

**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISTIC EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO
DEATH IN JAPANESE AND UZBEK LANGUAGES**

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Annotation: This article examines euphemistic expressions related to death in the Japanese and Uzbek languages from a comparative linguistic perspective. In many cultures, direct references to death are often avoided, and speakers prefer to use softer or indirect expressions. Such expressions are known as euphemisms and play an important role in reducing emotional tension and expressing politeness. The study analyzes the linguistic and cultural features of euphemistic expressions used to describe death in Japanese and Uzbek. Particular attention is given to metaphorical meanings and the cultural values reflected in these expressions. The research identifies similarities and differences between the two languages and demonstrates how cultural traditions and social norms influence the formation and use of euphemistic expressions.

Key words: euphemism, death expressions, Japanese language, Uzbek language, comparative linguistics, metaphorical expressions, linguistic culture, semantic analysis

Introduction

Language is not only a system of communication but also a reflection of cultural values, social norms, and collective worldview. Every society develops specific linguistic strategies to express sensitive or socially delicate concepts. Among such concepts, death occupies a central and emotionally significant position in human experience. Because of its psychological, religious, and cultural weight, direct references to death are often avoided in many languages. Instead, speakers prefer indirect, softened, or metaphorical expressions. These expressions are known as euphemisms.

Euphemism is a linguistic phenomenon that has been studied in semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and linguoculturology. From a semantic perspective, euphemisms function as substitutes for direct lexical items, often reducing emotional intensity. From a pragmatic point of view, they serve as politeness strategies that help maintain social harmony and interpersonal sensitivity. In cultural linguistics, euphemistic expressions are regarded as indicators of a society's beliefs, taboos, and value systems. Therefore, the study of euphemisms related to death provides valuable insight into how different cultures conceptualize life, mortality, and the afterlife. [Euphemism is a linguistic phenomenon that has been studied in semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and linguoculturology] [Wardhaugh, 2006]

In Japanese linguistic culture, communication is strongly influenced by politeness norms, indirectness, and the principle of social harmony. As a result, direct expressions such as “死ぬ” (to die) are often replaced with softer alternatives like “亡くなる,” “永眠する,” or “この世を去る.” These expressions not only reduce emotional harshness but also reflect hierarchical relationships and respect toward the deceased. Japanese euphemistic expressions frequently incorporate metaphorical imagery, such as sleep or departure, which indicates a particular cultural perception of death as transition rather than termination.

Similarly, the Uzbek language demonstrates a rich system of euphemistic expressions related to death. In Uzbek linguistic culture, direct mention of death is often considered emotionally heavy or socially inappropriate, especially in formal or respectful contexts. Expressions such as “olamdan o'tmoq,” “hayotdan ko'z yumdi,” or “bu dunyoni tark etdi” illustrate metaphorical and religious influences in the conceptualization of death. Many of these expressions are closely connected with Islamic beliefs and traditional moral values, where death is understood as a passage from the temporary world to the eternal one.

Although both Japanese and Uzbek languages actively employ euphemisms to refer to death, the underlying cultural motivations and linguistic structures differ. Japanese euphemisms are closely linked with politeness systems and aesthetic sensitivity, whereas Uzbek expressions are more strongly influenced by religious worldview and communal traditions. A comparative analysis of these two linguistic systems makes it possible to identify both universal tendencies and culture-specific features in the representation of death.

The object of this study is euphemistic expressions related to death in Japanese and Uzbek languages. The subject of the research is the semantic, metaphorical, and cultural characteristics of these expressions. The study employs comparative and descriptive methods of linguistic analysis in order to identify similarities and differences between the two languages. The novelty of this research lies in its cross-cultural approach, which integrates semantic and linguocultural perspectives in analyzing death-related euphemisms.

Thus, the investigation of euphemistic expressions concerning death contributes not only to comparative linguistics but also to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and human perception. Through this analysis, the article aims to demonstrate how linguistic forms embody cultural meanings and how societies transform a universal human experience into culturally specific verbal expressions.

