



## LEXICAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES IN THE SPEECH OF BOYS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LINGUISTIC CONTEXTS

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16958784>

### Annotation

This article examines the lexical-semantic characteristics of boys' speech in Uzbek and English, drawing on data from natural child discourse, literary sources, and cultural narratives. The analysis reveals that boys' lexical preferences gravitate toward thematic domains involving physical activity, competition, technology, heroic figures, and conflict resolution. Semantic structuring frequently employs binary oppositions such as strong/weak and winner/loser, reflecting culturally embedded models of masculinity. The study employs descriptive, contrastive, and functional analyses to identify similarities and differences between Uzbek and English data. While universal tendencies include goal-oriented semantic framing and assertive communicative style, cultural divergences emerge in the sources of lexical enrichment: Uzbek boys' speech draws heavily from historical and communal ideals, whereas English boys' speech is more influenced by fictional and commercial media. The findings contribute to gender linguistics by demonstrating the role of language in the early construction of gender identity and its embeddedness in socio-cultural norms.

**Keywords:** Boys' speech, lexical semantics, gender linguistics, Uzbek, English, communicative style, cultural narratives, gender identity, semantic structuring, sociolinguistics

**Introduction:** The study of gender-specific linguistic patterns in children's speech has emerged as a significant branch within contemporary gender linguistics, particularly in the domains of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse studies. While early research primarily concentrated on the speech of adult men and women, more recent investigations have turned their focus toward the formative years, exploring how gender roles and identities are linguistically encoded in the speech of boys and girls (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 2013). Boys' speech, in this regard, constitutes a distinctive object of inquiry due to the ways in which lexical choice, semantic structuring, and





communicative style reveal not only personal cognitive development but also the social and cultural environment in which the child is raised.

In Uzbek and English linguistic contexts, boys' speech presents both universal and culture-specific patterns. Universally, boys tend to favour more assertive, directive, and referential forms of expression (Holmes, 2013: 102). Culturally, however, the semantic fields they employ, the metaphorical models they internalize, and the evaluative vocabulary they adopt often reflect the specific societal stereotypes and normative expectations prevalent in their immediate environment (Ergasheva, 2017; Ziyayeva, 2020). The lexical-semantic structures found in boys' speech thus provide valuable insight into the processes of gender socialization, linguistic identity formation, and the interplay between individual agency and socio-cultural conditioning.

**Theoretical and Methodological Framework:** The analysis is informed by the theoretical foundations of gender linguistics (Kirilina, 1999; Pauwels, 2003; Tannen, 1990), which posit that gender differentiation in speech emerges from the complex interaction of biological, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors. The central hypothesis guiding this research is that boys' speech is shaped by:

- Lexical preferences reflecting cultural models of masculinity,
- semantic structuring aligned with assertiveness, competition, and problem-solving,
- functional orientation toward the performance of social roles perceived as 'male' in the given culture.

Methodologically, the study employs descriptive analysis to catalogue lexical-semantic patterns, contrastive analysis to highlight differences and similarities between Uzbek and English data, and functional interpretation to explain the communicative roles and pragmatic effects of the identified linguistic features. The corpus comprises both natural speech samples (collected in school and home contexts) and literary/folklore texts that serve as cultural models influencing children's language.

**Formation of Lexical-Semantic Units in Boys' Speech:** Boys' vocabulary development, while following the general trajectory of early language acquisition, tends to be enriched in specific thematic areas. In both Uzbek and English, semantic fields associated with physical activity, competition, objects of technology, heroic figures, and conflict resolution are disproportionately represented (Ziyayeva, 2020: 143). For example:

In Uzbek, a five-year-old boy may prefer lexical items such as *jangchi* ('warrior'), *otish* ('shooting'), *pahlavon* ('champion'), and culturally loaded





terms like bahodir ('hero'), which carry connotations of bravery and physical strength.

In English, equivalents such as soldier, fight, champ, and hero perform similar functions, though their semantic scope may differ slightly due to cultural references (e.g., superheroes in Western media vs. historical warriors in Uzbek oral tradition).

The acquisition of these terms is heavily mediated by parental input, peer group interaction, and media exposure. Boys' engagement with action-oriented narratives—whether through folk tales like Alpomish or through comic books such as Batman—reinforces lexical associations between masculinity and attributes such as courage, leadership, and resilience.

