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GENDER AS A FACTOR IN PHRASEOLOGICAL LACUNARITY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. This article examines the manifestations of gender as a factor contributing to phraseological lacunae in English and Uzbek, with particular attention to the interaction between cultural stereotypes, semantic asymmetry, evaluative meaning, and pragmatic function. Phraseological lacunae are understood as gaps in conventional phraseological correspondence in which an expression in one language lacks an established equivalent in another language that preserves its relevant semantic, cultural, stylistic, and communicative properties. Gender is considered as a sociocultural dimension of linguistic meaning through which expressions may represent, evaluate, or reinforce expectations concerning femininity, masculinity, family relationships, professional roles, emotional behaviour, and social status. The study employs a comparative-descriptive approach, combining semantic analysis, linguocultural interpretation, and the examination of illustrative English and Uzbek gender-marked expressions. Particular attention is paid to gender asymmetry, unequal evaluative associations, lexical and phraseological markedness, the conventionalization of social roles, and differences in the representation of unmarried people, occupational identities, and domestic responsibilities. The analysis proposes four manifestations of gender-related phraseological lacunarity: structural-semantic asymmetry, cultural-evaluative non-equivalence, pragmatic and stylistic divergence, and unequal conventionalization of gender-marked expressions. The article argues that gender-related lacunae should not be interpreted as evidence that one language lacks a concept or that all members of a linguistic community share the same gender stereotypes. Rather, they reflect differences in the ways particular linguistic communities conventionalize and evaluate socially gendered experiences. The proposed framework contributes to contrastive phraseology, gender linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication, while highlighting the need for empirical validation through comparable English and Uzbek phraseological datasets.

Keywords: gender linguistics, phraseological lacunae, gender-marked phraseology, English, Uzbek, gender stereotypes, semantic asymmetry, cultural connotation, pragmatic equivalence, contrastive linguistics.

Introduction

Phraseological units are an important source of information about the relationship between language, culture, and socially shared knowledge because their conventional meanings frequently encode evaluations that extend beyond the literal interpretations of their constituent words. Idioms, fixed expressions, proverbs, formulaic collocations, and socially conventionalized labels can communicate attitudes toward individual behaviour, family relationships, professional identity, emotional expression, and social status. Gender is particularly relevant to this process because linguistic expressions may reproduce culturally established expectations concerning the behaviour considered appropriate for women and men, the division of domestic and professional responsibilities, the valuation of appearance and personality, and the distribution of social authority. These representations are not simply grammatical properties of language: they develop through cultural practices, historical conventions, repeated usage, and communicative interaction. When English and Uzbek phraseological systems are compared, gender-related differences may

emerge in the availability of conventional expressions, the degree to which an expression explicitly identifies a person's gender, and the positive or negative associations attached to comparable social roles. Such differences provide a productive basis for investigating how gender contributes to phraseological lacunarity.

The concept of a phraseological lacuna must be distinguished from the more general presence of gender stereotypes in language. A gender-marked expression does not automatically constitute a lacuna, and a phraseological lacuna does not necessarily involve gender. The relevant phenomenon occurs when an expression in one language has no established phraseological equivalent in the other language that adequately preserves the meaning, cultural associations, evaluative colouring, stylistic register, and pragmatic function important in a particular context. Gender may contribute to this non-equivalence when one language conventionalizes a gender-specific description while the other employs a more general expression, when corresponding expressions carry different evaluative associations, or when a target-language equivalent fails to reproduce the social implications of the source expression. For example, English *old maid* and the Uzbek expression *qari qiz* can both refer to an unmarried woman, but their conventional use, perceived offensiveness, age implications, and evaluative force must be examined independently rather than assumed to be identical. Similarly, *bachelor* and *spinster* are not symmetrical in their historical and contemporary connotations, demonstrating that expressions referring to comparable relationship statuses may encode different social evaluations even within one language. These examples illustrate possible sites of gender-related semantic asymmetry; they do not establish an absolute lack of Uzbek equivalents without further contextual investigation.

Recent comparative research on English and Uzbek phraseology has explored the cultural representation of masculinity and femininity, the relationship between gender stereotypes and conventional expressions, and differences in the ways male and female referents are described. Umrzokova and Uralova (2022, pp. 55–58) examine national-cultural characteristics of gender stereotypes in English and Uzbek phraseological units, while Komilova (2021, pp. 112–117) investigates the linguocultural representation of gender through phraseological material in the two languages. More recent work has considered the role of gender in expressions describing intellectual abilities and social roles (Tursunova, 2025, pp. 15–21; Turdieva & Raximbekova, 2025, pp. 198–202). These studies are relevant to the present research because they demonstrate that gender-related phraseological meaning must be understood in relation to cultural expectations and evaluative conventions. However, the identification of gender stereotypes and the identification of phraseological lacunae are distinct analytical tasks: a stereotype may exist in both languages even when its expression differs, while a lacuna requires specific evidence of incomplete conventional correspondence.