Main Part

Euphemism is a widely recognized linguistic phenomenon that reflects the interaction between language, culture, and social norms.[Allan&Burrige,2006] In general, a euphemism can be defined as a mild or indirect expression used instead of a direct word that may sound harsh, unpleasant, or socially inappropriate. Linguists emphasize that euphemisms often appear in areas connected with social taboos such as disease, bodily functions, sexuality, and death. Among these topics, death occupies a particularly sensitive position because it is closely connected with human emotions, cultural beliefs, and religious views.

Because of this sensitivity, many languages avoid direct expressions referring to death. [Lakoff &Johnson,1980]Instead of using the straightforward word “to die,” speakers often prefer indirect or metaphorical expressions. These expressions help reduce emotional tension and make communication more polite and socially acceptable. In linguistic studies, such expressions are often explained through conceptual metaphors. According to cognitive linguists such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, people tend to understand abstract or emotionally difficult concepts through metaphorical thinking. In the case of death, common conceptual metaphors include death as sleep, death as a journey, and death as departure from the world.

These conceptual metaphors can be observed in many languages, including Japanese and Uzbek. Although the two languages belong to different language families and cultural traditions, both demonstrate a rich system of euphemistic expressions related to death.

In Japanese linguistic culture, direct reference to death through the verb “死ぬ” (shinu) may sound too harsh in many contexts. Therefore, speakers frequently replace it with softer expressions. One of the most common euphemistic verbs is “亡くなる” (nakunaru). Literally, this expression means “to disappear” or “to be gone.” However, in everyday Japanese communication it functions as a polite and respectful way of saying that someone has died. For example, in news reports or formal announcements, it is common to hear sentences such as:

“有名な作家が昨日亡くなりました。”

(A famous writer passed away yesterday.)

Another widely used expression is “永眠する” (eimin suru), which literally means “to sleep eternally.” [Lakoff&Johnson,1980] This expression reflects the metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP, which is very common in many cultures. By describing death as eternal sleep, the language softens the emotional impact of the event and creates a sense of peaceful rest rather than sudden termination. This expression is often used in formal contexts, obituaries, and memorial texts.

Japanese also frequently uses expressions that conceptualize death as leaving or departing from the world. For instance, the phrase “この世を去る” (kono yo o saru) literally means “to leave this world.” This metaphor represents life as a temporary stay in the world and death as a departure from it. A similar expression is “旅立つ” (tabidatsu), which means “to depart on a journey.” In this case, death is metaphorically represented as the beginning of a journey to another realm. Such metaphors are strongly connected with Buddhist views of life and the cycle of existence.

Another interesting Japanese expression is “帰らぬ人となる” (kaeranu hito to naru), which literally means “to become a person who will not return.” This phrase poetically suggests that the deceased has gone somewhere from which they cannot come back. It is frequently used in literary language and memorial speech. These examples show that Japanese euphemistic expressions often rely on metaphorical imagery such as sleep, departure, or disappearance.

Similarly, the Uzbek language also demonstrates a rich variety of euphemistic expressions related to death. [Rahmatullayev,2013] In Uzbek communication, directly saying “o‘ldi” (died) may sound too blunt or emotionally heavy, especially when referring to respected individuals or close relatives. Therefore, speakers commonly use softer expressions that convey respect and sympathy.

One of the most common Uzbek euphemistic expressions is “olamdan o'tmoq.” Literally translated, it means “to pass from the world.” This phrase represents death as a transition from the earthly world to another realm. For example, in formal speech or news reports, it is common to say:

“Buyuk adib kecha olamdan o'tdi.”

Another frequently used expression is “hayotdan ko'z yumdi.” This phrase literally means “closed one's eyes to life.” The metaphor here presents death as a peaceful act of closing one's eyes, suggesting calmness and acceptance. Because of its emotional softness, this expression is widely used in literature, journalism, and everyday speech.

Uzbek also uses the expression “bu dunyoni tark etdi,” which means “left this world.” This metaphor is very similar to the Japanese phrase “この世を去る.” Both languages conceptualize

life as a temporary presence in the world and death as leaving that place. Another Uzbek expression is “jon berdi,” which literally means “gave his soul.” This phrase reflects religious beliefs that life is connected with the soul and that death involves the departure of the soul from the body.

