

Linguocultural and Linguopragmatic Features of Gender Role Expression in the Speech of Uzbek and English-Speaking Children

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the linguocultural and linguopragmatic characteristics of gender role construction in children's speech, using Uzbek and English as comparative case studies. Drawing on data from spontaneous child dialogue, literary texts, and educational materials, the study explores how boys and girls differently express themselves linguistically due to culturally embedded gender norms. Employing qualitative discourse analysis and ethnopragmatic frameworks, the research reveals that even at an early age, children internalize and reproduce gender roles through patterns in vocabulary, narrative structure, emotional expression, speech acts, and turn-taking strategies.

The findings indicate that Uzbek-speaking children demonstrate stronger linguistic adherence to traditional gender roles, with girls favoring politeness, emotional lexicon, and affiliative narratives, while boys display assertiveness and dominance through directive speech and action-driven storytelling. In English-speaking contexts, although gender distinctions are somewhat less rigid, similar patterns persist. The study supports the theoretical perspectives of Butler's performativity theory and Brown and Levinson's politeness model, showing that language serves not only as a reflection of social identity but also as a primary medium for its construction.

The article concludes that recognizing these patterns is vital for developing gender-sensitive education policies and language curricula. Such understanding can contribute to

more inclusive linguistic practices and support the formation of equitable gender identities in early childhood.

Keywords: Gender linguistics, children's speech, Uzbek, English, linguoculture, pragmatics, gender roles, performativity, narrative, politeness strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of gender linguistics, increasing attention has been directed toward how gender roles are linguistically constructed and culturally transmitted through early speech patterns. Children's speech, as both a product and a reflection of their sociocultural environment, offers a rich source of insight into the interplay between language, culture, and gender. In particular, examining how linguistic structures embody gender-specific expectations provides a pathway to understanding the early socialization mechanisms that contribute to the formation of gender identity. This study situates itself within this broader theoretical landscape, exploring the linguocultural and linguopragmatic features of gendered speech among children, with comparative examples from Uzbek and English languages.

Language acquisition is not merely a mechanical process of learning vocabulary and grammar; it is deeply embedded in the sociocultural and ideological frameworks within which a child is raised. As V. V. Vorobyev and E. M. Vereshchagina have emphasized in their works on ethnolinguistics and child language development, the cultural codes, speech norms, and communicative roles conveyed through language serve to shape the child's understanding of their own gender identity and that of others. In this context, linguistic gender markers such as pronoun usage, evaluative expressions, speech acts, discourse patterns, and narrative positioning function as semiotic tools that reinforce socially constructed gender dichotomies.

In societies like Uzbekistan, where traditional gender roles remain influential in shaping everyday social behavior, children internalize distinct speech patterns and communicative strategies based on their gender. These may include differential patterns in

politeness strategies, turn-taking behavior, use of modal verbs, emotional expression, and metaphorical constructs. Similarly, in Anglophone cultures, despite a trend toward egalitarianism, linguistic gendering remains deeply embedded in children's narratives, social interactions, and play discourse, as highlighted in Deborah Tannen's interactional sociolinguistic research. The cross-linguistic and cross-cultural investigation of such features contributes significantly to our understanding of how language mediates the transmission of gender norms from early childhood.

This article builds upon the findings of the doctoral dissertation titled 'Bola nutqida gender xoslanishi (Inglizvao'zbektillarimisolida) by Shokirova Dilorom Abduvaliyevna, with specific emphasis on Section 2.2, which examines the linguocultural and linguopragmatic characteristics of gender roles in children's speech. The section outlines how male and female speech behavior in children reflects broader cultural stereotypes and discursive conventions. Through examples from both Uzbek and English corpora – spanning fairy tales, literary works, classroom dialogues, and spontaneous speech – the study reveals the deeply embedded cultural-linguistic codes that shape gender identity through verbal interaction.

The central aim of this article is to provide a comparative linguocultural and linguopragmatic analysis of gendered speech in Uzbek and English-speaking children. Specifically, the study investigates the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant linguocultural stereotypes associated with gender in Uzbek and English child discourse?
2. How are pragmatic speech acts gendered in children's conversations, narratives, and interactions?
3. To what extent do these gendered linguistic features reflect sociocultural norms, and how are they internalized differently in Uzbek and English contexts?

To address these questions, this article employs a qualitative and comparative methodology, drawing from authentic speech data, literary texts, and experimental studies. In doing so, it aims to

uncover the culturally shaped discursive strategies that contribute to the early formation of gender roles in children's linguistic behavior.

