

“Shame” as Language and Culture: A Linguistic-Philosophical Analysis of the *Uyat* Concept in Uzbek Society

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an interdisciplinary investigation into the phenomenon of shame in Uzbek society, combining linguistic examination of the concept uyat, philosophical-ethical analysis, empirical survey data, and – the Uzbek term for shame. Whereas prior studies have addressed either the sociocultural dimensions of shame or its linguistic encoding in isolation, the present work brings these perspectives into dialogue. Drawing on survey data collected from 108 respondents in Uzbekistan and on a corpus-based analysis of literary texts by Uzbek writers including Said Ahmad and P. Qodirov, the study examines how uyat functions simultaneously as a moral regulator, a communicative speech act, and a linguocultural concept embedded in national identity. Framing analysis of the concept reveals a structured semantic field encompassing dominant emotional content, causal attribution, intensification, physiological manifestation, and oppositional valence. Lexical and discourse analysis of the term in authentic literary contexts demonstrates how uyat-related speech acts – including prohibitive imperatives, rhetorical questions, and social sanctions – encode culturally specific norms governing gender, age, and communal belonging. The empirical data reveal that respondents primarily associate shame with individual conscience ($M \approx 4.5$) rather than external social pressure alone, while also affirming strong awareness of collective evaluative norms. Generational shifts and gender-differentiated expectations in shame discourse are confirmed. The integration of linguistic

and philosophical-empirical methods advances a more complete understanding of shame as both an ethical resource and a discursive mechanism of social control in contemporary Uzbek culture.

Keywords: Linguistics; linguocultural concept; *uyat*; shame; Uzbek society; discourse analysis; frame semantics; moral philosophy; empirical ethics; gender.

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are inseparable mediating systems through which communities organize, transmit, and negotiate moral experience. Among the affective states encoded in language, shame occupies a particularly salient position: it is at once a universal anthropological phenomenon and a culturally specific set of meanings, speech acts, and behavioral norms. In Uzbek society, the concept of *uyat* – encompassing shame, modesty, and honor – constitutes one of the most semantically dense and pragmatically active units of the lexicon. Understanding *uyat* therefore requires analysis not only at the level of individual psychology or social philosophy, but equally at the level of language: how the concept is structured, how it is invoked in discourse, what speech acts it licenses, and how it encodes and reproduces cultural norms.

The present study sets out to provide precisely this integrated account. It brings together two complementary lines of inquiry: a philosophical-ethical and empirical investigation of shame as a sociomoral phenomenon in Uzbek life, and a linguistic analysis of *uyat* as a linguocultural concept – one that organizes cognitive and emotional experience, structures communicative behavior, and reflects the value system of the Uzbek speech community. By combining these approaches, the study responds to a significant gap in the existing literature, in which philosophical accounts of Uzbek shame have seldom engaged with linguistic data, and linguocultural analyses of *uyat* have seldom been grounded in systematic empirical evidence.

The guiding research questions of the study are the following: (1) Does *uyat* in Uzbek society function primarily as an internal moral mechanism or as an instrument of external social control? (2) What is the semantic and frame structure of *uyat* as a linguocultural concept? (3) How is *uyat* deployed in Uzbek literary and everyday discourse as a speech act, and what pragmatic functions does it serve? (4) How do linguistic encodings of *uyat* reflect and reproduce culturally specific norms regarding gender, age, and social hierarchy?

To address these questions, the study draws on three bodies of evidence: a review of philosophical-ethical literature on shame across Western, Confucian, and Russian traditions; original survey data from 108 respondents in Uzbekistan; and linguistic analysis of *uyat*-related lexemes and discourse patterns in Uzbek literary texts. The combination of these methods allows the study to move between conceptual analysis, empirical quantification, and close textual reading – disciplines that are rarely integrated in the study of moral emotions in Central Asian contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Philosophical reflection on shame stretches from classical antiquity to contemporary phenomenology. Aristotle treated shame as a negative emotion analogous to grief, categorizing it alongside harm and dishonor as something to be avoided; yet he recognized that the complete absence of shame constitutes shamelessness rather than virtue (Aristotle 2011). Democritus and Plato offered more positive evaluations: the highest form of shame, in their view, is the inner restraint that prevents a person from wrongdoing even in private. This position anticipates later accounts of shame as an internalized moral standard rather than merely a response to external judgment (Chorieva 2024).