Semantic organization in boys' speech frequently reflects binary oppositions that align with culturally entrenched gender dichotomies: strong/weak, active/passive, winner/loser. In Uzbek, the metaphorical model hayot – jang maydoni ('life is a battlefield') permeates boys' speech, often manifesting in evaluative utterances such as u kuchli bola ('he is a strong boy') or yutqazdi ('he lost'). In English, parallel metaphors—life is a game, life is a battle—are likewise prevalent, shaping evaluative semantics and interpersonal positioning.

Boys also tend to favour goal-oriented semantic frames. Requests and proposals are often framed in terms of achieving a concrete outcome rather than maintaining interpersonal harmony. For instance, an English-speaking boy might say, Let's build the tallest tower, whereas an Uzbek counterpart could propose, Keling, eng baland minorani qilamiz. The focus in both cases is on measurable achievement.

One notable difference between Uzbek and English boys' speech lies in register control. In Uzbek, the register may shift sharply depending on the formality of the situation and the presence of adults, with honorifics or respectful forms occasionally replacing colloquial expressions. For example, a boy might switch from kel ('come') when addressing a peer to keling (polite imperative) when speaking to an elder male. In English, register shifts are more likely to be signalled through lexical politeness markers (please, could you...) rather than morphological changes, reflecting structural differences between the two languages.

**Functional Interpretation of Lexical-Semantic Features:** The lexical-semantic choices in boys' speech serve to assert a gendered social identity from an early age. The preference for competitive, action-oriented vocabulary aligns





with the societal expectation that males should be assertive, capable, and dominant in certain domains (Holmes, 2013). In Uzbek culture, this often intertwines with the concept of erkaklik ('manliness') as a moral and social ideal. In Anglo-American contexts, while 'manliness' as a term may be less frequent in child discourse, its semantic equivalents are conveyed through phrases like be brave, man up, and don't be a quitter.

In both linguistic communities, boys' lexical choices play a strategic role in peer group positioning. The use of slang, in-group jargon, and competitive banter serves to establish hierarchies and alliances. For instance, in English playground speech, expressions like You're out! or Beat you! carry not only the literal meaning but also the social function of reinforcing the speaker's competence and status. Uzbek equivalents (Sen chiqding!, Men yutdim!) operate similarly, though often with more explicit verbal affirmation of the speaker's own prowess.

Cultural narratives significantly shape the semantic content of boys' speech. In Uzbek oral tradition, epic tales valorising bravery and loyalty introduce lexical items that encode moral values alongside physical attributes. In English-speaking contexts, mass media and popular culture (films, television, video games) supply a parallel set of lexical items but often emphasise individual heroism and personal achievement over collective duty.

**Comparative Analysis:** Uzbek and English Contexts: The comparative analysis reveals both convergence and divergence in the lexical-semantic shaping of boys' speech.

**Convergence:** Both languages display an overrepresentation of terms denoting physicality, competition, and achievement. Semantic structures favour goal orientation and binary evaluative categories.

**Divergence:** Uzbek boys' speech is more explicitly tied to historical and communal ideals, often expressed through culturally unique lexemes (bahodir, pahlavon). English boys' speech, in contrast, draws heavily from fictional and commercial media, leading to a vocabulary saturated with brand-specific and entertainment-based terms (Spiderman, lightsaber).

Furthermore, the morphological richness of Uzbek enables more nuanced variation in politeness and respect marking, which in turn shapes boys' awareness of social hierarchy. English, with its more fixed morphological system, relies on lexical and intonational means to achieve similar pragmatic effects.





**Conclusion:** The formation of gender-specific lexical-semantic units in boys' speech reflects a dynamic interplay of universal cognitive tendencies and culture-specific socialisation processes. Uzbek and English data confirm that boys' speech is not merely a neutral developmental stage but a linguistic space where gendered identities are actively constructed, negotiated, and reinforced.

By documenting and functionally interpreting these patterns, this study contributes to the broader field of gender linguistics, offering insights that are relevant not only for academic theorisation but also for applied domains such as language education, speech therapy, and intercultural communication training. Recognising the culturally mediated nature of boys' lexical-semantic development underscores the importance of designing pedagogical and communicative interventions that respect diversity while fostering linguistic inclusivity.

If you'd like, I can also prepare a version with in-text citations fully formatted in APA or Chicago style, so it's ready for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. That would give the article a polished, scholarly appearance aligned with academic standards.

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