Furthermore, this article is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of critical discourse analysis (CDA), ethnopragmatics, and gender performativity theory. Judith Butler's notion of gender as a "performative" act aligns with the view that gender is constructed through repeated speech acts, while the ethnopragmatic approach (Goddard & Wierzbicka) emphasizes how culturally specific speech norms shape pragmatic behavior. These perspectives are particularly useful in examining how children's verbal behavior mirrors societal expectations and how language serves as both a mirror and a mechanism of socialization.

In the Uzbek context, where collectivist cultural norms prioritize respect, hierarchy, and traditional gender roles, children's speech patterns are shaped by values such as obedience (*itoatkorlik*), modesty (*halollik*), and deference to elders (*kattalargahurmat*). Girls are often encouraged to use more deferential and affiliative language, while boys are socialized to assert independence and leadership through more directive and competitive speech styles. In contrast, English-speaking children are exposed to a more individualistic and egalitarian communicative culture, yet their language still exhibits gender-based distinctions in terms of assertiveness, emotional display, and narrative control.

This contrast provides fertile ground for comparative analysis. By examining the nuances of gendered speech in these two linguistically and culturally distinct environments, this study contributes to both the theoretical enrichment of gender linguistics and the practical understanding of language socialization. Such comparative insights are also valuable for educators, curriculum designers, and sociolinguists concerned with language development, gender equity, and intercultural communication.

In the sections that follow, the article presents the methodological design of the study, outlines the main findings with illustrative examples, and discusses the broader implications

of these findings within the fields of linguocultural studies, child language acquisition, and gender theory.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, comparative, and interpretive methodology to examine the linguocultural and linguopragmatic features of gender role expression in the speech of Uzbek and English-speaking children. The aim is to uncover how gendered communicative behaviors are culturally constructed and pragmatically performed in two distinct linguistic environments. The research design integrates discourse analysis, ethnopragmatic frameworks, and cultural-semiotic interpretation to evaluate language use in context.

2.1. *Research design*

The research is structured as a comparative case study focusing on naturally occurring speech data, pedagogical materials, literary texts, and folkloric narratives in Uzbek and English. This design facilitates the identification of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural patterns in gender-related language use among children. Data were selected from a combination of sources representing formal (classroom), informal (playground and family), and narrative (stories and fairy tales) contexts, providing a comprehensive view of how gender identity is linguistically encoded across different domains of child interaction.

2.2. *Data sources*

The primary data sources include:

- **Authentic child speech samples** collected from spontaneous dialogues in classroom and domestic settings;
- **Children's literature and fairy tales**, such as the Uzbek classic *Sariqdevnininib* by H. Tukhtaboyev and English tales like *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *Cinderella*;
- **Textbook dialogues and language-learning materials** aimed at children aged 4–10;

- **Folkloric proverbs and paremias** that children are exposed to in early language socialization;
- **Narrative retellings and role-play observations** conducted during kindergarten and early school language activities.

These sources reflect a variety of speech genres and interaction types, including command-giving, emotional expression, self-introduction, storytelling, request formation, and conflict resolution. They also capture how caregivers, educators, and media reinforce gender roles through linguistic modeling.

2.3. Participant profile

Though this study primarily draws upon documented speech samples, it integrates findings from prior ethnographic studies and discourse observations conducted with:

- **60 Uzbek children** (30 girls and 30 boys) aged 5–10 from Andijan and Tashkent preschools and primary schools;
- **60 English-speaking children** (30 girls and 30 boys) of the same age range from multicultural urban settings in London and Manchester.

These groups were selected to ensure linguistic fluency in the respective languages and to reflect general cultural trends rather than atypical behavior. Parental consent and institutional ethical approval were secured in all cases, following ethical standards for child-focused linguistic research.

2.4. Analytical frameworks

The analysis relies on three main theoretical approaches:

a. Linguocultural analysis

This approach explores how language encodes cultural knowledge, values, and social roles. It draws from the works of E. M. Vereshchagina and V. V. Vorobyev on linguocultural competence and child socialization. Specific attention is paid to how gendered cultural schemas (e.g., obedience, bravery, beauty, authority) are realized lexically and metaphorically.

b. *Linguopragmatic analysis*

Here, the focus is on how gender influences the use of speech acts (Austin, Searle), politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson), implicatures (Grice), and conversational maxims. Gender differences are examined in turn-taking, mitigation, interruption, and assertiveness.

c. *Gender performativity and ethnopragmatics*

Inspired by Judith Butler's concept of gender as performance and Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory, this framework investigates how repeated speech patterns serve to enact and reinforce gender roles. Culture-specific semantic primes and speech act norms are key to this analysis.

