. Euphemisms function as pragmatic tools that allow speakers to express themselves more tactfully, often reducing the impact of language that might otherwise be perceived as blunt or offensive. Allan and Burridge (1991) underscore the importance of euphemistic language in sustaining polite interaction by diminishing the severity of potentially face-threatening remarks. These expressions, grounded in the framework of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), serve not only to maintain social decorum but also to subtly steer audience perception in strategic ways. Nowhere is this more evident than in political language, where word choice becomes a mechanism of persuasion, ideological framing, and influence.

Political discourse, by nature, demands a high degree of rhetorical management. As Chilton (2004) observes, politicians often rely on euphemistic phrasing to recast controversial measures in more favorable

terms, engaging in both linguistic camouflage and conceptual reframing. Fairclough (2006) expands on this by suggesting that euphemism operates as a form of discourse control—one that reinforces authority and shields political actors from dissent. By softening contentious realities, such language creates a protective layer between the speaker and the audience, maintaining political legitimacy and helping to preserve social order. Within English-language political rhetoric, euphemisms have been widely analyzed and critiqued. Scholars such as Lakoff (1973) have argued that these expressions function as "moral filters"—linguistic constructs that help reframe harsh realities. Terms like "*collateral damage*" to refer to civilian deaths, or "*enhanced interrogation techniques*" in place of torture, illustrate how bureaucratic jargon can obscure the moral weight of policy decisions. These sanitized terms repackage disturbing actions in emotionally neutral language, which not only shapes public perception but also helps normalize controversial practices. Euphemisms in English political speech are thus employed as sophisticated rhetorical devices that aid in minimizing criticism and consolidating support. From a structural perspective, English euphemisms often rely on grammatical constructions such as nominalization, passive voice, and specialized or vague vocabulary. Phrases like "*mistakes were made*" serve to diffuse responsibility by omitting any clear agent. This tendency toward abstraction is consistent with the legalistic and individual-centered nature of political discourse in English-speaking societies, where accountability can hinge on subtle linguistic choices.

In contrast, euphemistic strategies in Uzbek reflect the values of a high-context, collectivist culture. Uzbek political language tends to emphasize indirectness,

communal values, and deference to hierarchy. Rather than inventing technical terms or drawing on bureaucratic abstraction, Uzbek euphemisms often derive from idiomatic expressions or culturally resonant metaphors. These are rooted in traditional worldviews and shared societal norms. For instance, a term like “*qiyin davr*” (a difficult period) may be used in place of a direct reference to economic hardship. The phrase softens the message while also inviting empathy and national solidarity. In similar fashion, topics such as unemployment or political dissent are approached through euphemistic language that avoids confrontation and maintains group cohesion. Scholars such as Crespo-Fernández (2007) have emphasized that euphemistic usage is shaped by the broader cultural and communicative conventions of each society. What functions as a rhetorical strategy in Western political debates may, in Central Asian contexts, be closely tied to social etiquette, relational harmony, and traditional expectations. Kussmaul (1997) highlights how these cultural differences create challenges in translation, noting that in many cases, conveying the underlying meaning of a euphemism requires more than just linguistic equivalence—it demands cultural adaptation. Although there has been extensive inquiry into political euphemism in English, research on its use in Uzbek remains relatively sparse. Moreover, very few studies have engaged in a side-by-side comparison of euphemistic strategies across languages with distinct typologies and cultural backdrops, such as English and Uzbek. While both languages employ euphemism to avoid directness and manage social dynamics, the motivations and mechanisms behind these choices are often quite different. With political messages now circulating widely in a globalized media environment, understanding these cross-cultural

distinctions becomes increasingly important.