Spinoza located shame in the anticipation of negative social judgment, positioning it as a relational, audience-dependent emotion (Spinoza 1999). Sartre extended this relational analysis: shame, for him, is the lived experience of being objectified under another's gaze, so that public failure before witnesses constitutes one of the gravest moral catastrophes the subject can suffer

(Dolezel 2017). Contemporary clinical psychologists including Tangney & Dearing (2002) and Fonagy describe shame as a self-destructive emotion that produces impulses to hide or flee.

The Confucian tradition offers a markedly different evaluation. Mencius linked shame directly to righteousness, arguing that the person who feels shame about their failings is thereby drawn toward greater moral integrity. Xunzi distinguished outer shame – embarrassment over superficial matters such as poverty – from inner shame, activated when a person acts against their own values (Chorieva, 2024). In this tradition, shame functions as the first step toward moral self-cultivation.

Vladimir Solovyov argued that the capacity for shame is evidence of the distinctly human, moral dimension of personhood (Solovyov 1988). Plessner's concept of excentric positionality – the human being's capacity to stand back from itself and observe its own conduct as from outside – provides an anthropological account of how shame arises at the intersection of the embodied and the reflective self (Plessner 1975). Gergilov (2018) concludes that a person altogether without shame has, in a meaningful sense, ceased to be a person. Landweer (1999) argues that shame reveals rather than presupposes norms: it arises when a person suddenly recognizes both a norm and their violation of it, making shame a diagnostic of value conflict.

Linguocultural approaches to “shame”

The linguistic study of shame operates within the broader framework of linguoculturology, a discipline concerned with the relationship between language, culture, and cognition. As Maslova (2001) argues, key cultural concepts – those that are frequently invoked, encoded in proverbs, and embedded in formulaic speech – serve as cognitive tools through which communities construct their worldviews. The linguocultural concept is distinguished from a mere lexical unit by its cognitive-rational and emotional-psychological density: it simultaneously represents a category of thought, a vehicle of cultural memory, and a model for action (Usmanova 2019).

Uyat has been identified in the linguocultural literature as one such concept – a key unit of Uzbek cultural self-understanding. The Uzbek term encompasses shame, embarrassment, honor, and modesty, and its explanatory dictionary definition places it in semantic proximity to fear, pain, suffering, and punishment (O'zbektiliningizohlilug'ati 2006-2008). Xamdamova (2021) analyses *uyat* as a marker of subjective modality, noting that its occurrence in discourse serves simultaneously to express evaluative stance and to regulate interlocutors' behavior.

Linguocultural research has distinguished two principal orientations in the analysis of shame concepts. The emotional (or moral) orientation studies shame in relation to individual psychology, physiology, and moral cognition, treating cultural context as a variable. The deontic orientation treats shame as a modality of social evaluation: it is interested in how communities use shame-related language to assess actions and events, and in how this evaluative function varies across cultural and geographic contexts (Apresyan 2015). Both orientations are relevant to the analysis of *uyat*, and the present study draws on each.

Frame semantics (Fillmore 1985) provides a useful analytical tool for the structural description of the *uyat* concept. Xamdamova (2021) proposes a frame for *uyat* consisting of five sequential slots: (1) a dominant emotional state; (2) causal attribution to one's own conduct; (3) intensification or peak intensity; (4) an oppositional impulse (self-justification or suppression); and (5) physiological manifestation (blushing, stuttering, inability to speak). This frame provides a schematic representation of the cognitive and affective structure that underlies uses of the concept in discourse.

Cross-cultural comparison reveals both universal and culturally specific dimensions of shame. Zimbardo, Pilkonis & Norwood (1974) identified situations most commonly eliciting shame across cultures, including public speaking, low social status, evaluation, and the presence of strangers. While these situational triggers appear universal, their relative salience, the behavioral norms they activate, and the linguistic forms through

which shame is expressed vary considerably. The concept of *uyat* in Uzbek is linked to related but distinct concepts including *or-nomus* (honor), *andisha* (discretion), and *hayo* (modesty), which together constitute a semantic network encoding the community's moral expectations.