International studies provide further methodological support for examining gender through actual idiom use rather than through isolated examples alone. Rabinovich et al. (2020, pp. 5181–5192) investigate gender-related differences in idiomatic language use using a large corpus of spontaneous language production. Their research identifies associations between idiomatic choices, lexical and semantic preferences, emotional expression, and contextual patterns. Getman and Stanchulyak (2021, pp. 200–204) examine gender asymmetry in English phraseology, discussing differences in the representation of male and female referents in idiomatic expressions. Goodhew et al. (2022, pp. 219–231) investigate gender stereotypes embedded in language use and demonstrate the relevance of socially learned associations in linguistic communication. These studies provide a foundation for considering gender-related phraseological patterns as products of social convention and language use rather than as direct reflections of inherent characteristics of women or men. Their findings also suggest that gendered associations may influence the interpretation of an expression even when grammatical form alone does not explicitly identify a gendered referent.

The principal aim of this article is to develop a framework for explaining how gender contributes to the emergence and interpretation of phraseological lacunae in English and Uzbek. The study addresses four research objectives: identifying the principal semantic and pragmatic dimensions of gender-related phraseological non-equivalence; examining how stereotypes and culturally conventionalized social roles influence the meanings of fixed expressions; distinguishing gender-specific phraseological gaps from ordinary differences in imagery or vocabulary; and formulating criteria for comparing possible equivalents in the two languages. The central proposition is that gender-related phraseological lacunarity results from the interaction of linguistic conventionalization, cultural expectations, evaluative asymmetry, and communicative function. The study therefore treats gender as a factor in phraseological meaning and cross-linguistic correspondence without assuming that all speakers share the same beliefs or that traditional representations remain unchanged in contemporary communication.

Methods

The study adopts a comparative-descriptive methodology combining semantic analysis, linguocultural interpretation, and pragmatic examination of illustrative English and Uzbek expressions associated with gender, family relations, social roles, personal qualities, and occupational identity. The principal units of analysis are established phraseological expressions and formulaic constructions whose meanings include a socially recognizable evaluation of a person or role. Because gender representations appear not only in idioms but also in proverbs, recurrent collocations, and conventional labels, these related forms are considered when they provide evidence relevant to gender-related phraseological correspondence. Nevertheless, the analysis distinguishes classical idioms from broader formulaic expressions, since not every gender-marked word combination qualifies as a phraseological unit under a narrow definition. A candidate expression should demonstrate sufficient conventionalization, semantic association, recurrence, or figurative meaning to justify inclusion in the relevant phraseological category.

The comparison is conducted through four analytical stages. First, the central meaning of each expression is established, including the social role, personal characteristic, relationship status, or behaviour being described. Second, the expression is examined for gender marking, determining whether gender is explicitly encoded through lexical elements such as *woman*, *man*, *girl*, or *boy*, or indirectly conveyed through a conventional social association. Third, the evaluative and pragmatic properties are investigated, including approval, disapproval, humour, irony, stigma, admiration, or an assumption about the appropriateness of a particular role. Fourth, possible equivalents in the other language are evaluated to establish whether they preserve the meaning and the relevant social implications. The analysis distinguishes formal equivalence, semantic equivalence, cultural equivalence, and pragmatic equivalence because two expressions may refer to the same social situation while differing in the cultural evaluations or interpersonal implications they communicate.

For the purpose of classification, four forms of gender-related phraseological lacunarity are proposed. **Structural-semantic lacunarity** occurs when one language has a conventional gender-marked expression for which the other language does not offer an established counterpart with a sufficiently similar meaning and phraseological status. **Cultural-evaluative lacunarity** concerns cases in which a possible counterpart refers to a comparable person or role but carries different cultural associations or evaluative colouring. **Pragmatic-stylistic lacunarity** arises when expressions differ in offensiveness, familiarity, irony, social appropriateness, or emotional force. **Conventionalization asymmetry** refers to situations in which one language has a well-established gender-marked phraseological expression but the other language tends to communicate the same role through a general expression, a descriptive construction, or a different conventional pattern. These categories are analytical proposals rather than mutually exclusive types: one expression may exhibit more than one form of non-equivalence.

