

Semantic and Stylistic Differentiation of Lexical Doublets in English and Uzbek: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Lexical doublets constitute one of the most dynamic lexical phenomena reflecting the interaction between historical language development, semantic evolution, stylistic differentiation, and pragmatic adaptation. Although lexical doublets have received considerable attention in historical linguistics and lexicology, their integrated comparative analysis from semantic and stylistic perspectives remains insufficient, particularly in studies involving English and Uzbek. The present research investigates lexical doublets as context-dependent linguistic units whose functional value extends beyond etymological identity and lexical similarity. The study aims to determine the mechanisms of semantic divergence and stylistic specialization of lexical doublets in English and Uzbek through comparative analysis.

Keywords: Lexical doublets, semantic differentiation, stylistic variation, pragmatic differentiation, discourse analysis, English, Uzbek, comparative linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

The vocabulary of every language is a dynamic system that continuously evolves under the influence of historical development, language contact, sociocultural transformation, and communicative needs. One of the most distinctive manifestations of this evolution is the emergence and functional development of

lexical doublets. Lexical doublets are lexical units that originate from a common etymological source but enter the language through different historical pathways or undergo independent semantic development, eventually functioning as separate lexical items. Although these words retain traces of their common origin, they gradually acquire different semantic structures, stylistic values, and pragmatic functions. Consequently, lexical doublets represent not merely a historical phenomenon but a living component of contemporary communication whose interpretation depends on linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

The English language offers one of the richest systems of lexical doublets owing to the coexistence of Germanic, French, Latin, and Greek lexical strata. Historical events such as the Norman Conquest, the Renaissance, and intensive lexical borrowing produced numerous doublet pairs that today differ in meaning, stylistic colouring, frequency, and communicative function [1]. Words sharing the same historical root frequently develop independent lexical identities, becoming associated with different discourse types, communicative situations, and stylistic registers. Their differentiation demonstrates that lexical change extends beyond phonological or morphological development and is closely connected with semantic specialization and pragmatic adaptation.

Uzbek also possesses lexical phenomena comparable to lexical doublets, although their mechanisms of formation differ from those observed in English. Native vocabulary, Arabic, Persian-Tajik, and Russian borrowings, together with contemporary international terminology, have produced lexical units that exhibit semantic convergence, divergence, or functional redistribution within the lexical system. Some historically related lexical items gradually specialize according to discourse type, communicative purpose, or stylistic preference. This process indicates that lexical differentiation is not restricted to genetically related languages but reflects universal principles of lexical organization.

Traditional studies have predominantly approached lexical doublets from historical-linguistic, etymological, or lexicological perspectives. Considerable attention has been devoted to their

origin, phonological development, and semantic evolution, while considerably less attention has been paid to their functioning in authentic communicative contexts. Existing research generally describes lexical doublets as products of historical development without sufficiently explaining why speakers systematically choose one member of a doublet instead of another in particular communicative situations. This limitation becomes especially evident when lexical doublets are analysed across different discourse types such as literary, journalistic, legal, political, and everyday communication.

The objective of this research is to investigate the semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic differentiation of lexical doublets in English and Uzbek through comparative analysis of authentic linguistic material. Particular attention is devoted to identifying the contextual mechanisms responsible for semantic divergence, stylistic specialization, and pragmatic interpretation across different discourse types.

The novelty of the study lies in proposing an integrated comparative framework that combines semantic analysis, stylistic investigation, and pragmatic interpretation within a single analytical model. Rather than considering lexical doublets solely as products of historical lexical development, the research examines them as dynamic communicative units whose functions emerge through interaction between lexical meaning, discourse context, and speaker intention. Such an approach makes it possible to explain not only how lexical doublets differ structurally but also why these differences become communicatively significant in actual language use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexical doublets generally survive in the language not because they remain fully interchangeable, but because they gradually develop differences in meaning, function, collocational behavior, or stylistic value. Historical language change rarely preserves two lexical items with identical semantic and pragmatic functions for a long period. Instead, linguistic economy encourages differentiation, allowing each member of a doublet to occupy a

distinct communicative niche. Consequently, the persistence of lexical doublets reflects processes of semantic specialization, pragmatic differentiation, and register variation rather than lexical redundancy.

