

Manifestation of Semantic Asymmetry in English and Uzbek Languages

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the manifestation of semantic asymmetry in English and Uzbek, focusing on differences in lexical meaning, polysemy, connotation, cultural semantics, and translation equivalence. Semantic asymmetry occurs when lexical or phraseological units in two languages do not correspond completely in their semantic scope, contextual meaning, or pragmatic function. The study demonstrates that English and Uzbek, belonging to different language families and reflecting distinct cultural and cognitive traditions, frequently express similar concepts through semantically non-equivalent linguistic units. Particular attention is paid to polysemous words, culturally marked expressions, lexical gaps, and context-dependent meanings. The analysis shows that semantic asymmetry creates difficulties in interlingual communication and translation, requiring contextual, functional, and linguocultural approaches to achieve adequate equivalence.

Keywords: Semantic asymmetry, English, Uzbek, lexical semantics, polysemy, translation equivalence, lexical gap, linguoculture, connotation, contrastive linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a system through which people conceptualize and interpret the surrounding world. Although different languages may express similar ideas and concepts, the linguistic units used to represent

them often differ in their semantic structure, contextual meaning, and cultural associations. This phenomenon is commonly described as semantic asymmetry. It is particularly significant in comparative studies of English and Uzbek because these languages belong to different language families and have developed under different historical and cultural conditions.

Semantic asymmetry can be observed at the lexical, phraseological, contextual, and linguocultural levels. A lexical unit in English may have several meanings that are expressed through different words in Uzbek, while certain Uzbek concepts may not have direct equivalents in English. Such differences become especially evident in polysemous words, idiomatic expressions, culturally specific concepts, and words with strong connotative meanings.

The relevance of studying semantic asymmetry is also determined by the growing role of English–Uzbek bilingual communication in education, translation, science, business, and international cooperation. Inadequate recognition of semantic differences may result in inaccurate translation, misunderstanding of contextual meanings, and loss of culturally significant information. Therefore, identifying the mechanisms through which semantic asymmetry is manifested is important for both theoretical linguistics and practical translation.

The aim of this study is to examine the major manifestations of semantic asymmetry in English and Uzbek and to identify the linguistic and cultural factors that determine differences in semantic correspondence between the two languages. The study focuses particularly on lexical meaning, polysemy, phraseological units, connotation, and culturally marked vocabulary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical approaches to semantic asymmetry have been developed within contrastive linguistics, translation studies, lexical semantics, and linguocultural studies. Nida & Taber (1969), Catford (1965), and Baker (1992) emphasized the problem of equivalence and the need to consider semantic and

contextual differences when transferring meaning between languages. Contemporary English-Uzbek studies also demonstrate that semantic asymmetry is associated with polysemy, lexical gaps, cultural differences, and differences in conceptual categorization. In particular, studies of English and Uzbek stative verbs reveal that one English lexical unit may correspond to several Uzbek verbs depending on context, while a broader Uzbek semantic unit may require different English expressions. Recent research on culturally marked Uzbek antonyms further indicates that semantic differences are influenced by national values, traditions, and culturally determined meanings.

METHODOLOGY

The research employs contrastive, semantic, contextual, componential, and linguocultural methods. English and Uzbek lexical and phraseological units are compared according to their denotative and connotative meanings, semantic scope, contextual realization, and functional correspondence.

For analytical purposes, semantic asymmetry is classified into the following major types:

1. lexical-semantic asymmetry;
2. polysemous asymmetry;
3. connotative asymmetry;
4. phraseological asymmetry;
5. cultural-semantic asymmetry;
6. contextual asymmetry.

Such classification makes it possible to identify not only differences between individual lexical units but also the linguistic and cultural factors underlying these differences.

Semantic asymmetry is one of the important phenomena observed in the comparative analysis of languages. It arises because languages do not organize and categorize reality in exactly the same way. Even when two lexical units refer to a similar object, action, quality, or phenomenon, their semantic

structures may differ in terms of the number of meanings, semantic components, contextual restrictions, and cultural associations. Therefore, semantic equivalence between English and Uzbek should be understood as a relative rather than absolute relationship.

From a contrastive perspective, semantic asymmetry may be manifested in several forms. First, one lexical unit in English may correspond to several lexical units in Uzbek. Second, several English words may have one broad Uzbek equivalent depending on the context. Third, a culturally specific Uzbek concept may have no complete lexical equivalent in English. Fourth, formally corresponding words may differ in their connotative or pragmatic meanings.