2.5. *Coding procedure and linguistic features observed*

Data were categorized and coded according to the following gender-related linguistic indicators:

Feature category	Linguistic indicators
Lexical	Gender-specific nouns, adjectives, evaluatives
Speech acts	Directives, requests, approvals, disapprovals
Emotional lexicon	Use of affective expressions (e.g., fear, care, anger)
Narrative structure	Protagonist type, agency, moral resolution
Pragmatic strategies	Use of hedges, fillers, politeness markers, interruptions
Non-verbal pragmatics	Intonation, pausing, turn-taking behavior

Each instance of child speech or narrative was analyzed in context to determine whether and how it contributed to the construction or reinforcement of gender roles.

2.6. *Validation and reliability*

To enhance the reliability of the comparative analysis, multiple coders (linguists and early childhood educators) independently analyzed subsets of the data to assess intercoder agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Additionally, triangulation was achieved by comparing findings across data

types (e.g., comparing fairy tale portrayals with observed child speech behavior) and across languages.

2.7. *Limitations*

The study acknowledges several limitations:

- **Cultural specificity:** Results are not necessarily generalizable beyond Uzbek and English-speaking environments;
- **Data representation:** The selected speech samples, while diverse, may not capture the full range of gendered expression in all children;
- **Age-related variation:** Age differences within the 5–10 range may influence pragmatic awareness and gender role internalization.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a robust comparative perspective on how gender roles are constructed linguistically during early childhood across two distinct cultures.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the comparative linguocultural and linguopragmatic analysis of gender role construction in the speech of Uzbek and English-speaking children. The findings are organized into six thematic domains that reflect prominent gendered linguistic patterns: (1) lexical gender markers, (2) gendered speech acts, (3) emotional expression and appraisal, (4) narrative agency and protagonist roles, (5) politeness strategies and pragmatic mitigation, and (6) discursive turn-taking and assertiveness. Cross-cultural examples are provided to illustrate contrasts and parallels.

3.1. *Lexical gender markers*

Lexical differentiation between male and female child speech was evident in both Uzbek and English, though shaped by distinct cultural stereotypes.

In Uzbek child speech, girls were more likely to use adjectives associated with aesthetics and domestic roles (e.g., *chiroyli* – “pretty”, *tinch* – “quiet”, *ozoda* – “neat”), while boys favored adjectives implying strength, activity, and leadership (e.g., *jasur* – “brave”, *kuchli* – “strong”, *shijoatli* – “determined”).

Example (Uzbek girl, age 6):

Men chiroyliliboskiyaman, onamgayordamberaman.

“I wear a pretty dress and help my mom.”

Example (Uzbek boy, age 6):

Men kuchlibo‘laman, dadamgaishdayordamberaman.

“I’ll be strong and help my dad at work.”

In English, similar trends appeared: girls were more likely to use terms like “cute,” “nice,” and “sweet,” while boys leaned toward “cool,” “strong,” “fast,” or “awesome.” Notably, boys also used more evaluative descriptors tied to competence or winning.

Example (English girl, age 7):

“My dress is so cute and pink. I’m gonna be a princess.”

Example (English boy, age 7):

“I’m super fast like a ninja. I always win.”

These lexical choices reflect culturally instilled gender norms about expected behavior and self-image.

3.2. Gendered speech acts

Speech act analysis revealed gender-related preferences in both languages, particularly in the use of requests, commands, approvals, disapprovals, and expressive utterances.

Uzbek girls favored indirect and polite forms in making requests (e.g., *Iltimos, mengayordambering* – “Please help me”), while boys were more direct (e.g., *Ber, hozir!* – “Give it now!”). This reflects the cultural value placed on “modesty” and “obedience” in female children, and “assertiveness” in male children.

In **English**, similar gendering occurred in the frequency and tone of commands. Boys were more likely to use imperative structures (e.g., “Give it to me!”), while girls used interrogative or modal mitigated forms (e.g., “Can I please have it?”).

Table 1. *Gender differences in request forms*

Language	Girls' common forms	Boys' common forms
Uzbek	<i>Iltimos... mumkinmi?</i> (May I?)	<i>Ber!</i> (Giveit!)
English	“Can I please...?”, “Could I have...?”	“Give me that!”, “Stop it!”

Speech act frequency also showed that girls used more affiliative and cooperative speech, while boys initiated more directive and competitive interactions, especially during games or role-play activities.

3.3. *Emotional expression and appraisal*

A striking finding was the higher emotional lexicon density in girls' speech in both languages. Girls used more affective terms (e.g., *xafa*, *quvonchli*, *yaxshi*; “sad,” “happy,” “nice”) and appraisals about behavior and interpersonal interactions.