The study is qualitative and illustrative; it does not claim to report findings from a newly compiled parallel corpus of English and Uzbek phraseology. Consequently, the examples are used to demonstrate analytical distinctions, not to prove that a particular expression lacks an equivalent throughout the entire target language. A fully empirical investigation would require systematically collected entries from contemporary dictionaries, phraseological collections, corpora, and authentic spoken or written discourse, together with contextual evidence showing how gender-marked expressions are used. Candidate lacunae would need to be evaluated by proficient speakers of both languages to determine the degree of semantic correspondence, conventionality, offensiveness, and pragmatic appropriateness. The research should also distinguish historical expressions from contemporary usage and document variation across social groups and contexts. These procedures are necessary because the absence of an item from a general dictionary is not sufficient evidence of its absence from a linguistic community, and because gender-related meanings may change through social transformation and shifts in communicative practice.

Results

The comparative framework suggests that one important manifestation of gender-related phraseological lacunarity occurs when comparable social roles are conventionalized through expressions with different degrees of gender marking. In English, expressions such as *career woman* explicitly identify gender in a social and occupational category, whereas *career man* is possible but does not necessarily have the same degree of conventionalization or communicative function. This asymmetry is analytically significant because the unmarked expression *career person* or the noun *professional* can describe a person's occupation without making gender central to the meaning. In Uzbek, a phrase such as *ishbilarmon ayol* explicitly identifies a woman as a business-oriented or professionally active person, while expressions describing a professionally active man may often be formed without an equally salient gender-specific component. The example suggests a possible difference in conventionalization and social markedness, but the existence and relative frequency of actual equivalents must be determined through contextual and corpus evidence. The relevant question is not simply whether both languages can describe a woman or a man with a career, but whether the two languages conventionally mark the gender of that role in equivalent ways and whether this marking carries comparable social implications.

A related pattern can be examined in expressions referring to domestic roles and family responsibilities. English *housewife* and Uzbek *uy bekasi* are conventional expressions referring to a woman associated with household management or domestic responsibilities, although their range of meanings and contemporary connotations may vary by context. Their existence does not itself establish a lacuna, because the expressions show a substantial degree of functional correspondence. More revealing is the asymmetry between such conventional female-coded roles and expressions referring to men performing comparable domestic work. A phrase such as *stay-at-home father* explicitly marks the male referent in English because the role has often been conventionally associated with women; a possible Uzbek translation may likewise require an expression identifying the father as the person performing the domestic role. This illustrates how a phraseological or formulaic gap may be shaped by the unequal conventionalization of social roles rather than by an inability to describe the role itself. The expression may exist in both languages while differences in markedness and cultural assumptions influence the choice of words and the pragmatic effect.

A second manifestation involves differences in the evaluative meanings attached to expressions describing similar personal or social circumstances. English *bachelor* and *spinster* offer a well-known illustration of gender asymmetry in relationship-status labels. Although both can refer to unmarried adults, *bachelor* may carry neutral or even favourable associations in some contexts, whereas *spinster* has historically acquired more strongly negative, age-related, and socially stigmatizing associations. Their difference concerns not only lexical meaning but also the

cultural expectations historically imposed on women and men regarding marriage and family formation. In Uzbek, *bo'ydoq* and *qari qiz* may be used to refer to an unmarried man and an unmarried woman respectively, but the terms differ in age implications, structure, conventional usage, and potential evaluative force. These expressions should not be treated as exact equivalents without contextual analysis. Rather, they demonstrate the need to examine whether gendered labels for comparable relationship statuses carry equivalent connotations or reproduce different expectations concerning marriage, adulthood, and social acceptability.

This asymmetry illustrates why phraseological lacunarity cannot be identified solely through dictionary definitions. Even where the basic referent is similar, the target expression may differ in the social judgment that accompanies it. A translation of *spinster* as *qari qiz*, for example, may preserve a reference to an unmarried woman and an age-related implication, but the degree of stigma or offensiveness may differ according to context and speaker intention. Conversely, a more neutral descriptive expression may accurately communicate the relationship status while avoiding the negative historical implications of the original term. This difference creates a pragmatic and cultural problem for translation: preserving the source expression's historical connotation may reproduce a stereotype, while replacing it with a neutral term may change the tone of the original text. The appropriate choice depends on whether the purpose is to analyze the stereotype, reproduce a character's voice, communicate factual information, or avoid perpetuating an unnecessary negative evaluation. The existence of a descriptive translation does not eliminate the analytical importance of a gender-related phraseological gap, because the gap may lie specifically in the absence of a conventional expression with the same combination of meaning and connotation.