The Islamic dimension of this semantic network deserves attention. In Islamic ethical thought, *hayā* – modesty and decency – is considered a branch of faith (*imān*), and the Prophet Muhammad's teaching that the spirit of Islam is *hayā* establishes modesty as a foundational virtue rather than a secondary social norm. This theological grounding gives the shame concept a moral authority in Uzbek society that extends beyond purely social sanction.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods design combining empirical survey research, thematic analysis of open-ended responses, and linguistic analysis of literary texts. The two methodological strands are treated as complementary: the empirical component provides systematic evidence about how shame is understood and experienced across a sample of Uzbek adults, while the linguistic component provides close analysis of how *uyat* is encoded and deployed in authentic discourse.

Empirical survey

A total of 108 respondents participated in the online survey. Participants were residents of Uzbekistan representing a range of ages, genders, and social backgrounds. The sample was recruited through online platforms and is consequently non-probabilistic, with overrepresentation of younger and urban respondents. This limitation is discussed in Section 5. The survey instrument comprised 20 items organized into three sections: (1) demographic indicators; (2) attitudinal statements rated on a five-point Likert scale; and (3) open-ended questions eliciting personal perspectives on and experiences of shame. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics; means (M) were

computed for each Likert item. Qualitative responses were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis.

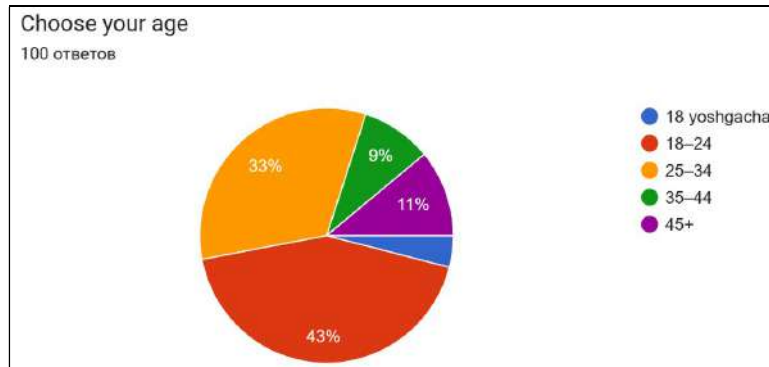
Linguistic analysis

The linguistic component of the study examines *uyat* as it appears in a corpus of Uzbek literary prose, drawing on texts by Said Ahmad & P. Qodirov, writers whose work is considered canonical in the representation of Uzbek social and moral life. The corpus analysis focuses on: (1) the lexical field of *uyat*, including synonyms and semantically related terms (*sharmanda*, *or-nomus*, *andisha*, *hayo*, *viydon*, *diyonat*); (2) the frame structure of the concept; (3) the pragmatic functions of *uyat*-related speech acts; and (4) the discourse contexts in which shame vocabulary is deployed to regulate behavior, express social evaluation, or mark gendered and generational norms. The analysis draws on methods from cognitive semantics, pragma-discourse analysis, and linguocultural studies.