This can be represented through the following semantic relationship:

English lexical unit → semantic structure → contextual meaning
→ Uzbek equivalent

The relationship is not always direct because the semantic structure of the source-language unit may contain components that are absent from the target-language equivalent. Consequently, translation requires the identification of the relevant semantic component in a particular context rather than mechanical substitution.

One of the most common manifestations of semantic asymmetry occurs at the lexical level. English and Uzbek frequently use different lexical units to express similar concepts. At the same time, one word in one language may cover a wider or narrower semantic field than its counterpart in another language.

For example, the English word “home” and the Uzbek word *uy* may correspond in many contexts, but their semantic structures are not completely identical. “Home” may refer not only to a physical building but also to a place associated with family, belonging, emotional security, and personal identity. The Uzbek word *uy* primarily denotes a physical dwelling, although

contextual and cultural meanings can also extend beyond the physical structure.

Another example can be observed in the English word “friend” and the Uzbek words *do‘st*, *o‘rtoq*, or other context-dependent expressions. English may use “friend” relatively broadly, whereas Uzbek lexical choices can indicate different degrees of intimacy, social relationship, age, or communicative context. This demonstrates that semantic boundaries between apparently corresponding words are not always identical.

The following general pattern can therefore be identified:

one English word → several Uzbek equivalents

or, conversely:

several English words → one broad Uzbek equivalent.

Such differences constitute lexical-semantic asymmetry and are particularly important in bilingual dictionaries and translation practice.

Polysemy represents another significant source of semantic asymmetry. A polysemous word possesses several related meanings that develop historically and functionally within a language. However, the organization of these meanings may differ considerably between English and Uzbek.

A prominent example is the English verb “run.” Depending on the context, it can denote physical movement “run quickly,” management “run a business,” functioning “the machine is running,” participation in an election “run for office,” or the movement of a substance “water is running.” In Uzbek, these meanings are generally expressed by different lexical units or combinations such as *yugurmoq*, *boshqarmoq*, *ishlamoq*, *nomzodbo‘lmoq*, or *oqmoq*.

Thus, the relationship can be represented as:

English unit	Contextual meaning	Possible Uzbek equivalent
run	move quickly	<i>yugurmoq</i>
run a business	manage	<i>boshqarmoq</i>

machine runs	function	<i>ishlamog</i>
run for office	participate as a candidate	<i>nomzod bo'lmoq</i>
water runs	flow	<i>oqmoq</i>

This example demonstrates that dictionary equivalence alone cannot adequately explain semantic relationships between English and Uzbek. The context determines which semantic component should be transferred into the target language.

Semantic asymmetry becomes particularly visible in phraseological units. Idioms are traditionally associated with the cultural and historical experience of a linguistic community. Their meanings are often not predictable from the literal meanings of individual components.

For example, the English expression “break the ice” means to overcome initial social tension and establish communication. Its literal translation would not necessarily communicate the intended meaning to an Uzbek-speaking reader. Therefore, an appropriate Uzbek equivalent should reproduce the communicative function rather than the individual lexical components.

Similarly, “spill the beans” means to reveal secret information, while “a piece of cake” refers to something very easy to accomplish. In these cases, semantic correspondence is achieved through functional or contextual equivalence rather than literal lexical substitution.

Uzbek also contains numerous phraseological units whose cultural and semantic components cannot be reproduced through direct translation. Consequently, English-Uzbek translation of idioms often requires one of three strategies:

1. use of a functional equivalent;
2. descriptive translation;
3. preservation of the original expression with additional explanation.

This confirms that phraseological asymmetry is closely connected with cultural differences and conventional patterns of meaning.

A particularly important form of semantic asymmetry is related to culturally specific concepts. Certain words contain meanings that are closely connected with the social structure, traditions, historical experience, and values of a particular society.

The Uzbek word “mahalla” is a clear example. It can be translated into English using such words as “neighborhood,” “community,” or “local community,” but none of these expressions necessarily reproduces the entire semantic and institutional content of *mahalla*. The Uzbek concept includes not only geographical proximity but also social relations, community participation, traditions, mutual assistance, and local organizational functions.

Therefore:

mahalla ≠ neighborhood

although there is a significant semantic overlap between the two concepts.

The same phenomenon can be observed in words related to family relations, hospitality, traditions, social status, and cultural practices. Such lexical units demonstrate that language reflects not only objective reality but also the culturally determined way in which that reality is conceptualized.

Semantic asymmetry also occurs when words with similar denotative meanings possess different connotations. Denotation refers to the basic referential meaning of a word, whereas connotation includes additional emotional, evaluative, social, or cultural associations.

For example, two words may both refer to a particular social role or personal characteristic but differ in whether they express approval, criticism, respect, informality, or irony. This difference may not be immediately visible in bilingual dictionaries but becomes apparent in actual discourse.

