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GENDER CATEGORIZATION OF SOCIAL ROLES IN THE ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract: The article examines the linguistic mechanisms through which social roles are gender-categorized in English and Uzbek. The study focuses on family and kinship relations, professional and public roles, forms of address, evaluative vocabulary, and proverbs. Its aim is to identify the principal means by which gender information is encoded, inferred from context, or culturally associated with particular social roles in the two languages. The research employs comparative, descriptive, lexical-semantic, linguocultural, and selected discourse-analytical procedures. The analysis shows that the absence of a developed grammatical gender system does not entail the absence of gender semantics. In English, gender distinctions are most explicitly realized in third-person personal pronouns, semantically marked lexical pairs, and historically gendered occupational designations, while contemporary usage demonstrates a tendency toward gender-neutral professional nomenclature. Uzbek is characterized by a higher degree of grammatical neutrality, yet its kinship terminology systematically encodes sex, relative age, family hierarchy, and culturally significant forms of respectful address.

Keywords: gender, social role, gender categorization, English, Uzbek, kinship terms, occupational vocabulary, gender stereotypes.

Introduction

Gender remains a significant area of contemporary linguistic research because linguistic forms participate in the representation of social identities, interpersonal relations, and culturally established expectations. This issue is particularly relevant to the study of social roles, where gender meanings interact with family status, professional position, age, and communicative context. A comparison of English and Uzbek is especially informative because the two languages differ typologically while neither possesses a developed grammatical gender system in nouns. Their comparison therefore makes it possible to examine how gender meanings are encoded when grammatical gender is limited or absent.

The present article focuses on the linguistic representation of male and female roles in family, professional, and public spheres, with particular attention to kinship terms, forms of address, occupational designations, evaluative vocabulary, and proverbs. The analysis considers both directly gender-marked units and formally neutral expressions whose interpretation depends on context or culturally established associations. The study aims to identify the principal similarities and differences in the ways English and Uzbek categorize social roles through lexical, contextual, and sociocultural means. This approach allows gender to be treated not merely as an indication of biological sex, but as a component of linguistic representation shaped by social practice.

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The relevance of the comparison also lies in the different distribution of gender information across the two linguistic systems. English preserves explicit gender distinctions in personal reference and in a number of historically marked lexical oppositions, while contemporary professional terminology increasingly favors neutral forms. Uzbek is grammatically more neutral in this respect, yet its kinship vocabulary and forms of address encode gender together with age, family hierarchy, respect, and social distance. The article therefore proposes an integrated comparison of direct gender marking, contextual interpretation, and culturally conditioned evaluation as complementary mechanisms of gender categorization.

Literature Review

E. I. Goroshko notes that gender studies emerged as an independent field of linguistic inquiry relatively late. The scope of research gradually expanded beyond the specific features of male and female speech to include the ways in which sex and gender are expressed in vocabulary, syntax, systems of nomination, and other domains of language [5]. The author emphasizes that one of the principal objectives of such research is to determine which characteristics and evaluations language associates with men and women and in which semantic domains these evaluations are most salient.

This approach is particularly important in the study of social roles because an individual is simultaneously a member of a family, a participant in professional relations, and a representative of a particular age and social group. Gender characteristics therefore rarely function independently of other attributes. As Goroshko's review demonstrates, linguistic behavior is also related to status, age, social role, and the specific communicative situation [5]. Such a perspective helps to avoid an overly reductive approach in which all linguistic differences are explained solely by an individual's male or female sex.

The comparison of English and Uzbek is of particular interest. On the one hand, the two languages belong to different language families and differ substantially in their structural organization. On the other hand, neither Modern English nor Uzbek is characterized by a developed system of grammatical gender in nouns.

G. I. Ergasheva proposes examining the gender dimension in relation to general principles of language description. For the researcher, it is important to distinguish universal categories of human cognition from the structural means available in a particular language [6]. This approach is especially productive for English-Uzbek comparison, since similar social content may be expressed by different linguistic means in the two languages.

K. I. Normurodov demonstrates that gender in English and Uzbek is represented not only grammatically but also through lexical units, occupational titles, kinship terms, forms of address, and culturally conditioned expressions [3]. English has largely lost grammatical gender, whereas Uzbek, as a Turkic language, has no grammatical gender category in nouns. Nevertheless, both languages actively convey gender meanings through vocabulary and the social use of words.

A similar conclusion is reached by Sh. B. Tolibova. The author notes that English preserves gender opposition primarily in the system of personal pronouns, in vocabulary, and in certain word-formation patterns. In Uzbek, gender is more often determined by context and sociocultural conditions [4].