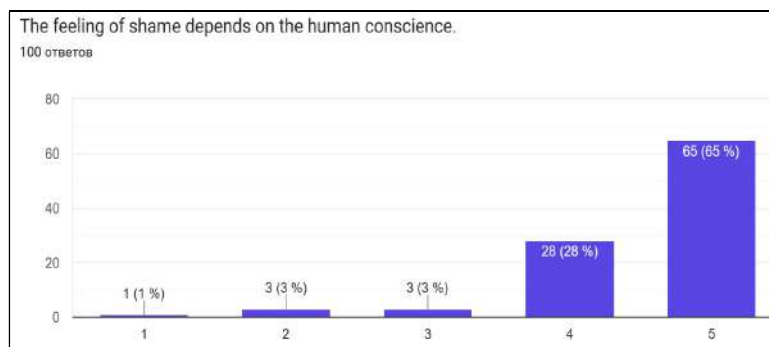
RESULTS

Empirical survey results

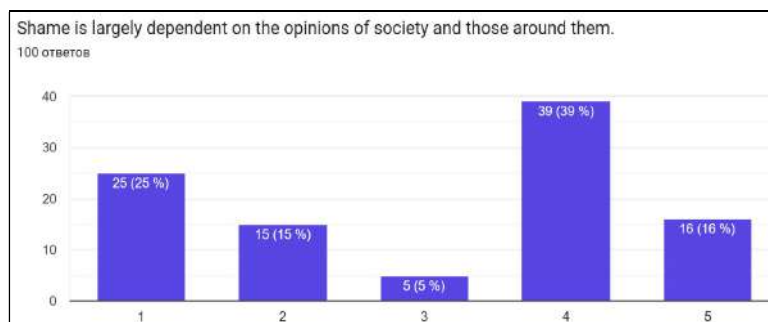
Of the 108 respondents, the largest group fell within the 18-24 age range (43%), followed by the 25-34 age group (33%). Together, these two cohorts accounted for over three-quarters of the total sample. Respondents aged 45 and above comprised 11% of the sample; the 35-44 age group represented 9%; and those below 18 years of age made up approximately 4%. This distribution reflects the online mode of recruitment and indicates that findings are most representative of younger and working-age adults in Uzbekistan.



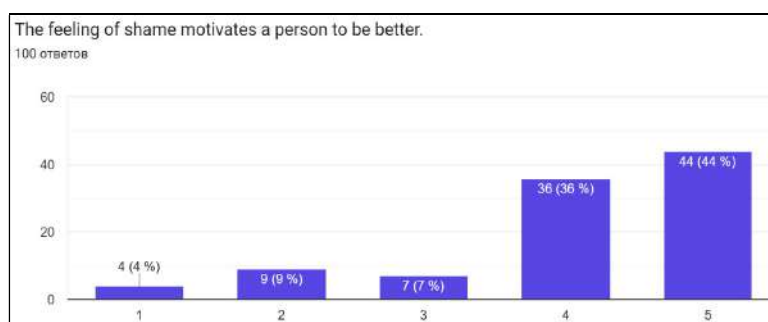
The statement “Shame is tied to a person's conscience” received the highest mean rating in the survey ($M \approx 4.5$), indicating strong agreement that shame is primarily an inner moral phenomenon.



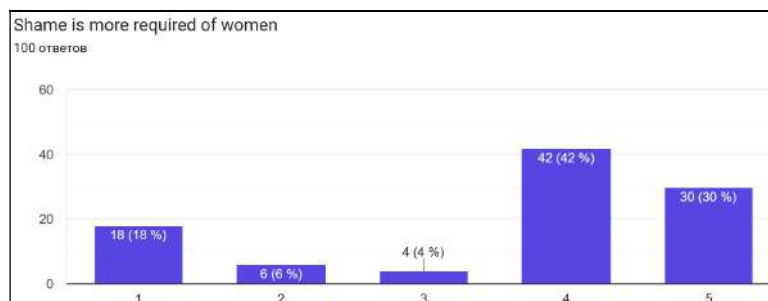
The statement “Shame is primarily determined by the opinions of those around us” received a notably lower rating ($M \approx 3.2$), yet the statement 'In Uzbek society, the concern with what people will say is very strong' was rated highly, indicating awareness of powerful collective evaluative norms. Together, these findings reveal an ambivalence: respondents distinguish between what shame *is* – a matter of conscience – and the social conditions that typically *trigger* it.



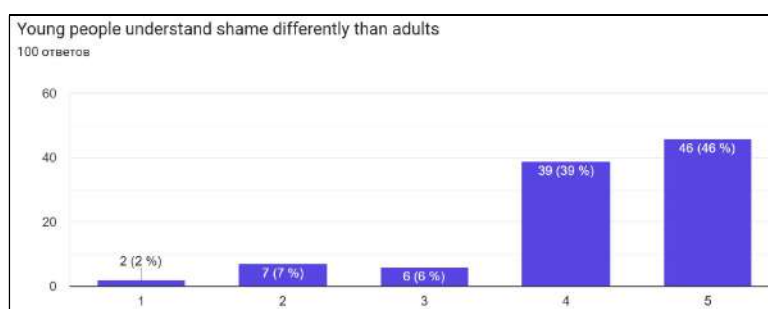
The statement “Shame motivates a person to become better” received high agreement ($M \approx 4.1$), reflecting a view of shame as a constructive moral force.