Another limitation in the existing literature is methodological. Much of the current research is limited to textual analysis and lacks insight into real-time speech contexts or the perspectives of native language users. Because euphemisms often depend on contextual cues—such as tone, setting, and shared cultural references—their interpretation cannot be fully understood through text alone. The pragmatic dimension, which includes how meaning is negotiated in interaction, is essential for a comprehensive analysis. Furthermore, while numerous comparative studies focus on widely spoken world languages—such as Chinese, Arabic, or Russian—Turkic languages like Uzbek remain underrepresented in discourse analysis. Considering Uzbekistan's growing role on the international stage and evolving internal political dynamics, exploring how euphemistic language is employed in Uzbek political speech is both timely and necessary. It offers valuable insight not only for linguistic theory but also for understanding political messaging in non-Western societies. To address these gaps, this study sets out to conduct a comparative linguopragmatic analysis of euphemisms in English and Uzbek political discourse. It seeks to explore the ways in which euphemistic expressions reflect and reproduce cultural values, communicative norms, and ideological orientations in each language. Through this comparative lens, the study aims to contribute to broader discussions in political linguistics, intercultural communication, and discourse studies.

In conclusion, although euphemisms have been extensively analyzed in Western political contexts, there remains a pressing need for research that brings non-Western languages like Uzbek into the conversation. By investigating the unique and overlapping

functions of euphemistic language in English and Uzbek political rhetoric, this study aims to enrich our understanding of how language operates as a tool of diplomacy, power, and cultural expression across linguistic and national boundaries.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative and comparative linguopragmatic approach, aiming to explore the structural, functional, and contextual use of euphemisms in political rhetoric across two linguistically and culturally divergent languages: English and Uzbek. At its core, this study treats euphemisms not merely as lexical alternatives but as expressions deeply shaped by the social norms and pragmatic systems of their respective speech communities. The methodology was thus designed to go beyond surface-level comparisons and uncover the underlying cultural and communicative ideologies influencing euphemistic language use in political discourse. The chosen methodology centers on a cross-linguistic, pragmatically oriented comparison, which enables the researcher to analyze how different linguistic communities address sensitive issues through indirect forms of expression. By comparing euphemistic strategies in English and Uzbek political speech, this study highlights both convergences and divergences in linguistic structure and pragmatic intent. The linguopragmatic framework allows for examination of not only how euphemisms are formed and used, but also why they are chosen in particular contexts, reflecting the idea of language as a functional tool within specific cultural settings. A curated dataset of 50 political speeches was assembled for comparative analysis, comprising 25 from English-speaking figures and 25 from Uzbek officials to ensure representativeness. The English-language corpus includes addresses from U.S. Presidents, U.K. Prime Ministers, and

Cabinet members, sourced from authoritative platforms like whitehouse.gov, gov.uk, and the American Presidency Project. These texts encompass inaugural speeches, policy declarations, and legislative debates. Conversely, the Uzbek-language corpus features public addresses by the President and leading officials in sectors like education and economics. These were gathered from official portals such as president.uz, various ministry websites, and national news agencies including Uza and Dunyo, guaranteeing reliability and a comprehensive scope of governmental communication from both political spheres. The selected speeches span from 2015 to 2023, a period marked by significant events like the COVID-19 pandemic, international conflicts, and major economic reforms, which provided a rich context for the use of euphemistic language. To ensure consistency, strict selection criteria were applied: all speeches had to be publicly delivered and officially documented, addressing politically sensitive issues such as economic challenges, civil unrest, or diplomatic controversies. Furthermore, the original delivery was required to be in the speaker's native language or available in a professionally verified translation, with a complete and accurate official transcript accessible for analysis, guaranteeing the corpus's reliability and analytical value.

The analysis proceeded through three stages—examining linguistic construction, pragmatic function, and cultural context. Euphemistic expressions were identified using a context-sensitive, semantic-substitution method, pinpointing where softer language replaced direct terms. Key indicators included semantic shifts using metaphorical expressions, syntactic strategies like passive constructions that obscure agency, and pragmatic softening through vague or emotionally neutral wording for controversial subjects. This