Example (Uzbek girl, age 5):

Men bugunonamdaxafabo'ldim, lekinkeyinquvondim.
“I was sad with my mom today, but then I was happy.”

Example (English girl, age 6):

“I felt bad for my doll, she was lonely.”

Uzbek boys were more likely to use emotion-suppressing expressions or bypass emotional content entirely. **English boys** used emotion in more action-driven contexts (e.g., “I was mad when he cheated!”) rather than in empathetic or relational evaluations.

This supports findings by M. Ergasheva & D. Ziyayeva, who assert that girls internalize expressive emotional registers earlier and more consistently than boys due to social conditioning.

3.4. Narrative agency and protagonist roles

Analysis of child-generated or child-retold stories revealed significant gendered patterns in narrative focus.

In **Uzbek-speaking** children's retellings, boys often placed themselves or male characters in heroic or active roles: solving problems, overcoming monsters, leading adventures. Girls tended to narrate care-oriented or decorative roles, such as helping family, preparing food, or dressing dolls.

Example (Uzbek boy retelling):

Men bo'riniurdim, hammamizniqutqardim.

"I hit the wolf and saved us all."

Example (Uzbek girl retelling):

Men onamgadasturxonyozdim, chiroyliliboskiyibchiqdim.

"I set the table for my mom and wore a pretty dress."

In **English**, narrative roles followed similar lines. Boys often cast themselves as heroes or explorers, while girls favored relational or domestic themes.

Example (English boy, age 8):

"I found the treasure before anyone else. I was the captain."

Example (English girl, age 8):

"I helped mommy bake cookies and decorated the house."

In both cultures, the semantic fields of action, conquest, and space were linked to boys, while fields of nurture, beauty, and emotion were linked to girls. This underscores the performative reproduction of gender roles through storytelling.

3.5. Politeness strategies and mitigation

Pragmatic mitigation strategies showed strong gender divergence, especially in face-threatening acts like disagreement, refusal, and criticism.

Girls used more: Politeness particles (Uzbek: *iltimos*, *bo'ladimi*; English: "please," "maybe"); Hedging expressions (Uzbek: *balki*, *ehtimol*; English: "I think," "maybe," "sort of"); Inclusive language ("let's," *keling*).

Boys, in contrast, used more direct or imperative forms with fewer mitigations.

Example (English boy, age 9):

“No, that’s wrong.”

Example (English girl, age 9):

“Hmm, maybe that’s not quite right?”

Example (Uzbek boy, age 7):

“Yoqmaydi bu.” (I don’t like it.)

Example (Uzbek girl, age 7):

“Balkiboshqacha qilamizmi?”

“Maybe we can do it differently?”

These patterns align with Brown & Levinson’s theory of politeness, where girls are socialized into positive face maintenance and negative face respect strategies, while boys learn competitive framing.

3.6. Discursive turn-taking and assertiveness

Discourse analysis of dialogue exchanges revealed that boys more frequently initiated topics, interrupted others, and controlled the flow of conversation, particularly in peer interactions. Girls, while equally talkative, used more backchanneling, tag questions, and self-effacing discourse markers.

Table 2. *Turn-taking features*

Feature	Girls	Boys
Topic initiation	Less frequent	Frequent
Interruptions	Rare	Frequent
Tag questions	Common (e.g., “isn’t it?”)	Rare
Back channeling	Frequent (“yeah”, <i>ha-ha</i>)	Infrequent

These patterns support Janet Holmes’ and Deborah Tannen’s findings that girls often adopt “rapport talk” while boys favor “report talk.”

Summary of key cross-cultural trends

Feature	Uzbek girls	Uzbek boys	English girls	English boys
Adjective use	Beautiful, kind	Brave, strong	Cute, sweet	Cool, fast
Request strategy	Indirect, polite	Direct, imperative	Modal (“Can I...”)	Commanding
Emotional expression	High	Low/moderate	High	Contextual/action-based
Narrative role	Domestic/helper	Heroic/leader	Family-themed	Explorer/hero
Politeness forms	Hedging, softening	Directness	Politeness, inclusion	Bluntness
Turn-taking behavior	Cooperative	Dominant	Collaborative	Controlling

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight how gender identity is linguistically constructed and reinforced in the speech of children across two culturally distinct settings—Uzbek and English-speaking environments. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, the results support the claim that language is not merely a reflection of existing gender roles but a dynamic site where such roles are actively formed, negotiated, and internalized through repeated discursive acts.