“Shame is demanded more of women than of men” received notable agreement, providing empirical support for the perception of gender-differentiated shame expectations in Uzbek society. A meaningful proportion of respondents also agreed that shame can constrain personal development and independent thinking, reflecting awareness of shame's potentially limiting function.



“Young people understand shame differently than older generations” also elicited strong agreement ($M \approx 4.2$), confirming perceived generational shifts.



Linguistic analysis: The semantic field of Uyat

The lexical field surrounding *uyat* in the corpus is semantically rich. The term co-occurs with and is sometimes used interchangeably with *sharmanda* (disgrace), *or-nomus* (honor/reputation), *andisha* (discretion/decorum), *hayo* (modesty), *vijdon* (conscience), and *diyonat* (integrity). While these terms are partially synonymous, they carry distinct pragmatic emphases: *sharmanda* foregrounds the public disgrace dimension; *or-nomus* foregrounds honor and reputation; *vijdon* foregrounds individual conscience; *hayo* foregrounds modesty as a positive virtue. The explanatory dictionary of Uzbek defines *uyat* as encompassing embarrassment, a sense of honor, conduct that violates established moral custom, and the condition of being shameful – a definition that confirms the concept's dual reference

to inner state and social norm (O'zbektiliningizohlilug'ati 2006-2008).

Uzbek proverbs provide further evidence of the concept's cultural centrality. The collection *O'zbekxalqmaqollari* includes dedicated sections on *or-nomus* and *andisha* and contains numerous proverbs encoding shame-related norms. Proverbs such as *Obro' isitar, uyatkuydirar* ("Reputation warms, shame burns") and *Uyat-o'limdanqattiq* ("Shame is harder than death") establish *uyat* as a morally weighty and potentially destructive force. Others – *Hayoli hayodanqo'rqr, behayonedanqo'rqr* ("The modest fear modesty, the shameless fear nothing") and *Uyatiyo'qo'g'ilyomon, qilig'i buzug qizyomon* ("A son without shame is bad, a daughter of bad conduct is bad") – encode gendered expectations and articulate a normative ideal of the shame-bearing person as socially virtuous. The preponderance of negatively valenced lexemes in these proverbs (*o'g'rilik, qo'rqq, sharmandali*) confirms that *uyat* is most saliently activated by deviation from communal norms.

Following Xamdamova (2021), the frame of *uyat* can be represented as a structured sequence of five slots: (1) Dominant sema – the emergence of an acute emotional state (shame, embarrassment); (2) Causal attribution – recognition of one's own conduct as the source of this state; (3) Intensification – escalation to a peak of internal discomfort; (4) Oppositional phase – the subject's attempts at self-justification, concealment, or confrontation of the shame-inducing event; and (5) Physiological manifestation – blushing, loss of speech, inability to remain still, topic avoidance. Literary texts in the corpus consistently instantiate this frame. In Said Ahmad's prose, the character Ikromjon's response to an oblique public comparison of his son to a deserter – 'His heart sank. He felt as though someone had struck him with an electric current. His tongue would not move... Then he went red' – enacts slots 1, 3, and 5 of the frame in rapid succession, demonstrating how shame operates as a total psychosomatic event rather than a merely cognitive assessment.

The frame analysis also reveals the social conditionality of the shame event. The intensity of *uyat*, as several texts demonstrate, scales with the relational proximity of the audience:

shame is most acute in the presence of those whose opinion matters most – family members, close associates, community elders. This observation maps onto Plessner's (1975) account of shame as a social emotion and onto the survey finding that the concern with 'what people will say' (*odamlarnimadeydi*) is highly salient in Uzbek social consciousness.

