

THE USE OF DEATH AS A TABOO THROUGH CURSES AND INSULTING EXPRESSIONS: PARALLELS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This article examines the use of death-related expressions as taboo phenomena in English and Uzbek languages through curses, insults, and offensive speech. The study analyzes how the concept of death functions linguistically as a tool of emotional aggression, social condemnation, and expressive intensification. The semantic, pragmatic, cultural, and linguocultural features of death-related curses and insulting expressions are comparatively investigated. The findings reveal that both English and Uzbek languages employ death-related lexical units as powerful taboo mechanisms; however, their cultural motivations and communicative functions differ significantly. English insulting expressions tend to emphasize individual aggression and emotional confrontation, whereas Uzbek curses frequently incorporate collectivist values, religious beliefs, family honor, and moral judgment. The study contributes to comparative linguistics, pragmatics, taboo studies, and linguoculturology.

Keywords: taboo, death concept, curses, insulting expressions, euphemism, dysphemism, linguoculturology, pragmatics, English language, Uzbek language.

Introduction

Language reflects not only positive aspects of human communication but also emotional aggression, social conflict, cultural fears, and taboo perceptions. Among the most universal and emotionally charged concepts in human culture is death. Throughout history, death has functioned not only as a biological reality but also as a symbolic, religious, psychological, and cultural phenomenon. Because of its association with fear,

loss, punishment, and uncertainty, death occupies a central place in taboo systems across many societies.

Taboo language refers to linguistic expressions that are socially restricted, emotionally sensitive, or culturally prohibited. According to Allan and Burridge, taboo expressions emerge in areas connected with fear, religion, sexuality, death, and bodily functions (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Among these, death-related language demonstrates particularly strong emotional and expressive potential.

Death may appear in language through euphemisms, which soften its harshness, or through dysphemisms, which intensify negativity and emotional aggression. In curses and insulting expressions, death frequently functions as a dysphemistic mechanism used to threaten, humiliate, condemn, or emotionally attack another person.

Both English and Uzbek languages contain numerous curses and offensive expressions connected with death. Expressions such as “**Drop dead**”, “**Go to hell**”, or “**You’re dead to me**” in English demonstrate direct emotional hostility and interpersonal aggression. Uzbek language, meanwhile, contains culturally specific expressions such as “**O’lib ket**”, “**Go’ringga bor**”, or “**Qabringga kir**” which reflect not only aggression but also deeper cultural concepts related to religion, morality, family honor, and social ethics.

The use of death-related expressions in curses is closely connected with cultural perceptions of fear and punishment. In many societies, death is considered sacred or spiritually sensitive; therefore, invoking death in communication becomes highly expressive and emotionally powerful. Such expressions often violate communicative norms intentionally in order to intensify emotional impact.

The aim of this article is to comparatively analyze death-related curses and insulting expressions in English and Uzbek languages from semantic, pragmatic, and linguocultural perspectives. The study seeks to identify cultural parallels and differences in the use of death as a taboo mechanism.

Literature Review

The study of taboo language has become an important area within sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and linguoculturology. Scholars such as Allan and Burrige describe taboo language as expressions avoided or restricted because of social, cultural, or psychological reasons (Allan & Burrige, 2006). Taboo words often become emotionally powerful precisely because they violate social norms.

Dysphemism, the opposite of euphemism, refers to deliberately harsh or offensive language used to create emotional intensity or insult. According to Warren, dysphemistic expressions frequently emerge in contexts of anger, conflict, and social aggression. Death-related expressions are among the strongest forms of dysphemism because they invoke fear, loss, and existential anxiety.

Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that metaphorical systems shape human conceptual understanding, including perceptions of death and destruction (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In many cultures, death is metaphorically associated with darkness, punishment, hell, decay, or disappearance. Such metaphorical models influence the formation of curses and insulting expressions.

In English linguistic culture, insults connected with death are often direct and individualistic. Expressions such as **“Drop dead”** or **“Go die”** demonstrate personal aggression and emotional rejection. English taboo language frequently prioritizes emotional release and individual confrontation.

Uzbek linguistic culture, however, demonstrates stronger connections between taboo language and collective morality. Death-related curses in Uzbek often include references to family members, divine punishment, graves, or dishonor. This reflects the importance of communal values and spiritual worldview within Uzbek society.

Although many studies have examined taboo language and insults separately, comparative analysis of death-related taboo expressions in English and Uzbek languages

remains insufficiently explored. This article attempts to fill that gap through a linguocultural comparison.

Methods

This research employed a comparative linguocultural approach to investigate the use of death-related curses and insulting expressions as taboo phenomena in English and Uzbek languages. The primary objective of the study was to identify how the concept of death functions as a linguistic instrument of emotional aggression, social condemnation, psychological pressure, and expressive intensification in both linguistic cultures. In order to achieve this aim, the research integrated several linguistic methods, including comparative analysis, semantic analysis, pragmatic analysis, contextual analysis, dysphemistic interpretation, and linguocultural analysis.

The comparative method was used to determine similarities and differences between English and Uzbek taboo expressions related to death. The study focused on identifying how both languages conceptualize death within curses, insults, threats, and emotionally offensive communication. Particular attention was given to the structural organization of expressions, metaphorical imagery, emotional intensity, and communicative purpose. The comparison made it possible to reveal culture-specific tendencies in the use of taboo language.