Despite cultural and linguistic differences, Japanese and Uzbek euphemistic expressions related to death share several important similarities. In both languages, metaphor plays a central role in shaping these expressions. Death is often conceptualized through metaphors such as sleep, departure, or transition to another place. These metaphors help soften the emotional intensity associated with death and allow speakers to discuss the topic in a respectful manner.

However, there are also notable differences between the two linguistic systems. In Japanese, euphemistic expressions are closely related to the system of politeness and hierarchical social relationships. The choice of expression may depend on the context, the social status of the deceased, and the level of formality. In contrast, Uzbek euphemistic expressions are more strongly influenced by religious beliefs and traditional cultural values. Islamic views about life, death, and the afterlife have significantly shaped the way death is described in Uzbek language.

Thus, the analysis of euphemistic expressions in Japanese and Uzbek languages demonstrates how linguistic forms reflect deeper cultural perceptions of death. Through metaphorical and indirect language, both societies transform a universal human experience into culturally meaningful expressions.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of euphemistic expressions related to death in Japanese and Uzbek languages reveals several important linguistic and cultural patterns. Although both languages aim to soften the emotional impact of death, the linguistic structure and cultural motivation behind these expressions demonstrate both universal and culture-specific characteristics.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that in both Japanese and Uzbek languages death is frequently conceptualized through metaphorical models. Cognitive linguists argue that metaphor is not only a stylistic device but also a fundamental mechanism of human thinking. According to Lakoff and Johnson, abstract and emotionally difficult concepts are often understood through metaphorical structures that connect them with more familiar experiences. In the case of death, languages commonly employ conceptual metaphors such as death as sleep, death as departure, death as a journey, and death as transition to another world.

The metaphor DEATH IS SLEEP can be clearly observed in both Japanese and Uzbek euphemistic expressions. In Japanese, one of the most common examples is the expression 「永眠する」 (eimin suru), which literally means “to sleep eternally.” This expression presents death as a peaceful and eternal sleep rather than a sudden or painful end. Because of this semantic nuance, the phrase is frequently used in formal contexts such as obituaries, memorial speeches, and funeral announcements. By using the metaphor of sleep, the language reduces the emotional harshness associated with death and emphasizes calmness and rest.

A very similar conceptualization can be found in Uzbek language. The expression “hayotdan ko'z yumdi” literally means “closed one's eyes to life.” In this metaphor, death is represented as the act of closing one's eyes, which symbolically resembles falling asleep. This metaphor also conveys a sense of peaceful transition rather than abrupt termination. In many

Uzbek literary texts and journalistic reports, this expression is used to show respect toward the deceased and to avoid direct or emotionally heavy wording.

Another important metaphor identified in both languages is DEATH IS DEPARTURE. In Japanese, this metaphor appears in expressions such as 「この世を去る」 (kono yo o saru), which literally means “to leave this world.” The expression conceptualizes life as temporary presence in the world and death as a departure from that place. This metaphor reflects philosophical and religious perspectives that view human existence as a temporary stage. A related Japanese expression is 「旅立つ」 (tabidatsu), which means “to depart on a journey.” Here death is metaphorically represented as the beginning of a journey to another realm. This metaphor is closely connected with Buddhist ideas about the cycle of life and the continuation of existence in another form.

The same conceptual metaphor can also be observed in Uzbek euphemistic expressions. For example, the phrase “olamdan o'tmoq” literally means “to pass from the world.” This expression presents death as movement from the current world to another place. Another similar phrase is “bu dunyoni tark etdi,” which means “left this world.” These expressions illustrate how Uzbek linguistic culture also conceptualizes death as departure rather than annihilation. Such metaphors reflect cultural and religious beliefs about the temporary nature of earthly life.

In addition to metaphors of sleep and departure, both languages also demonstrate expressions that conceptualize death as a form of spiritual transition. In Uzbek language, the expression “jon berdi” literally means “gave his soul.” This phrase reflects the belief that human life is closely connected with the soul, and death represents the departure of the soul from the body. This concept is strongly influenced by Islamic worldview, where life is considered a divine gift and death is understood as the return of the soul to its Creator. Japanese language also contains expressions that reflect spiritual or transcendental perspectives on death. For example, the expression 「天国へ行く」 (tengoku e iku) means “to go to heaven.” Although this phrase is influenced by Western religious concepts, it is sometimes used in everyday Japanese speech. Another expression, 「帰らぬ人となる」 (kaeranu hito to naru), literally means “to become a person who will not return.” This phrase carries a poetic nuance and suggests that the deceased has departed to a place from which return is impossible.