The linguistic analysis identifies several distinct pragmatic functions of *uyat*-related speech acts in the corpus. First, *uyat* functions as a prohibitive: the formulaic utterances *Uyatbo'ladi* ("It will be shameful/You should be ashamed"), 'Uyaling' ('Be ashamed'), and *Uyalmaysanmi?* ("Are you not ashamed?") serve to regulate behavior by invoking collective norms. These forms are what Austin (1962) would classify as illocutionary acts of prohibition and admonishment: their primary function is not to describe a state of affairs but to constrain future conduct. The imperative *Uyaling-e* – found in multiple corpus texts – functions as a directive without the need for explicit prohibition, activating the addressee's internalized shame norms through invocation rather than argument.

Second, *uyat*-related speech acts function as evaluative assessments. Utterances such as *Uyat, sharmandalikbu!* ("This is shameful, this is disgrace!") and *Sizlarda or degan, nomusdegannarsabormi?* ("Do you have any sense of honor or decency?") combine propositional content (attribution of shameful conduct) with illocutionary force (social sanction). The use of rhetorical questions – formally interrogative but functionally condemnatory – is particularly common and reflects a pragmatic strategy of heightened affective impact without direct accusation.

Third, *uyat* functions as an instrument of identity and relational positioning. The utterance *Meni o'rtoqlarimoldidasharmandaqilding* ("You shamed me in front of my friends") frames the speaker as a victim of social delegitimization and positions the addressee as morally responsible for that delegitimization. In this function, shame-language serves to negotiate social standing and to articulate claims about relational responsibility. The rhetorical question *Uyalmaysanmi? Vijdoningbormio'zi?* ("Are you not ashamed?

Do you even have a conscience?") combines shame attribution with a challenge to the addressee's moral personhood – a doubly face-threatening act in Goffman's (1959) sense.

Fourth, the corpus documents the production of shame through praise and positive evaluation. Maqto'v (praise) directed at an addressee can produce a mild form of *uyat* – rendered in the texts as *o'ng'aysizlanish* (embarrassed discomfort) – accompanied by blushing and verbal self-deprecation. This form of shame-through-praise is a culturally specific pragmatic phenomenon: it reflects the Uzbek norm of humility (*kamtarlik*) and the expectation that praise will be deflected rather than accepted, and it demonstrates that *uyat* in Uzbek discourse is activated not only by wrongdoing but also by unwanted positive visibility.

Gender, age, and social hierarchy in uyat discourse

The corpus analysis confirms and extends the survey findings on gender and generational differentiation in shame discourse. Literary texts consistently assign heavier shame-related obligations to women: *uyatchanlik* (modesty), *ibolilik* (reserve), and *hayolilik* (decency) are repeatedly identified as distinctively feminine virtues, while men are more typically associated with *or-nomus* in the sense of public honor and reputation. This gendered distribution of shame vocabulary encodes an asymmetric moral geography in which women's shame is primarily interior and body-related, and men's shame is primarily relational and status-related.

Age and social hierarchy are equally salient. The utterance *Katta odam, uyatbo'ladi* ("You are an adult – it is shameful") invokes age as a modulating factor: those of senior status bear a heightened shame obligation precisely because they are expected to model appropriate conduct for juniors. Conversely, the filial shame dynamic evident in the Azizxon/Ummatali episodes of Said Ahmad's texts – where a son's behavior causes a father's public embarrassment – demonstrates how shame can travel vertically through kinship networks, making individual conduct a source of collective family exposure. The sociological situativity of *uyat* is further illustrated by the corpus: what counts as shameful in one

context (bride kidnapping condemned as *g'irtahmoqlik* – *sheer stupidity*) may be assessed differently in another context (*Boplabdi, qoyil* – “Well done, impressive”), demonstrating the contextual and contested nature of shame norms.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal *uyat* as a complex, multilayered phenomenon that cannot be reduced to either a purely psychological emotion or a purely social mechanism. The integration of linguistic and empirical perspectives offers several insights that neither approach could yield alone.