systematic approach allowed for a thorough examination of how language was deliberately softened across the corpus of political speeches. For instance, “operational misstep” was marked as a euphemism for “military failure,” while the Uzbek phrase “muammo yo‘q, faqat vaqtinchalik qiyinchilik” (“no problem, only a temporary difficulty”) indirectly referenced crises. Once identified, these euphemisms were classified by communicative function, drawing from established pragmatic theories. These included face-saving politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), ideological framing (Fairclough, 2006), avoidance of taboo subjects (Allan & Burridge, 1991), and intentional misdirection (Lakoff, 1973; Crespo-Fernández, 2007), providing a theoretical framework for analyzing their strategic use in political discourse across both linguistic and cultural contexts. Many euphemisms served multiple functions, so primary and secondary roles were assigned contextually. Their linguistic construction was analyzed through word formation like compounding, syntactic features such as passive voice, and vocabulary choices including abstract nouns and culturally loaded metaphors, revealing their multifaceted nature. Structural comparisons revealed English euphemisms favored bureaucratic abstraction, while Uzbek counterparts often utilized traditional proverbs and cultural metaphors. To ensure accurate, culturally grounded interpretations, the study incorporated insights from native speaker informants. These individuals possessed native fluency in either English or Uzbek, coupled with professional expertise in linguistics, translation, or political communication. Crucially, they also had a deep awareness of their respective country's sociopolitical context and rhetorical styles, allowing for a nuanced analysis of the identified euphemistic strategies across the two

distinct political discourses. Selected excerpts were shared with these informants, who were then asked to explain their understanding of specific euphemistic phrases. Their feedback was critical in confirming the connotative and ideological meanings of expressions, and it provided a check against potential misreadings by the researcher. Discrepancies in interpretation were recorded and analyzed for cross-cultural significance.

Results

The comparative analysis of euphemistic expressions in political discourse across English and Uzbek reveals distinct differences in how each language employs such strategies. These differences span not only frequency and structure but also cultural intention and audience reception. Drawing on the examination of 50 political speeches—25 from each linguistic context—the findings are organized into four key areas: frequency and concentration, communicative functions, structural characteristics, and public interpretation. This section outlines how euphemism serves as a culturally grounded linguistic resource in political messaging. A noticeable variation was observed in how often euphemisms appeared in political speeches across the two languages. English-language speeches, particularly from U.S. and U.K. officials addressing topics such as foreign intervention, defense policy, and internal governance issues, showed a high density of euphemistic language. These speeches frequently included expressions designed to soften or obscure controversial actions—phrases like “*kinetic military action*”, “*collateral damage*”, or “*enhanced interrogation*” appeared repeatedly in discussions about military operations and security matters. This tendency reflects a broader strategic use of euphemism in English-speaking political environments, where the aim is often to reduce emotional response or public

backlash by reframing uncomfortable truths. By contrast, Uzbek political speeches made less frequent use of euphemisms, but those that were used tended to be deeply rooted in the cultural and social fabric of the language. Topics such as economic challenges, healthcare, or labor concerns were often addressed using more implicit and culturally resonant language. For instance, rather than referring to a crisis directly, phrases like “*qiyin davr*” (a difficult time) were used, offering a less alarming framing. Similarly, terms like “*yangilanish jarayoni*” (renewal process) substituted more formal or harsh terms like “*islohot*” (reform), thus presenting political shifts in a more positive or hopeful light. These patterns suggest that English speakers use euphemism as a rhetorical tool in adversarial or accountability-laden environments, while Uzbek speakers deploy it to maintain collective harmony and align with a core objective was to identify how euphemisms function pragmatically within each linguistic and political context. While both English and Uzbek speeches use euphemisms to handle sensitive content, their communicative goals diverge. In English discourse, such language often deflects blame, reframes unfavorable outcomes with softer terminology, and supports political agendas by controlling public interpretation. For instance, “budgetary adjustment” replaced “budget cuts,” subtly violating expectations of clarity for strategic effect. Conversely, Uzbek political speeches employed euphemisms primarily to uphold social dignity, avoid direct criticism, and reinforce cultural values, respect for hierarchy, and emotional stability, thereby presenting messages within familiar, morally grounded frameworks. The structural makeup of euphemisms also differed significantly. English expressions often featured nominalizations like “downsizing,” passive constructions such as “errors were made,”