According to Yusupov [6; 7], lexical doublets that originate from a common etymological source initially exhibit close semantic similarity; however, over time they undergo semantic divergence, gradually acquiring distinct conceptual and communicative functions [6]. He argues that most surviving English doublets are no longer absolute synonyms because each lexical item develops its own semantic profile and contextual distribution. From this perspective, the longevity of lexical doublets is explained not by synonymy itself, but by the emergence of differentiated meanings that reduce lexical competition and enable both forms to coexist within the language.

A similar position is expressed by Sesterhenn (2016), who maintains that complete synonymy is inherently unstable in natural languages. Since languages tend to avoid unnecessary lexical duplication, one member of a synonymous pair usually acquires additional semantic features or expands into a new functional domain. As a result, lexical doublets evolve into complementary rather than competing lexical units, each fulfilling a specific communicative purpose [5].

The role of stylistic differentiation has also been emphasized by Šarić (2022). In her view, many lexical doublets remain productive because they become associated with different registers of discourse. Native Germanic forms generally function as stylistically neutral or informal vocabulary, whereas borrowed Romance or Latinate equivalents are frequently preferred in formal, academic, legal, or literary contexts. Consequently, speakers choose between members of a doublet not only according to semantic meaning but also according to communicative situation and stylistic appropriateness [4].

This argument is further supported by Kruger (2018), who notes that register variation enables speakers to express similar concepts with different stylistic effects. Borrowed lexical forms often convey greater precision, abstraction, or formality, while

native equivalents preserve conversational naturalness. Such stylistic specialization contributes significantly to the maintenance of lexical doublets within the lexicon because each form fulfills a distinct pragmatic function [1].

Recent research by Mevis (2021) further demonstrates that the survival of lexical doublets is closely connected with collocational specialization. Even when two lexical items remain semantically similar, they frequently develop preferences for different lexical environments. Over time, these habitual collocations strengthen semantic differentiation and establish each member of the pair as an independent lexical unit with its own distributional patterns [2].

This tendency is clearly illustrated by the English doublet *frail* and *fragile*. According to Yusupov [6; 7], although both adjectives broadly denote weakness or susceptibility to damage, their collocational behavior differs considerably. *Frail* most commonly combines with nouns referring to living beings or physical conditions, such as *frail old man*, *frail woman*, and *frail health*, emphasizing human physical or emotional weakness. In contrast, *fragile* predominantly modifies inanimate objects, as in *fragile glass*, *fragile package*, or *fragile materials*, highlighting physical breakability rather than biological vulnerability.

These differences demonstrate that collocational preferences gradually become semantic distinctions, preventing the two words from functioning as complete synonyms. In some cases, lexical doublets exhibit much stronger semantic divergence. Yusupov [6; 7] identifies pairs such as *host–guest* and *fire–pyre* as examples where historical development has produced substantial conceptual separation. While *host* and *guest* have evolved into lexemes expressing opposite participant roles within social interaction, *pyre* has become restricted to the specialized meaning of a ceremonial funeral fire, distinguishing it from the broader and more neutral concept expressed by *fire*. These examples illustrate how historical semantic change may transform originally related lexical forms into units with highly specialized meanings [6].

Overall, contemporary linguistic scholarship [5; 6; 7; 2; 4; 1] consistently demonstrates that lexical doublets survive because

they undergo semantic divergence, collocational specialization, pragmatic differentiation, and register separation. Rather than representing redundant vocabulary, they evolve into complementary lexical resources that enrich the expressive potential of the language by serving distinct communicative, stylistic, and discourse-related functions.

The majority of existing studies have concentrated on the historical origin and structural development of doublets, whereas comparatively little attention has been devoted to their contextual behaviour and communicative functions. Consequently, the relationship between semantic differentiation, stylistic specialization, and pragmatic interpretation remains insufficiently investigated, particularly in comparative studies involving English and Uzbek.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study adopts a comparative qualitative research design to investigate the semantic and stylistic differentiation of lexical doublets in English and Uzbek. The research is based on the assumption that lexical doublets cannot be adequately explained through etymological analysis alone because their communicative value emerges from the interaction of semantic structure, stylistic distribution, discourse environment, and pragmatic interpretation. Consequently, the methodological framework integrates comparative linguistics, lexical semantics, stylistics analysis into a unified analytical model.