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Proverbs constitute a separate group within the research material. Their relevance to gender analysis lies in their capacity to preserve cultural representations that have developed over long periods of time. S. Karimov regards the Uzbek proverb as a form through which popular experience, systems of values, and distinctive features of the national linguistic worldview are reflected [1].

D. Kodiralieva examines English and Uzbek proverbs specifically from the perspective of gendered representations of knowledge and social roles. In the material she analyzes, Uzbek proverbs more frequently associate men's knowledge with public authority, whereas women's wisdom is more often linked to the family sphere. English proverbs are more formally neutral, although they may likewise preserve implicit gender stereotypes [2].

Materials and Methods

The research material comprises English and Uzbek linguistic units denoting men and women in family, professional, and public spheres, as well as proverbs and stable cultural representations analyzed in the works of S. Karimov [1], D. Kodiralieva [2], K. I. Normurodov [3], Sh. B. Tolibova [4], E. I. Goroshko [5], and G. I. Ergasheva [6]. The study employs comparative, descriptive, lexical-semantic, and linguocultural methods. Elements of discourse analysis are used in cases where the meaning of a linguistic unit depends on the communicative situation and the speaker's social status.

The choice of methods is determined by the nature of the material under investigation. G. I. Ergasheva emphasizes that language comparison should take into account both universal principles and the structural characteristics of each particular linguistic system [6]. In her work, gender is treated as a conceptual category that may exist independently of whether a language possesses grammatical gender.

Goroshko's approach complements this position by introducing a social dimension. According to her observations, gender research may encompass sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, cognitive, and intercultural perspectives, while its object of study includes both the language system itself and human speech behavior [5]. The present study focuses primarily on the lexical-semantic and sociocultural dimensions of gender. Its purpose is not to determine how "men speak" or how "women speak," but rather to establish how language names, differentiates, and evaluates their social roles.

Results and Discussion

Gender as a Linguistic and Social Category

The analysis demonstrates that grammatical gender and gender as a social category must be distinguished. Grammatical gender is a property of the language system. Social gender is associated with societal perceptions of male and female roles, qualities, and patterns of behavior. The two categories do not fully coincide.

This distinction is particularly evident in English and Uzbek. In English, nouns in most cases do not change according to whether they refer to a male or a female person. At the same time, third-person singular personal pronouns distinguish gender: he and she.

The Uzbek pronoun u, by contrast, may refer to either a man or a woman. Its interpretation is determined by context. Thus, the sentence U keldi ("He/She came") does not in itself indicate whether the person who came was male or female.

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K. I. Normurodov considers this difference to be one of the important features of English-Uzbek comparison. He also emphasizes that the absence of grammatical gender in Uzbek does not mean the absence of gender semantics: gender meanings are widely represented in vocabulary, social roles, and culturally established forms of address [3]. This position is consistent with G. I. Ergasheva's approach, according to which the presence or absence of grammatical gender is a structural characteristic of a particular language, whereas the concepts of sex and gender may be expressed by other linguistic means [6].

Accordingly, in the analysis of social roles it is useful to distinguish direct gender marking, in which sex forms part of the lexical meaning of a word, from socially conditioned gender meaning, in which a formally neutral word acquires male or female associations within a particular culture. For example, the pairs father–mother and ota–ona directly denote male and female family roles. By contrast, the English word leader and the Uzbek word rahbar do not themselves indicate sex, although the image of a leader in a particular historical period may carry specific gender associations. It is precisely this second phenomenon that is particularly significant for the present study.

Family and Kinship Roles

Gender categorization is most consistently represented in the system of kinship relations. English contains lexical oppositions such as father–mother, son–daughter, brother–sister, husband–wife, and uncle–aunt. The Uzbek system likewise directly marks the sex of a relative: ota–ona, o'g'il–qiz, er–xotin, aka–opa, uka–singil, kelin–kuyov.

However, there is an important difference between the two languages. The English word brother refers to a male sibling regardless of whether he is older or younger than the speaker. In Uzbek, this information is encoded directly in the lexical meaning: aka denotes an older brother, whereas uka denotes a younger brother.

A similar distinction exists between opa and singil, both of which correspond to the English word sister. Thus, Uzbek kinship terms convey not only gender but also relative age and family hierarchy. Normurodov relates this feature to the important role of age, respect, and an individual's position within the system of kinship relations [3].

As a result, a single Uzbek kinship term may simultaneously indicate several parameters: whether the referent is male or female, older or younger than the speaker, and what position the person occupies within the kinship system. Units such as kelin and kuyov are particularly significant because they denote specific family positions whose semantic content is not limited to formal kinship. In traditional culture, these roles are associated with particular expectations regarding a person's behavior in a new family, relations with relatives, and the performance of family responsibilities. A kinship term can therefore perform two functions simultaneously: it identifies a person and indicates the social role associated with that designation.