At the philosophical-empirical level, the data confirm that Uzbek respondents primarily understand shame through the lens of individual conscience – a finding consistent with accounts from Plato through Solovyov that treat shame as an internalized moral standard. Yet the survey simultaneously confirms strong awareness of the social conditions that trigger shame: the concern with collective evaluation (*odamlarnimadeydi*) remains highly salient, even for respondents who frame shame as a matter of inner moral life. This ambivalence maps onto the distinction between moral (inner) and deontological (social) shame identified in the theoretical literature (Ausubel 1955; Shmelev 2000) and suggests that *uyat* in Uzbek society is experienced at the intersection of these two orientations rather than as a simple instance of either.

At the linguistic level, the frame analysis and discourse examination demonstrate that *uyat* is not merely a passive emotional response but an active discursive resource. The range of speech acts in which shame-vocabulary is deployed – prohibition, admonishment, social sanction, identity negotiation, and even compliment-response – reveals a pragmatically rich system in which language does not simply report shame but produces, intensifies, and manages it. The density of shame-related vocabulary in Uzbek literary prose, and the frequency with which shame-invoking speech acts appear in dialogic exchanges, confirms Maslova's (2001) criterion for a key cultural concept: *uyat* is indeed frequently invoked and formulaically

encoded, and it plays a regulative role in the discursive organization of social life.

The identification of shame-through-praise as a culturally specific pragmatic phenomenon is a particularly noteworthy finding. It extends beyond the standard accounts of shame as a response to wrongdoing or social failure and draws attention to the role of positive visibility – being the object of admiring attention – as a shame trigger in cultures that strongly value humility and self-effacement. This phenomenon is linguistically encoded in the *o'ng'aysizlanish* (embarrassed discomfort) that praise produces, and it has no straightforward equivalent in the Western philosophical accounts of shame, which consistently link shame to failure, exposure of inadequacy, or moral transgression.

The finding of gender-differentiated shame discourse has significant implications. The linguistic data from literary texts confirm and extend the survey finding that shame is demanded more intensely from women than from men in Uzbek society. The association of *uyatchanlik* and *hayolilik* with femininity, and of *or-nomus* with masculinity, reflects a structural asymmetry in the moral expectations encoded in the language: women's shame is primarily about bodily and behavioral decorum in the domestic and semi-public sphere; men's shame is primarily about reputation and relational standing in the public sphere. This asymmetry carries real consequences for the distribution of freedom and constraint across gender categories.

Limitations of the study include the non-probabilistic nature of the survey sample, the restriction of the literary corpus to two canonical writers, and the absence of longitudinal data that would permit tracking of the diachronic evolution of *uyat* norms. Future research would benefit from probability sampling, expanded and genre-diverse corpora, and comparative analysis with shame concepts in neighboring Turkic and Iranian cultures.

CONCLUSION

This study has advanced the understanding of *uyat*– shame – in Uzbek society by integrating linguistic, philosophical, and

empirical perspectives that are rarely brought into dialogue. The principal findings are as follows. Empirically, Uzbek respondents primarily identify shame with individual conscience rather than external pressure, while simultaneously confirming the strong normative weight of collective evaluation. Significant generational shifts and gender-differentiated expectations in shame experience are confirmed. Linguistically, *uyat* constitutes a semantically dense linguocultural concept embedded in a rich lexical field that includes *sharmanda*, *or-nomus*, *andisha*, *hayo*, and *vijdon*. Its frame structure unfolds across five sequential slots from dominant emotional state to physiological manifestation. In discourse, *uyat*-related speech acts serve prohibitive, evaluative, identity-regulative, and praise-deflecting functions, demonstrating that shame-language in Uzbek is a productive pragmatic resource rather than a mere expressive register.

The integration of these findings supports a reading of *uyat* as a multidimensional sociocultural phenomenon that serves simultaneously as an ethical resource for moral self-regulation and as a discursive mechanism of social control. The task for Uzbek society, as for any community whose moral life is organized in part around shame, is to distinguish between those forms of *uyat* that sustain ethical integrity and relational respect, and those that suppress legitimate individual expression and reinforce inequitable social structures. The present study provides a conceptual and empirical foundation from which this distinction can be pursued in future research.

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