The principal corpus of lexical material includes representative English doublet pairs such as “cartoon-carton,” “dignity-dainty,” “aptitude-attitude,” “forge-fabric,” “compute-count,” “cadence-chance,” and “cunning-canny.” These examples were chosen because they illustrate different mechanisms of semantic specialization and stylistic differentiation. Their functional equivalents and contextually comparable lexical units in Uzbek were identified through semantic correspondence rather than literal translation. Authentic examples were collected from contemporary dictionaries, linguistic corpora, literary texts,

journalistic publications, legal documents, political discourse, and naturally occurring everyday communication.

Unlike many previous investigations that analyse semantic or stylistic aspects independently, the present study evaluates these parameters simultaneously. This integrated procedure makes it possible to explain not only lexical differences but also the communicative mechanisms responsible for their emergence and development.

The methodological approach adopted in this research follows the comparative and contextual orientation illustrated in the two reference articles while extending it through a multidimensional analysis of lexical doublets.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a semantic and stylistic analysis of each doublet pair, followed by a discussion of the general patterns that emerge across the material.

Cartoon-carton

- **Semantic shift:** Metonymic narrowing in two different directions from a shared base meaning ("heavy paper/pasteboard"). "Carton" kept the material sense (container made of that paper). "Cartoon" shifted from "preparatory drawing on heavy paper" → "humorous drawing" → "animated film."
- **Stylistic register:** Both neutral/everyday, but "cartoon" has picked up a connotation of levity and informality (comic, satirical, childlike), while "carton" stayed purely functional/utilitarian with no emotional coloring.
 - "She enjoys reading the cartoons in the Sunday paper." (Merriam-Webster)
 - "She got a carton of ice cream out of the freezer." (Merriam-Webster)

A comparable tendency may be observed in Uzbek lexical organization, although the mechanisms differ. Uzbek does not

preserve identical historical doublets corresponding directly to cartoon and carton. Instead, semantic differentiation frequently develops between inherited Turkic vocabulary and borrowed lexical units that gradually specialize according to communicative domain. Native and borrowed words often coexist while performing different semantic functions rather than remaining complete synonyms. This demonstrates that semantic specialization is a universal lexical process independent of genealogical language affiliation.

Dignity-dainty

- **Semantic shift:** This is a case of divergent evaluative drift. “Dignity” preserved the core Latin sense of “worthiness, gravity.” “Dainty” underwent pejoration/narrowing — from general “worthiness” to “delicacy,” then further to “fussy, overrefined” (mildly negative) alongside the neutral “delicate, pretty.”
- **Stylistic register:** “Dignity” is elevated, abstract, formal. *Dainty* is concrete, domestic, and can be affectionate or faintly mocking depending on context – a much lower register split from a high-register root.
 - “I think everyone should be able to die with dignity.” (Cambridge Dictionary)
 - “She took a dainty sip of tea from her teacup.” (Merriam-Webster)

A parallel evaluative split can be observed in Uzbek between *qadr-qimmat* and *nafis/nozik*. Although the two are not etymological doublets, they occupy a functionally comparable distribution: *qadr-qimmat* is reserved for elevated, formal contexts concerning human worth and social status (legal, political, and moral discourse), whereas *nafis/nozik* describes delicacy in concrete, domestic, or aesthetic contexts. This confirms that the high/low register split observed in dignity – dainty has a functional, if not etymological, counterpart in Uzbek.