Kinship Terms as Forms of Social Address

Another important feature of Uzbek is the use of kinship terms beyond actual family relations. The words aka, opa, amaki, and xola are widely used when addressing people who are not related to the speaker. In such usage, opa does not simply mean "older sister"; it may function as a respectful form of address to a woman of a certain age. Aka performs a comparable function in relation to a man.

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Gender characteristics are therefore combined here with age, respect, and social distance. Normurodov notes that Uzbek kinship terms function as culturally significant forms of address and thus extend beyond the boundaries of family vocabulary proper [3]. Such a systematic model is considerably less characteristic of English, where kinship words such as brother, sister, aunt, and uncle generally retain their literal meanings or occur only in particular stylistically marked contexts. Uzbek thus demonstrates an especially close relationship between gender categorization and the system of social relations.

Professional and Public Roles

Occupational vocabulary presents a different pattern. Historically, English contained a large number of occupational and official titles in which male or female sex was explicitly encoded, for example: chairman, businessman, policeman, fireman, stewardess, waitress, and actress. Such designations are associated with earlier patterns of social role distribution, in which a number of occupations were perceived as predominantly male or female.

Goroshko shows that vocabulary became one of the central domains of gender research because historically developed differences in the designation and evaluation of men and women are particularly visible at the lexical level [5]. Contemporary English displays a clear tendency toward the neutralization of such designations: chairman → chair/chairperson; policeman → police officer; fireman → firefighter; stewardess → flight attendant; businessman → businessperson. Normurodov associates this process with changing norms of public and professional communication [3].

Changes in occupational titles are not merely formal. They indicate that social roles are increasingly less likely to be associated with obligatory membership in a particular sex category. In Uzbek, many occupational titles are already gender-neutral: o‘qituvchi — teacher; shifokor — doctor; tarjimon — translator/interpreter; tadqiqotchi — researcher; rahbar — leader/manager; mutaxassis — specialist; yozuvchi — writer. The form of the word does not change depending on whether it refers to a man or a woman.

The professional sphere therefore reveals an important contrast. In many cases, English moves toward gender neutrality by replacing previously gender-marked vocabulary, whereas a number of Uzbek occupational titles permit reference to a professional without specifying sex from the outset. It is nevertheless necessary to distinguish linguistic form from social representation.

The word rahbar is formally gender-neutral. This fact alone, however, does not mean that the social image of a leader has been associated equally with men and women in every historical period. For this reason, the existence of a gender-neutral word cannot automatically be regarded as evidence of the complete absence of a gender stereotype.

Gender Evaluation and Social Stereotype

The evaluative dimension of language constitutes an important component of gender categorization. Goroshko shows that one area of gender linguistics has focused on asymmetries in the designation of men and women, particularly in vocabulary and phraseology [5]. A characteristic example is provided by the English words bachelor and spinster. Historically, both refer to an unmarried person, yet their evaluative histories differ: spinster developed a markedly more negative connotation.

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A similar asymmetry is found in the pair master–mistress. Master retains meanings associated with a high degree of proficiency, authority, or control, whereas one established meaning of mistress refers to an extramarital relationship. These examples are significant not because they supposedly describe contemporary men or women, but because they demonstrate the capacity of language to preserve traces of differing social evaluations of comparable male and female positions.

In this respect, Goroshko's conclusion regarding the relationship between language and the social environment is especially important. Linguistic signs are formed and used within particular social relations, while social processes may alter patterns of language use [5]. Gender semantics should therefore not be regarded as immutable. A word may acquire or lose evaluative connotations as society's attitude toward the corresponding social role changes.

Proverbs as Reflections of Traditional Social Roles

Proverbs occupy a special place in the material analyzed in this study. Their significance lies in the fact that they preserve cultural experience for considerably longer periods than many other forms of speech. A proverb used in contemporary language may therefore reflect a social model that emerged long before present-day social relations.

S. Karimov considers Uzbek proverbs to be part of the national artistic and cultural tradition [1]. Within the present study, paremiological material is therefore relevant to the reconstruction of traditional representations of family, knowledge, responsibility, and an individual's position in society. Its value lies not in treating proverbial statements as direct descriptions of contemporary behavior, but in identifying the cultural models preserved in conventional language. This perspective provides a basis for comparing the gendered social meanings represented in English and Uzbek proverbs.

D. Kodiralieva analyzes English and Uzbek proverbs concerning knowledge and ignorance from the perspective of gender representation. She notes that in the Uzbek material under consideration, the male image is more frequently associated with social authority and public responsibility, whereas female wisdom is more often connected with the home and family relations. The English material is characterized by greater formal neutrality, although implicit gender evaluations also persist [2].