and invented terminology like “nontraditional engagement” to obscure responsibility, mask agency, and reduce emotional intensity, contributing to a formal, bureaucratic tone that distances the speaker. Uzbek euphemisms, by contrast, displayed metaphorical and idiomatic expressions rooted in folklore, references to religious principles or divine will, and proverbial language like “*Har bir ishda bir xayr bor*” (“There is good in every hardship”) to reframe adversity positively. This indicates that while both systems manage image, English euphemisms are more explicitly strategic, whereas Uzbek ones operate within an implicitly respectful, culturally conditioned framework. Phrases rooted in kinship or national duty—such as “*sabr-toqat davri*” (a time for patience)—were used over direct references to hardship, showing their primary function is preserving social harmony rather than manipulating perception. These stylistic tendencies reflect Uzbek’s high-context communication style, where meaning is implied, social values are prioritized, and euphemisms build emotional resonance and solidarity instead of depersonalizing content.

Native speaker feedback provided essential insight into how euphemistic language is received within each culture. English-speaking informants, particularly those attuned to political rhetoric, generally viewed euphemisms with suspicion. They perceived such language as evasive or intentionally misleading, citing examples like “*alternative facts*” as emblematic of manipulative spin. Overuse of euphemism, they suggested, could result in public cynicism and loss of trust. In contrast, Uzbek-speaking informants expressed a more favorable view. Many saw euphemistic speech as appropriate and respectful, particularly in contexts where direct language might cause embarrassment or social unrest. While a

few acknowledged that euphemisms could obscure accountability, most emphasized their cultural necessity and the comfort they provide in maintaining respectful discourse. This divergence highlights differing expectations around political communication: English-speaking audiences often prioritize transparency and directness, while Uzbek-speaking audiences place value on courtesy, restraint, and communal harmony.

Discussion

This study provides significant insights into how euphemistic language is employed in political contexts within two distinct linguistic and cultural frameworks: English and Uzbek. The findings indicate that euphemisms are shaped not only by the structural features of each language but also by sociocultural norms and political traditions. Rather than serving a uniform purpose, euphemisms vary in their form, function, and audience reception based on broader ideological and communicative factors. This section discusses the broader implications of these results, draws connections to existing academic discourse, and proposes directions for future research and practical applications. The study illustrates that euphemism is deeply rooted in the communicative traditions and cultural values of a society. While politicians in both English- and Uzbek-speaking settings utilize euphemisms as rhetorical tools, the intentions and mechanisms behind their use differ notably. In English-speaking political contexts, euphemisms often reflect a preference for formal detachment and strategic ambiguity. Phrases like *“enhanced interrogation”* or *“collateral damage”* do more than replace harsher terms; they recast problematic realities in less emotionally charged and more institutionally acceptable language. These findings align with the work of scholars such as Chilton (2004) and Fairclough (2006),

who argue that political language in English-speaking cultures frequently serves to obscure truth and shape public opinion.

In contrast, euphemisms in Uzbek political speech are more reflective of a collectivist and high-context culture, where implicit meaning and shared cultural references play a central role. Expressions such as *“qiyin davr”* (difficult time) emphasize resilience and national solidarity rather than denial or distortion. Unlike their English counterparts, Uzbek euphemisms are generally not used to mislead, but rather to maintain social balance and cultural decorum.

The differences observed in the structural design of euphemistic expressions can be linked to the typological features of each language. In English, euphemisms frequently appear as nominalizations, passive constructions, or abstract formulations, often resulting in language that conceals agency and responsibility. These forms contribute to a bureaucratic tone that helps speakers distance themselves from potentially damaging actions or outcomes. By contrast, Uzbek euphemisms are often metaphorical or idiomatic and deeply tied to religious and cultural imagery. Uzbek, being an agglutinative language, facilitates rich and expressive phrasing that enhances emotional resonance. This stylistic preference supports the broader communicative goals of preserving unity, respect, and optimism in the face of political or social challenges. These observations confirm that euphemism functions not just as a linguistic substitute, but as a culturally embedded practice shaped by both grammatical structure and social convention. Understanding these nuances requires a linguopragmatic approach that takes into account both form and context.