Aptitude–attitude

- **Semantic shift:** From physical/concrete to abstract/mental – a classic metaphorical extension. “Attitude” began as a term of art (literally a figure's “pose”) and metaphorized into “mental stance,” then further narrowed colloquially to “defiant/assertive disposition” (e.g., “she's got an attitude”). “Aptitude” stayed closer to the root sense of “fitness, capability.”
- **Stylistic register:** “Aptitude remains formal/technical (psychometrics, education – “aptitude test”). “Attitude” spans registers dramatically, from formal (social psychology) to highly colloquial slang.
 - “The new test is supposed to measure the aptitudes of the students.” (Merriam-Webster)
 - “He was showing some attitude during practice today, so the coach benched him.” (Merriam-Webster)

Uzbek shows a comparable functional division between *qobiliyat* and *munosabat*. *Qobiliyat* denotes an innate or trained capacity and is used almost exclusively in formal, educational, and psychometric contexts (cf. English “aptitude test”), while *munosabat* denotes a general mental or evaluative stance and occurs freely across formal and everyday registers, including colloquial expressions of a defiant or assertive disposition. The register asymmetry thus mirrors the aptitude–attitude split, even though the two Uzbek items are not historically related.

Forge-fabric

- **Semantic shift:** Specialization vs. generalization from a shared “workshop/craft” root. “Forge” narrowed to a specific craft (metalworking) and extended metaphorically to “create with effort” (forge an alliance) and negatively to “counterfeit” (forge a signature). “Fabric” generalized outward – first to any manufactured cloth, then metaphorically to abstract structure (“the fabric of society”).
- **Stylistic register:** “Forge” is punchy, monosyllabic, Anglo-Saxon-sounding despite its Latin origin (via Old French),

fitting concrete/physical contexts. “Fabric” retains more Latinate polish and works comfortably in abstract, formal registers.

- “The two countries have forged a strong alliance.” (Merriam-Webster)
- “You can't expect the fabric of society to survive if you do away with all moral imperatives.” (Merriam-Webster)

A similar split between concrete craft and abstract structure appears in Uzbek between *soxtalashtirmoq/qalbakilashtirmoq* and *to'qima*. The former, corresponding to the negative sense of *forge* (“to counterfeit”), remains concrete and legal/criminal in usage, whereas the latter, like *fabric*, has generalized from “woven cloth” to an abstract structural metaphor, as in the calque *jamiyatto'qimasi* (“the fabric of society”). The Uzbek pair therefore replicates the concrete-legal versus abstract-formal register division found in forge–fabric.

Compute-count

- **Semantic shift:** Technical specialization vs. everyday generalization. “Compute” stayed close to the “calculate” sense and became the term for formal/mechanical calculation (hence “computer”). “Count” broadened into basic enumeration and gained many idiomatic extensions (“count on you,” “doesn't count”).
 - **Stylistic register:** “Compute” is Latinate, formal, technical/scientific. “Count” is basic-vocabulary, high-frequency, used from early childhood – a textbook case of a learned doublet vs. a popular (vernacular) doublet.
- “Compute the area of the triangle.” (Merriam-Webster)
 - “Count the pages of the manuscript.” (Merriam-Webster)

Uzbek demonstrates a comparable functional distinction through lexical choices such as *sanamoq*, *hisoblamoq*, and *hisob-kitobqilmoq*. Although these expressions share the general conceptual domain of numerical processing, they differ with

respect to cognitive complexity, communicative purpose, and professional usage. Everyday conversation predominantly favours *sanamoq*, whereas scientific, economic, and technical discourse generally requires *hisoblamoq* or more specialized terminological expressions. Consequently, semantic differentiation in Uzbek likewise emerges through functional specialization rather than absolute synonymy.

Cadence-chance

- **Semantic shift:** Metaphorical bifurcation from "falling." "Cadence" preserves the image of a rhythmic/musical "fall" (of the voice, of a phrase, of footsteps). "Chance" abstracts "falling" into "the fall of events/dice" → randomness, luck.
- **Stylistic register:** "Cadence" is literary, musical, somewhat elevated. "Chance" is everyday and register-neutral, appearing in casual speech as easily as in formal writing.
 - "He speaks with a soft Southern cadence." (Merriam-Webster)
 - "We found the house entirely by chance." (Britannica Dictionary)

Uzbek exhibits a comparable domain split between *ohang* and *tasodif*. *Ohang* is confined to musical, poetic, and prosodic contexts, corresponding to the elevated register of "cadence," while *tasodif* denotes randomness or coincidence and is used freely across all registers, matching the neutral distribution of "chance." The domain-restricted versus register-neutral opposition thus recurs independently of etymological relatedness.