These observations make it possible to identify a traditional tendency: the male role is more often associated with the public sphere, whereas the female role is linked to the family sphere. This conclusion, however, requires caution. First, a proverb does not reflect society in its entirety, but rather a particular cultural and historical experience. Second, the presence of such a model in language does not mean that it fully corresponds to the contemporary distribution of social functions.

Third, as follows from Goroshko's methodological observations, linguistic behavior and social evaluation are influenced not only by gender, but also by status, age, communicative situation, and other factors [5]. Proverbs should therefore be used not to prove "what men and women are like," but to identify how their social roles were conceptualized within the traditional linguistic worldview. This distinction is essential for maintaining the scientific objectivity of the study.

Gender, Social Role, and Context

A joint consideration of the six sources allows one further important point to be clarified. Gender categorization operates not only through words in which sex is explicitly indicated. Three principal ways of expressing a gendered social role may be distinguished in the material analyzed.

Mode of expression	English	Uzbek

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Direct indication of sex	father, mother, husband, wife, he, she	ota, ona, er, xotin, aka, opa
Gender-neutral form with sex inferred from context	teacher, doctor, researcher, they	o‘qituvchi, shifokor, tadqiqotchi, rahbar, u
Culturally conditioned social association	historical perceptions of occupations and public authority	family roles, age hierarchy, forms of address, traditional models

This classification explains why grammatical neutrality does not necessarily imply the complete absence of gender categorization. For example, the English word doctor and the Uzbek word shifokor do not contain an explicit indication of sex. In a particular context, however, a speaker may add female doctor or ayol shifokor (“female doctor”).

Such specification is meaningful precisely because an otherwise neutral professional role receives an additional gender characteristic. Accordingly, analysis should ask not only “Which word is used?” but also “Why does it become necessary in this situation to specify the person’s sex?” At this point, lexical analysis moves into the domain of social and discourse analysis.

Contemporary Changes

The language system is not static. Changes in social roles gradually influence the ways in which those roles are designated. In English, this process is especially visible in occupational vocabulary and forms of reference. Normurodov notes the increasing use of gender-neutral occupational titles and singular they in situations where a person’s gender is unknown or irrelevant [3].

An earlier stage in the transformation of linguistic norms is described in detail by Goroshko. She shows that gender-oriented language reform concerned, to a considerable extent, vocabulary, occupational titles, and ways of referring to individuals in official communication [5]. Thus, the neutralization of English occupational designations observed today has a long developmental history.

The situation in Uzbek is different. Because a substantial proportion of occupational vocabulary is already not marked for sex, the principal changes occur not so much in word form as in usage. For example, tadqiqotchi denotes both a male and a female researcher. Additional indication of sex is therefore justified only when it is genuinely relevant to the content of the message.

In this respect, G. I. Ergasheva’s work is particularly useful because language comparison should take into account not only similarities between concepts, but also differences in the structural means by which they are expressed [6]. The same social process may therefore produce different linguistic changes in the two languages. This difference follows from the fact that English and Uzbek possess different structural resources for expressing comparable social meanings.

Conclusion

The analysis confirms that gender categorization of social roles in English and Uzbek cannot be reduced to grammatical gender or to the direct lexical indication of sex. In both languages, gender meanings may be encoded explicitly, inferred from context, or activated through culturally established associations with particular social roles. English displays more visible gender marking in personal reference and in several historically established lexical oppositions, while its professional vocabulary shows a continuing movement toward gender-neutral designation. Uzbek, by contrast, is more

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grammatically neutral in personal and occupational reference, but its kinship system provides a more detailed representation of gender together with relative age and family hierarchy.

The comparison also shows that formally neutral vocabulary should not automatically be interpreted as socially neutral. A designation such as leader or rahbar may contain no grammatical indication of sex while still acquiring gendered associations in a particular cultural or historical context. The same principle applies to evaluative vocabulary and proverbs, where linguistic forms may preserve earlier patterns of social evaluation after the corresponding social practices have changed. Gender analysis therefore requires attention to the interaction of lexical meaning, communicative context, social status, and culturally established expectations.

The principal difference between English and Uzbek lies not in the presence or absence of gender categorization, but in the linguistic domains in which it is most systematically expressed. English foregrounds gender in personal reference and reflects historical change through the neutralization of occupational terminology, whereas Uzbek foregrounds it in kinship relations, age distinctions, and respectful forms of address. These findings demonstrate that typologically different languages may represent comparable social categories through different combinations of lexical, contextual, and sociocultural resources. Further analysis of contemporary media, social networks, and colloquial usage may clarify how these traditional patterns interact with emerging forms of gender representation in both languages.

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