The problem is particularly relevant when translating literary, journalistic, political, and cultural texts. A translator who transfers only the denotative meaning may unintentionally change the emotional or evaluative effect of the original text.

Consequently, successful translation requires the preservation of both:

denotative meaning + connotative meaning.

Where complete preservation is impossible, the translator should select the closest functional equivalent according to the communicative purpose of the text.

Context plays a decisive role in determining the meaning of a linguistic unit. A single English word may require different Uzbek equivalents depending on the syntactic and semantic environment in which it occurs.

For instance, the English adjective “strong” can describe physical strength “a strong man,” intensity “strong wind,” taste “strong coffee,” influence “strong influence,” or character “strong personality.” Uzbek does not necessarily use one lexical equivalent in all these contexts. Depending on the collocation, different expressions may be required.

This illustrates the following principle:

lexical meaning + context = actual meaning.

Therefore, semantic asymmetry should not be examined exclusively through isolated vocabulary. Collocations, syntactic structures, discourse context, and communicative intention must also be taken into consideration.

The manifestations discussed above demonstrate that translation between English and Uzbek cannot always rely on direct lexical substitution. The translator must determine the semantic function of the source-language unit and then select an appropriate target-language expression.

The main translation approaches can be summarized as follows:

Type of asymmetry	Main translation approach
Lexical asymmetry	Contextual equivalent
Polysemy	Meaning-based selection
Idiomatic asymmetry	Functional equivalent

Cultural asymmetry	Descriptive or explanatory translation
Connotative asymmetry	Contextual and stylistic adaptation
Contextual asymmetry	Discourse-based interpretation

Accordingly, semantic asymmetry does not necessarily represent a problem in itself. Rather, it is a natural consequence of linguistic diversity. The main challenge arises when translators or language learners fail to recognize this asymmetry and assume that formally similar words necessarily have identical semantic structures.

Based on the comparative analysis, semantic asymmetry between English and Uzbek can be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon involving five interconnected levels:



These levels interact with one another. For example, a culturally specific word may also demonstrate polysemy, contextual variation, and phraseological productivity. Therefore, semantic asymmetry should be studied as an integrated phenomenon rather than as a collection of isolated lexical differences.

The comparative model may be expressed conceptually as:



This model emphasizes that the process of establishing equivalence involves several stages. First, the meaning of the source-language unit is identified. Second, its relevant semantic components are determined. Third, the contextual meaning is established. Fourth, culturally specific elements are considered. Finally, an appropriate Uzbek or English equivalent is selected.

Such an approach can improve the accuracy of translation and reduce semantic distortion in English-Uzbek bilingual communication.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis demonstrates that semantic asymmetry is a fundamental characteristic of the relationship between English and Uzbek. Despite the existence of numerous lexical and conceptual correspondences, complete semantic equivalence between the two languages cannot always be established. Differences in lexical structure, polysemy, contextual interpretation, phraseological organization, connotation, and cultural conceptualization result in different ways of expressing similar realities.

The study shows that lexical-semantic asymmetry is manifested when one English lexical unit corresponds to several Uzbek units or, conversely, when several English expressions are represented by a broader Uzbek lexical unit. Polysemy further complicates interlingual correspondence because different meanings of the same English word may require separate lexical equivalents in Uzbek. This confirms that context plays a decisive role in determining the appropriate translation equivalent.

The analysis of phraseological expressions demonstrates that idioms represent one of the most complex forms of semantic asymmetry. Their meanings are strongly connected with cultural conventions and cannot always be transferred through literal translation. Similarly, culturally marked concepts such as *mahalla* demonstrate that certain lexical units contain social and cultural meanings that have no complete one-word equivalent in another language.

Another important finding is that semantic correspondence involves not only denotative meaning but also connotative, pragmatic, and cultural components. Therefore, accurate English-Uzbek translation requires consideration of the communicative situation, stylistic characteristics, cultural background, and intended meaning of the source text.

Recognition of this sequence is important for improving translation quality, bilingual lexicography, foreign-language teaching, and intercultural communication. Translators and language learners should therefore avoid relying exclusively on direct word-for-word correspondence and instead analyze the

semantic function of linguistic units within their particular contexts.

Thus, semantic asymmetry should not be viewed merely as an obstacle to communication. It reflects the distinctive ways in which English- and Uzbek-speaking communities organize experience and conceptualize reality through language. A systematic understanding of these differences can contribute to more accurate translation, more effective English-Uzbek language instruction, and deeper comparative research in contrastive linguistics.

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