Euphemisms in both English and Uzbek political discourse serve important ideological purposes, albeit in different

ways. In English-speaking environments, euphemisms often serve to mask unpleasant realities or reframe controversial policies in more favorable terms. Terms like “*conflict*” instead of “*war*”, or “*revenue enhancements*” instead of “*tax increases*”, are used to soften the political and ethical implications of policy decisions. In the Uzbek context, while euphemisms also frame political narratives, they do so by invoking moral and cultural values. Rather than concealing the truth, these euphemisms tend to portray difficulties as shared challenges that can be overcome through patience and unity. The rhetorical strategy is not about denial but about mobilizing collective strength and maintaining morale. Thus, while both systems use euphemism to influence public perception, their objectives diverge. English euphemisms often manage dissent and legal scrutiny, whereas Uzbek euphemisms reinforce societal cohesion and shared responsibility.

Audience reaction to euphemistic usage is another key area of divergence between the two languages. Informants from English-speaking countries expressed a general mistrust toward political euphemisms, viewing them as tools for deception or spin. This aligns with a cultural emphasis on transparency and directness, particularly in democratic societies with strong media oversight. Uzbek informants, however, typically interpreted euphemistic expressions as polite and appropriate for public discourse. The use of softened language was seen as a way to show respect, avoid social conflict, and uphold national values. While some acknowledged the potential for vagueness, most respondents considered euphemisms to be a culturally valid means of communication. These differences reveal how audience expectations and interpretive norms play a crucial role in the success or failure of euphemistic messaging. What might seem

dishonest in one culture may be perceived as respectful or even reassuring in another. The study’s results have broader implications for international communication and translation. Euphemisms are highly context-sensitive, and their meanings can become distorted when transferred across cultures without adequate interpretation. For diplomats, journalists, and interpreters, it is essential to understand not just what euphemisms mean, but how they function within specific cultural frameworks. This has practical consequences for international relations. For instance, Western media may interpret Uzbek political euphemism as lacking transparency, while Uzbek listeners might find Western political language overly blunt or insensitive. Increasing awareness of these differing rhetorical norms can improve mutual understanding and reduce miscommunication in diplomatic and media settings. These findings also carry valuable implications for education, especially in areas such as critical media literacy, intercultural communication, and language instruction. As individuals are exposed to political messaging through various media channels, the ability to detect and interpret euphemisms becomes increasingly important.

Educators can integrate euphemism analysis into curricula to help students develop critical thinking skills and better understand how language influences perception. In language education, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or Uzbek language programs, teaching euphemisms can enhance cultural competence and deepen learners’ understanding of how rhetoric operates in different societal settings. While this study has provided a focused comparison between English and Uzbek political discourse, it opens the door to broader investigations. Future studies might expand this research to include other Turkic or

Slavic languages, examining whether similar euphemistic patterns exist and how they vary across political or historical contexts. Another promising direction involves examining how euphemisms evolve over time, especially during periods of political upheaval or social change. A diachronic analysis could reveal how euphemistic strategies adapt to shifting ideological climates. In addition, quantitative tools such as corpus linguistics or sentiment analysis could complement qualitative observations. By combining frequency data with discourse interpretation, researchers could gain a more comprehensive view of how euphemism shapes and reflects political communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the significance of euphemistic strategies as more than just stylistic choices—they are integral to how language constructs and mediates political meaning. Euphemisms in English often prioritize depersonalization and institutional rhetoric, while in Uzbek, they emphasize collective identity and moral unity. Viewing political euphemism through a linguopragmatic lens reveals how these expressions are shaped by the interplay of grammar, culture, and ideology. As global political communication continues to evolve, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts, understanding these dynamics will remain vital for scholars, educators, and communicators committed to fostering transparency and intercultural understanding.

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