Gendered phraseology may also display asymmetries in the representation of appearance, intelligence, emotionality, strength, and social authority. A phraseological expression associated with women may evaluate physical attractiveness or conformity to social expectations, while an expression associated with men may emphasize authority, competence, independence, or professional activity. Such patterns should be analyzed as linguistic representations of historically and culturally situated expectations rather than as evidence of inherent gender characteristics. Getman and Stanchulyak (2021, pp. 200–204) discuss gender asymmetries in English phraseology and identify unequal patterns in the representation of masculine and feminine referents. Tursunova (2025, pp. 15–21) examines gender and cultural dimensions of phraseological units describing intellectual abilities in English and Uzbek. These studies provide relevant comparative perspectives, although their findings should not be generalized to every phraseological domain or every contemporary speaker. A robust analysis must establish which expressions occur, how they are used, and whether their evaluative meanings remain stable across different genres and social contexts.

Gender-related phraseological lacunae may also arise when corresponding expressions differ in their cultural associations and pragmatic functions. A gender-marked idiom can convey not only a description of a person but also praise, ridicule, social approval, criticism, or an implicit judgment about the appropriateness of their behaviour. For example, an expression depicting a woman as assertive may be used positively in one context but negatively in another if the surrounding discourse assumes that women should demonstrate modesty or deference. A comparable expression referring to a man may be interpreted differently because assertiveness has historically been associated with masculine authority in some social settings. If English and Uzbek expressions differ in these evaluative implications, a direct translation may communicate the descriptive content without reproducing the intended social judgment. In such cases, the source and target expressions may be semantically similar but pragmatically divergent. The identification of a lacuna therefore requires an analysis of how the expression functions in actual communication

and whether the target language provides a conventional form with an equivalent interpersonal effect.

The pragmatic dimension is particularly important when expressions are used ironically, affectionately, or critically. A gender-marked phrase may sound playful among close interlocutors but insulting in a formal or unfamiliar relationship. Similarly, a term that is considered traditional and acceptable in one generation may be perceived as outdated or discriminatory among younger speakers. This variability means that a phraseological unit cannot be assigned a single unchanging social value solely on the basis of its dictionary definition. The comparison should consider the speaker's relationship with the addressee, the genre, the intended audience, and the social context. Goodhew et al. (2022, pp. 219–231) demonstrate the continued relevance of gender stereotypes in language use, while Rabinovich et al. (2020, pp. 5181–5192) show that figurative language choices can be associated with differences in emotional and semantic patterns. These findings reinforce the need to investigate the social meanings of phraseological expressions through their use rather than assuming that gendered associations are inherent in the words themselves.

The proposed framework identifies four recurrent ways in which gender may contribute to phraseological lacunarity. First, an expression can have a gender-specific form in one language but correspond to a more general or less conventionalized construction in the other. Second, expressions referring to comparable roles may differ in the evaluative implications attached to women and men, as illustrated by the contrast between *bachelor* and *spinster*. Third, a target-language equivalent may preserve the referent while failing to reproduce the source expression's pragmatic force, including humour, disparagement, social intimacy, or historical connotation. Fourth, the two phraseological systems may differ in how conventionally particular gender roles are named and evaluated, producing asymmetry in the forms readily available to speakers. These manifestations may overlap and should be treated as dimensions of analysis rather than a rigid taxonomy in which every expression belongs to exactly one category.

The comparison also shows that gender-related lacunarity should be distinguished from gender asymmetry in general. An expression may reproduce a stereotypical view of women or men but have a close equivalent in the other language; in such a case, gender is relevant to the semantic analysis, but there may be no phraseological lacuna. Conversely, two languages may express the same concept through different idioms without reproducing the same gendered connotation, creating a cultural or pragmatic mismatch. The researcher must therefore identify the precise feature that is not preserved before describing a phraseological gap. This approach avoids the assumption that differences in imagery, structure, or lexical composition necessarily indicate a lack of equivalence, while also recognizing that a neutral paraphrase does not always reproduce the social meaning of a gender-marked idiom.

The following table summarizes the proposed analytical categories and the evidence required to identify them.

Type of manifestation	**Principal feature**	**Evidence required**
Structural-semantic	A gender-marked expression lacks a conventional phraseological counterpart with sufficiently similar meaning.	Dictionary and corpus comparison; authentic examples.
Cultural-evaluative	Comparable expressions carry different associations or judgments about women, men, or social roles.	Contextual semantic analysis and speaker judgments.
Pragmatic-stylistic	Expressions differ in offensiveness, humour, register, politeness, or communicative effect.	Discourse context, genre, and pragmatic interpretation.

Conventionalization asymmetry	One language conventionalizes a gender-specific expression while the other uses a broader or differently structured construction.	Frequency, distribution, phraseological stability, and usage evidence.