Despite these similarities, the analysis also reveals important differences between Japanese and Uzbek euphemistic expressions. In Japanese linguistic culture, euphemisms are strongly connected with the system of politeness and social hierarchy. The choice of expression often depends on the context, the relationship between speakers, and the level of formality. For instance, expressions like 「亡くなる」 (nakunaru) are commonly used in neutral or polite contexts, while more literary expressions such as 「帰らぬ人となる」 may appear in written narratives or ceremonial speech. This indicates that euphemistic expressions in Japanese serve not only as semantic softeners but also as markers of social respect and politeness.

In contrast, Uzbek euphemistic expressions related to death are more strongly influenced by religious beliefs and cultural traditions rather than grammatical politeness systems. Many Uzbek expressions emphasize the spiritual dimension of death and the belief in the afterlife. Expressions such as “jon berdi,” “olamdan o'tdi,” and “rahmatli bo'ldi” reflect the cultural perception that death is not merely a biological event but also a spiritual transition.

The analysis therefore demonstrates that euphemistic expressions related to death serve multiple linguistic and cultural functions. They reduce emotional tension, maintain social

politeness, express respect toward the deceased, and reflect deeper cultural beliefs about life and mortality. At the same time, the similarities between Japanese and Uzbek expressions reveal universal cognitive strategies used by humans to conceptualize difficult experiences such as death.

Thus, the comparative study of euphemistic expressions not only highlights linguistic patterns but also provides insight into the cultural and philosophical perspectives embedded within language.

Conclusion

The present study analyzed euphemistic expressions related to death in Japanese and Uzbek languages from a comparative linguistic and cultural perspective. The results of the analysis demonstrate that euphemisms play a significant role in human communication, especially when speakers refer to sensitive topics such as death. Both languages tend to avoid direct lexical expressions and instead employ indirect or metaphorical forms that reduce emotional intensity and maintain social politeness.

The research has shown that Japanese and Uzbek languages possess a wide range of euphemistic expressions describing death. These expressions are often constructed through similar conceptual metaphors such as death as sleep, death as departure, and death as transition to another world. For instance, Japanese expressions like “永眠する” and “この世を去る” metaphorically represent death as eternal sleep or leaving the world, while Uzbek expressions such as “hayotdan ko'z yumdi” and “olamdan o'tmoq” convey comparable meanings. Such similarities suggest that certain metaphorical patterns used to conceptualize death may reflect universal cognitive mechanisms shared across different cultures.

At the same time, the analysis revealed important cultural differences in the formation and usage of euphemistic expressions. In Japanese linguistic culture, euphemisms are closely connected with the system of politeness and hierarchical social relations. The choice of expression often depends on the communicative context and the level of respect toward the deceased. In contrast, Uzbek euphemistic expressions are more strongly influenced by religious beliefs and traditional cultural values. Many expressions reflect Islamic perspectives on the soul, life, and the afterlife, which shape the linguistic representation of death.

The findings of this study also highlight that euphemistic expressions perform multiple communicative functions. They help speakers avoid emotional discomfort, demonstrate respect toward the deceased, and preserve social harmony in communication. At the same time, these expressions serve as linguistic indicators of cultural attitudes toward death and human existence.

From a broader academic perspective, the results of this research contribute to several fields of linguistic study. The analysis provides valuable insights for comparative linguistics, linguoculturology, and cognitive linguistics, as it demonstrates how metaphorical language structures reflect cultural perceptions and conceptual frameworks. In addition, the findings may be useful for intercultural communication studies, since understanding culturally specific expressions related to sensitive topics can facilitate more effective cross-cultural interaction.

Therefore, the study of euphemistic expressions related to death not only enriches comparative linguistic research but also reveals how language encodes cultural attitudes toward one of the most universal and profound human experiences.



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