One of the core observations was the marked difference in lexical choice between girls and boys. In both linguistic settings, boys leaned toward words associated with strength, speed, or competition, while girls preferred descriptors emphasizing appearance, emotions, or cooperation. These patterns mirror the dominant cultural ideologies in each setting. In Uzbekistan, where traditional gender roles are more pronounced and culturally enforced, the language of children reflects a stronger polarization. For example, Uzbek girls are socialized into roles that emphasize obedience (*itoatkorlik*), emotional sensitivity (*sezuvchanlik*), and modesty (*kamtarinlik*), which are lexically represented in their speech. Boys, on the other hand, are encouraged to be assertive and authoritative, leading to the dominance of directive and commanding expressions in their discourse.

From a linguopragmatic perspective, this research illustrates how even at a young age, boys and girls differ in how they structure speech acts. Girls are more likely to engage in politeness strategies, hedging, and cooperative dialogue, while boys favor directness, interruption, and topic control. These behaviors suggest that children do not only acquire grammatical and lexical features – they also internalize culturally specific conversational norms. This supports the argument made by Brown and Levinson in their theory of politeness, as well as Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity: gender is not a static identity but a socially constructed role that is enacted through repeated speech behavior.

Furthermore, the narrative analysis revealed how children use storytelling as a tool to position themselves within gendered frameworks. Boys consistently adopt agentive roles in their narratives – heroes, leaders, explorers – while girls often present themselves as helpers, supporters, or relational figures. These narrative choices are not arbitrary; they reflect the kinds of stories children are exposed to in books, folklore, media, and adult discourse. In Uzbek culture especially, fairy tales and folk stories like *Sariqdevnininib* often portray male characters in active roles and female characters in supportive ones. English tales like *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty* similarly emphasize appearance, obedience, and relational virtue in female protagonists. Such representations not only mirror societal norms but actively contribute to a child’s understanding of their own gender identity and expected behavior.

Cross-linguistic comparison also revealed some important contrasts. While both cultures display gendered speech patterns, the intensity and rigidity of these patterns were more pronounced in the Uzbek context. This may be attributed to Uzbekistan’s collectivist societal structure, where cultural conformity and traditional roles are emphasized. English-speaking contexts, though not immune to gender stereotyping, allow for more flexibility due to individualistic values and the influence of gender-neutral education policies. However, even in these contexts, gender differences in speech acts, narrative structures, and politeness behavior persist.

Another important point is the role of pragmatic competence – children are not passive imitators of language but active participants in constructing meaning. As shown in the data, many children – especially girls – employ complex strategies to manage social relationships and express emotion, suggesting that gendered communication is as much about interpersonal awareness as it is about cultural programming.

These insights underscore the need to view gender not as a binary linguistic trait but as a complex matrix of behaviors shaped by sociocultural forces, parental discourse, education, and peer interaction. Language is the arena where these forces converge, and child speech provides a unique lens for observing this convergence in real time.

5. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how gender roles are linguistically and culturally encoded in the speech of children in Uzbek and English contexts. Through the lens of linguocultural and linguopragmatic analysis, it became evident that children's speech is not gender-neutral but deeply marked by the social and cultural frameworks that shape their everyday experiences.

The analysis confirmed that gender identity in children is constructed not only through social modeling but also through the repeated use of specific linguistic patterns. Girls and boys use language differently – not because of inherent cognitive differences, but because they are socialized into distinct communicative norms that reflect the gender expectations of their society. These include differing lexical choices, discourse styles, emotional expression, narrative structures, and pragmatic strategies.

Uzbek-speaking children exhibit strong adherence to traditional gender norms, with language reflecting deeply ingrained values of respect, collectivism, and role differentiation. English-speaking children, while operating within a more egalitarian communicative environment, also show gendered tendencies in their speech, especially in narrative agency and politeness behavior.

These findings contribute to the field of gender linguistics by reinforcing the notion that gender is both a linguistic phenomenon and a social performance. They also provide practical insights for educators, linguists, and policymakers. If we are to promote a more inclusive and equitable society, it is essential to recognize how language functions as a tool of socialization from the earliest stages of development.

In practical terms, the study suggests that curriculum design, teaching strategies, and language assessment tools must be re-examined through a gender-sensitive lens. Stories, textbooks, and classroom discourse should reflect diverse models of identity and provide children with opportunities to explore roles beyond traditional gender binaries. Moreover, raising awareness among parents, educators, and media content creators about the role of language in shaping gender identity is critical to fostering more inclusive linguistic environments.

In conclusion, this research confirms that the foundation of gender roles is laid early – and it is laid through language. By better understanding how these linguistic foundations are built, we take the first step toward reshaping them in ways that support equity, freedom of expression, and individual development for all children.

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