

EUPHEMISM AND TABOO PHENOMENA (A Comparative Study of Japanese and Uzbek Languages)

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative analysis of euphemism and taboo phenomena in Japanese and Uzbek languages. Taboo is interpreted as a socio-cultural constraint, while euphemism is viewed as a lexical strategy that mitigates the impact of such constraints and serves to maintain norms of politeness and respect in communication.

In Japanese, euphemization is closely linked to principles of hierarchy and politeness, whereas in Uzbek, it is associated with notions of modesty and respect, as illustrated with examples.

Keywords: taboo, euphemism, comparative analysis, Japanese language, Uzbek language, speech culture, discourse, expression

Language is a complex system that reflects the cultural, moral, and social norms of a society. Within this system, certain realities cannot be named or expressed directly due to social restrictions. In this context, the phenomena of taboo and euphemism play a crucial role. They relate to the aesthetic and socially acceptable expression of concepts considered shameful, frightening, or socially inappropriate in discourse.

Euphemisms are directly related to taboos. The term *taboo* was first used in Polynesian cultures to mean “forbidden” and was later incorporated into anthropology and linguistics. Linguistic taboo refers to words, expressions, and topics that are socially, morally, or religiously unacceptable to articulate explicitly. Taboo is often manifested in areas such as death, illness, sexuality, physiological processes, social status, and religious beliefs. These restrictions prohibit speakers from explicitly naming certain objects, which creates the need for alternative expressions.

Euphemism, in contrast, involves the use of soft, neutral, or culturally acceptable expressions instead of taboo or negatively evaluated words. Euphemisms do not eliminate taboos but linguistically mask them and provide aesthetic refinement. Their primary functions include maintaining politeness in communication, mitigating negative effects, and preserving social balance. In this sense, euphemism is inherently connected to the pragmatic dimension of speech, taking into account the age, social status, and contextual circumstances of the interlocutor.

The Japanese language is particularly rich in taboo and euphemistic expressions, reflecting the hierarchical structure and principles of respect in Japanese society. For instance, death is a strongly tabooed topic, and the verb 死ぬ (*shinu* – to die) is often considered excessively direct or impolite in conversation. Instead, euphemistic alternatives such as 亡くなる (*nakunaru* – to pass away) or 逝去する (*seikyo suru* – to depart this world) are used. For example, the sentence 祖父は昨年亡くなりました (*My grandfather passed away last year*) demonstrates the activation of euphemism to preserve respect and cultural norms.

Expressions related to illness are also frequently euphemized in Japanese. The word 癌 (*gan* – cancer), for instance, is often replaced with the softer expression 大きな病気 (*ookina byouki* – serious illness), in order to consider the patient’s psychological state and reduce negative impact. Similarly, in workplace contexts, the phrase 解雇する (*kaiko suru* – to dismiss)

may be replaced with 退職していただく (*taishoku shite itadaku* – to request someone to resign) as a euphemistic form appropriate for Japanese business communication.

In Uzbek, taboo and euphemism are closely linked to national traditions, modesty, and respect. Death, for instance, is a highly tabooed subject, and the direct use of the word *o'ldi* (died) is often socially inappropriate. Euphemisms such as *vafot etdi* (passed away), *olamdan o'tdi* (departed this world), or *dunyodan ko'z yumdi* (closed eyes on the world) are preferred. For example, the sentence *U kishi kecha vafot etdilar* (He/She passed away yesterday) conveys a much gentler tone.

Similarly, euphemisms are actively used to indicate pregnancy, where words like *homilador* (pregnant) may be replaced with polite expressions such as *og'ir oyoq* (heavy leg) or *yukli* (laden). Avoiding explicit mention of physiological processes and discussing sexuality implicitly are also characteristic features of Uzbek speech culture. Euphemisms in such cases help maintain social balance and respect.

Comparative research on Japanese and Uzbek shows that while taboo and euphemistic mechanisms share general linguistic features, their application is shaped by the national cultural mindset. In Japanese, euphemisms are often associated with hierarchical relations and levels of respect, whereas in Uzbek, they are primarily based on modesty, etiquette, and traditional values.

In linguistics, euphemisms are considered not only as static units but also as dynamic phenomena subject to change. Expressions that are socially acceptable and polite at one period may gradually lose their softening function or acquire a more neutral or even negative meaning over time. This process, known as the “euphemism cycle,” reflects the continual adaptation of language to cultural, pragmatic, and social changes. New euphemistic terms emerge, while older ones may become neutral or even turn into dysphemisms. This phenomenon is evident in both Japanese and Uzbek, particularly in physiological terms, occupational titles, and expressions denoting social status, which have historically undergone multiple euphemistic renewals.

Thus, the euphemism cycle demonstrates not only lexical enrichment but also the ongoing adaptation of language to the cultural, pragmatic, and social transformations within a society.

In conclusion, taboo and euphemism phenomena are essential tools for revealing the socio-cultural nature of language. While taboo expresses social and moral restrictions, euphemism ensures communication is conducted in a polite, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner. Although their forms and usage differ between Japanese and Uzbek, the ultimate goal is the same: maintaining social harmony and balance in interpersonal relationships.

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