

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF TABOO AND
EUPHEMISMS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERATURE

(Based on the Works of John Steinbeck and Tog'ay Murod)

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Abstract. This article examines the cultural and linguistic features of taboo and euphemisms in English and Uzbek literature from a comparative perspective. The study is based on the works of John Steinbeck and Tog'ay Murod and analyzes the functional, pragmatic, and cultural load of taboo and euphemistic expressions in literary texts. The findings indicate that in English literature euphemisms primarily serve the principles of social equality and personal respect, whereas in Uzbek literature they are closely connected with national mentality, moral norms, and traditional values.

Keywords: taboo, euphemism, linguocultural features, literary discourse, comparative analysis, English literature, Uzbek literature, John Steinbeck, Tog'ay Murod.

Introduction. In modern linguistics, the relationship between language and culture is considered an important object of study. Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a system that reflects the moral, social, and cultural views of society. Indeed, human language is extraordinarily complex, and it is extremely difficult to grasp all its aspects in their entirety at once. Nevertheless, several centuries of experience in the history of world linguistics show that representatives of various schools have considered the study of language to be the most appropriate path, dedicating their entire lives to clearly defining the object of study and its essence. Therefore, certain concepts are not openly expressed or are used in a restricted form within a community. Such phenomena are explained in linguistics through the concept of taboo. To reduce communicative discomfort caused by taboo expressions, euphemisms emerge as alternative linguistic means. In the linguistic dictionary edited by lexicographer O.S. Akhmanova, euphemism is defined as "a neutral word or expression that can be used in place of its synonym, which may seem rude, coarse, or impolite to the speaker." D.N. Shmelev similarly defines euphemism as "an expression that is softened to avoid using an



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inappropriate or extremely harsh word, considered impolite in certain circumstances, and serves to convey the same meaning while maintaining decorum.” Literary discourse provides a natural environment for the manifestation of taboo and euphemisms. Authors convey social problems, personal emotions, and complex life situations through these linguistic devices. A comparative analysis of English and Uzbek literature allows for identifying culture-specific features of taboo and euphemistic usage. This article explores these issues through the analysis of works by John Steinbeck and Tog‘ay Murod.

Main part. Theoretical Foundations of Taboo and Euphemisms. The concept of taboo originated within anthropological research and was initially used to describe actions and notions prohibited or considered inappropriate in society. Later, it was applied as a linguistic term referring to restricted lexical units. In the studies of Allan and Burridge, taboo is interpreted as linguistic expressions limited due to social, religious, or moral reasons. Euphemism is closely related to taboo and serves to maintain social harmony in communication. Ullmann defines euphemisms as semantic devices used to soften unpleasant or offensive meanings. In Uzbek linguistics, euphemisms are associated with politeness, respect, and modesty and are regarded as an essential component of national speech culture.

Representation of Taboo and Euphemisms in John Steinbeck’s Works

John Steinbeck’s literary works are distinguished by their realistic depiction of social inequality, poverty, and human tragedy in American society. However, the author often avoids direct and harsh expressions of sensitive topics, preferring euphemistic language. In *Of Mice and Men*, the issue of intellectual disability is one of the central themes and is presented not through blunt terminology but via mild and indirect expressions. For instance, the character Lennie is described using phrases such as “not very bright” or “a simple fellow.” In *The Grapes of Wrath*, social taboos such as poverty, hunger, and the degradation of human dignity are conveyed through euphemistic expressions rather than explicit and coarse language. Hunger is depicted through phrases like “they were tired and weak,” which not only soften the harsh reality but also evoke a deeper emotional response in the reader. Scenes of death are frequently described using euphemisms such as “he passed away” or “he lay still,” reflecting cultural and religious sensitivity toward the topic. Additionally, Steinbeck’s dialogues include taboo words characteristic of colloquial speech; however, these are often abbreviated, implied, or understood through context. This stylistic approach allows the author to maintain realism while respecting moral and cultural boundaries. The portrayal of death in Steinbeck’s works emphasizes inevitability and human tragedy rather than explicit violence, reflecting the English-speaking cultural tendency to respect personal emotions and protect the reader’s psychological comfort.

National Features of Taboo and Euphemisms in Tog‘ay Murod’s Works



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In Tog‘ay Murod’s literary works, taboo and euphemisms are closely intertwined with the traditional worldview and moral norms of the Uzbek people. In Uzbek society, topics such as death, sexual relations, and family conflicts are considered sensitive and are rarely discussed openly. Therefore, the author tends to represent these issues symbolically and indirectly. The taboo surrounding death is particularly prominent in Tog‘ay Murod’s writings. In Uzbek culture, direct mention of death is often avoided; instead of the verb “to die,” euphemistic expressions such as “passed away,” “closed one’s eyes,” or “fulfilled one’s mortal duty” are used. In the novel *Otamdan qolgan dalalar* (Fields Left by My Father), death is frequently conveyed through such softened expressions, reflecting folk beliefs and religious perceptions. These euphemisms not only mitigate the taboo topic but also express respect for the deceased. The inner emotional experiences of Tog‘ay Murod’s characters are often depicted through silence, descriptions of nature, and psychological states, which enhances the stylistic significance of euphemisms as literary devices.

A comparative analysis of the works of John Steinbeck and Tog‘ay Murod demonstrates that taboo and euphemisms in both literary traditions are shaped by distinct cultural factors. In English literature, euphemisms are largely associated with personal freedom, social equality, and political correctness. In contrast, in Uzbek literature they primarily serve to preserve moral norms, modesty, and national traditions. In both literary contexts, euphemisms enhance the aesthetic and pragmatic value of the literary text.

Conclusion. The findings of this study confirm that taboo and euphemisms constitute significant cultural and linguistic phenomena in both English and Uzbek literature. In John Steinbeck’s works, they function as tools for presenting social issues in a humane and softened manner, allowing readers to engage with sensitive topics such as poverty, inequality, disability, and death without feeling overwhelmed by harsh or offensive language. Through euphemistic expressions, Steinbeck not only communicates the realities of human suffering but also emphasizes empathy, compassion, and social awareness, reflecting the cultural and moral concerns of his time. In contrast, in Tog‘ay Murod’s writings, euphemisms serve as a reflection of national values, moral principles, and traditional norms. By avoiding direct mention of sensitive topics such as death, illness, or social transgressions, Murod’s use of euphemistic language demonstrates respect for social etiquette, religious beliefs, and cultural sensitivity. The stylistic use of silence, descriptions of nature, and psychological insights further enhances the literary effect of euphemisms, making them an integral part of character development and narrative expression. The comparative analysis of these literary traditions reveals that while the functional purposes of euphemisms differ—social critique and personal empathy in English literature versus moral guidance and cultural preservation in Uzbek literature—their role in shaping reader perception, emotional response, and cultural understanding is equally profound. This study highlights the intricate relationship between language, culture, and literature, demonstrating that euphemisms and taboo are



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not merely linguistic tools but are deeply embedded in societal values and cultural identity.

In conclusion, exploring taboo and euphemisms in a cross-cultural context provides valuable insights into how different societies negotiate sensitive issues, maintain social harmony, and transmit moral and cultural norms through literature. Such analysis not only enriches our understanding of the aesthetic and pragmatic functions of language but also fosters a greater appreciation of the interconnectedness between linguistic expression, cultural consciousness, and literary creativity.

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