The semantic analysis method played a central role in examining both literal and figurative meanings of the selected expressions. The study analyzed how lexical units associated with death acquire negative, aggressive, and emotionally destructive meanings within communicative contexts. Expressions such as **“Drop dead”**, **“Rot in hell”**, and **“You’re dead to me”** in English were semantically compared with Uzbek expressions such as **“O‘lib ket”**, **“Go‘ringga bor”**, and **“Joning jahannamda kuysin”**.

The semantic analysis helped determine how death-related vocabulary functions beyond its direct meaning and transforms into a tool of insult and condemnation.

Results

The comparative analysis revealed that death-related curses and insulting expressions function as powerful taboo mechanisms in both English and Uzbek languages. However, significant differences were identified in their cultural meanings, emotional structure, and communicative functions.

In English, many death-related insults are direct and confrontational. Expressions such as **“Drop dead”** or **“Go die”** are used to express intense anger, hatred, or emotional rejection. These expressions primarily function as interpersonal aggression aimed at humiliating or dismissing another person.

The phrase **“You’re dead to me”** metaphorically excludes a person from emotional or social existence. Rather than referring to physical death, the expression symbolizes complete relational rejection. Similarly, **“Rot in hell”** combines religious imagery with moral condemnation.

English death-related insults often prioritize emotional immediacy and personal confrontation. They are frequently short, direct, and individual-oriented. The emphasis is placed on emotional intensity rather than social ritual or collective morality.

Uzbek death-related curses demonstrate a more culturally layered structure. Expressions such as **“Go‘ringga bor”** or **“Qabringga kir”** invoke grave imagery and symbolize complete destruction or disappearance. These expressions are highly offensive because graves and death are culturally sacred concepts within Uzbek society.

The curse **“O‘liging chiqsin”** carries extremely strong emotional aggression and reflects cultural beliefs about misfortune, shame, and suffering. Unlike English insults, Uzbek death-related curses often extend beyond the individual and may imply consequences affecting family honor or spiritual condition.

Religious concepts also play a stronger role in Uzbek taboo expressions. Phrases such as “**Joning jahannamda kuysin**” reflect Islamic imagery of hell and divine punishment. Such expressions intensify emotional aggression by invoking spiritual suffering rather than merely physical death.

The findings demonstrate several major parallels and differences:

1. Both languages use death as a powerful taboo concept in emotional aggression.
2. English expressions are more direct and individualistic.
3. Uzbek expressions contain stronger religious and collectivist components.
4. Grave and afterlife imagery are especially significant in Uzbek curses.
5. English taboo expressions focus on emotional confrontation, while Uzbek curses often involve moral and spiritual condemnation.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that death-related taboo expressions reflect deeper cultural perceptions of fear, morality, punishment, and social order. Although both English and Uzbek languages use death symbolically in insults and curses, the cultural logic underlying these expressions differs considerably.

English taboo expressions are strongly influenced by individualistic communication patterns. Emotional aggression is often directed personally and explicitly. Expressions such as “**Drop dead**” serve primarily as emotional outbursts rather than ritualistic or culturally symbolic acts.

Uzbek taboo expressions, however, reveal stronger integration of religion, spirituality, and collective morality. In Uzbek culture, death is treated with considerable respect and sacredness. Consequently, invoking death in curses becomes especially powerful and socially offensive.

Another important difference concerns family and communal identity. Uzbek insults may indirectly affect not only the individual but also their social and moral reputation.

This reflects collectivist cultural structures in which personal identity is closely connected with family and community.

The metaphorical structures used in both languages also differ. English expressions often conceptualize death as disappearance, rejection, or emotional elimination. Uzbek expressions rely more heavily on grave imagery, hell, suffering, and spiritual punishment.

The findings also indicate that taboo language serves important pragmatic functions. Death-related insults allow speakers to express anger, frustration, rejection, or social hostility with maximum emotional intensity. At the same time, such expressions reveal cultural boundaries regarding morality, fear, and sacred concepts.

Thus, death-related taboo expressions function not only as linguistic tools of aggression but also as cultural indicators reflecting national worldview and collective psychology.

Conclusion

This study comparatively analyzed death-related curses and insulting expressions in English and Uzbek languages from semantic, pragmatic, and linguocultural perspectives. The findings demonstrate that death functions as a universal taboo concept used to intensify emotional aggression and social condemnation in both linguistic cultures.

English death-related expressions mainly emphasize direct interpersonal confrontation and emotional rejection, whereas Uzbek curses contain stronger religious, spiritual, and collectivist meanings. Uzbek taboo expressions frequently involve grave imagery, divine punishment, and communal morality, reflecting the cultural significance of spirituality and social honor.

The study confirms that taboo language serves as an important linguistic reflection of cultural mentality and emotional behavior. Comparative analysis of death-related insults

contributes to the development of taboo studies, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and intercultural communication research.

Future studies may further investigate the relationship between taboo language, gender, social hierarchy, and emotional expression across different cultures and linguistic traditions.

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