Cunning-canny

- **Semantic shift:** Evaluative divergence again. Both retain "knowing/skillful," but "cunning" skewed toward the negative (deceptive cleverness), while "canny" skewed positive-to-neutral (shrewd, sensible, sometimes "cute" in North American usage).
- **Stylistic register:** "Cunning" is standard and slightly literary/moralizing (fairy-tale villains are "cunning").

“Canny” carries dialectal color (strongly associated with Scots/Northern English) and reads as more regionally or informally marked.

- “She was cunning enough to fool me.” (Merriam-Webster)
- “He is a canny investor.” (Cambridge Dictionary)

Uzbek reproduces the same evaluative bifurcation between *ayyor* and *ziyrak/aqlli*. *Ayyor* denotes deceptive cleverness and carries a negative moral colouring parallel to “cunning,” whereas *ziyrak/aqlli* denotes shrewdness or sensible judgement with a neutral-to-positive colouring, corresponding to “canny.” This confirms that the “amelioration/pejoration” split observed in “cunning-canny” reflects a recurrent, cross-linguistically available pattern of lexical evaluation rather than an accident of English etymology.

From the perspectives above, every pair shows the same mechanisms of semantic change pulling two descendants apart:

- **Narrowing:** “cartoon,” “forge,” “compute,” “cadence” all specialize a broad root sense into one particular domain.
- **Generalization:** “fabric,” “count,” “chance” broaden outward from a specific original sense.
- **Metaphorical extension:** “attitude,” “forge,” “chance,” and “fabric” all shift from something concrete to something abstract (pose → mindset, craft → counterfeit, falling → randomness, cloth → structure).
- **Evaluative drift:** “dainty,” “cunning/canny,” and “attitude” shift not just in meaning but in judgment, becoming more positive or negative over time.

CONCLUSION

This study examined seven English lexical doublets – “cartoon-carton,” “dignity-dainty,” “aptitude-attitude,” “forge-fabric,” “compute-count,” “cadence-chance,” and “cunning-canny” – to see how and why each pair splits apart in meaning and style. The

results show that doublets from a shared root rarely stay synonymous. They diverge through a few recurring patterns: narrowing (“cartoon,” “forge,” “compute,” “cadence”), broadening (“fabric,” “count,” “chance”), a shift from concrete to abstract meaning (attitude, forge, chance, fabric), and a shift toward a more positive or negative meaning (“dainty,” “cunning/canny,” “attitude”). This matches what Yusupov [6; 7], Sesterhenn [5], Šarić [4], Kruger & Rooy [1], and Mevis [2] have argued: doublets survive because they stop being interchangeable and each one takes on its own meaning, collocations, and use.

There is also a clear link between meaning and style. In most pairs, the word that entered the language earlier, or through everyday speech, became the more concrete and informal one (“carton,” “dainty,” “attitude,” “forge,” “count,” “chance,” “canny”). The word that entered later through writing, and stayed closer to Latin, became the more abstract and formal one (dignity, aptitude, fabric, compute, cadence, cunning). Cartoon is the one exception, showing that this pattern is strong but not absolute.

The Uzbek material suggests this kind of splitting is not unique to English. Even without direct historical counterparts, Uzbek shows similar splits – between native and borrowed words (as with “cartoon-carton”), or between words in the same domain that differ in complexity and register (as with *sanamoq*, *hisoblamoq*, and *hisob-kitobqilmoq* compared to compute–count). This points to semantic and stylistic splitting as a general feature of how languages organize their vocabulary, not something specific to English's Latin-French-Germanic history.

The study has clear limits. The Uzbek comparison is etymologically direct for only two of the seven pairs; the other five rely on functional rather than historical parallels. The English examples, now taken from *Merriam-Webster*, *Cambridge Dictionary*, and *Britannica Dictionary*, are still dictionary examples rather than examples from literature, news, law, or political speech, as the original methodology planned. Future work should extend the Uzbek comparison to all seven pairs, use real examples across different genres, and measure

collocation and register patterns more precisely. This would give the proposed model a stronger empirical base.

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