The table is a proposed research framework rather than a report of measured frequencies. Its purpose is to support systematic comparison and to ensure that claims about gender-related phraseological gaps are based on identifiable linguistic evidence.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that gender may contribute to phraseological lacunarity through the unequal conventionalization of social roles, the asymmetric evaluation of comparable situations, and the different pragmatic functions performed by gender-marked expressions. These patterns suggest that phraseological meaning is shaped not only by lexical composition but also by the cultural assumptions and evaluative conventions through which linguistic communities interpret social identity. However, the existence of gender-marked phraseology does not establish that all members of a community share the represented stereotypes, nor does it demonstrate that the expressions directly reflect objective differences between women and men. Phraseological units preserve historically accumulated social evaluations, which may be contested, modified, or rejected in contemporary communication. A gender-sensitive analysis must therefore distinguish between the stereotype encoded or presupposed by an expression and the beliefs held by the speaker who uses it.

For translation studies, the findings demonstrate the importance of separating denotative equivalence from cultural and pragmatic equivalence. A translator may find a target-language expression that refers to the same social role but does not convey the same degree of stigma, admiration, humour, or historical association. In such cases, translation involves a decision about whether to preserve the source expression's evaluative force, use a more neutral expression, or provide an explanatory formulation that identifies the cultural implications. The appropriate strategy depends on the purpose of the text. Literary translation may require the preservation of characterization and historical connotation, whereas academic writing may benefit from a neutral term accompanied by an explanation of the source expression's gendered implications. In bilingual lexicography, entries should identify not only the definition and possible translation but also the expression's gender marking, register, connotation, frequency, and contextual restrictions. Such descriptions would help learners distinguish an equivalent phraseological meaning from an expression that differs in social evaluation or pragmatic appropriateness.

The study also has implications for gender linguistics because phraseological comparison provides a means of examining how language can sustain or challenge established gender expectations. Expressions that repeatedly associate women with domesticity, appearance, emotionality, or dependence, or men with authority, public activity, and strength, may make such associations appear conventional and unmarked. Nevertheless, the interpretation of these patterns requires careful attention to the historical and sociolinguistic contexts in which expressions developed and remain in use. A phraseological unit may preserve a historically gendered image while contemporary speakers use it ironically or critically, thereby changing its pragmatic function. Similarly, an expression may become less common as social expectations change. Phraseological analysis should therefore investigate not only the structure and meaning of expressions but also their contemporary distribution and the attitudes speakers associate with them.

The principal limitation of the present article is its qualitative and illustrative design. The examples demonstrate how gender-related phraseological non-equivalence can be analyzed, but they do not constitute a representative corpus of English and Uzbek phraseology. Consequently, the article does not establish the frequency of the proposed lacuna types or claim that specific

expressions lack equivalents across all varieties of the two languages. Future empirical research should compile comparable phraseological datasets from contemporary dictionaries, corpora, media texts, and authentic spoken discourse; document the contexts in which gender-marked expressions occur; and distinguish gender explicitly encoded in the expression from gender inferred through social convention. Independent judgments from proficient speakers would help assess semantic correspondence, degree of offensiveness, positive or negative connotation, and pragmatic suitability. A longitudinal approach could further examine whether expressions change in frequency or evaluation as social expectations evolve. Such evidence would make it possible to test the proposed framework and establish more precise conclusions about the relationship between gender and phraseological lacunarity.

Conclusion. The manifestations of gender as a factor in phraseological lacunae in English and Uzbek involve structural-semantic asymmetry, culturally differentiated evaluation, pragmatic and stylistic divergence, and unequal conventionalization of gender-marked expressions. The comparative analysis demonstrates that expressions referring to similar social roles or experiences may differ in gender marking, connotation, and communicative force. The examples *career woman*, *housewife*, *bachelor*, *spinster*, *ishbilarmon ayol*, *uy bekasi*, *bo'ydoq*, and *qari qiz* illustrate potential areas of comparison, although their degree of phraseological status and equivalence must be established through contextual and corpus-based evidence.

The central conclusion is that gender-related phraseological lacunarity cannot be identified by comparing dictionary definitions alone. Researchers must examine the expression's semantic structure, cultural associations, evaluative meaning, register, and pragmatic function, while avoiding assumptions that traditional stereotypes represent all speakers or remain unchanged over time. The proposed framework may contribute to contrastive phraseology, gender linguistics, translation studies, bilingual lexicography, and intercultural communication. Its empirical development requires systematically collected English and Uzbek data and contextual validation of potential phraseological equivalents.

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