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Euphemisms of Love in Uzbek and English Literature: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: This article explores the semantic, cultural, and stylistic features of euphemisms of love in Uzbek and English literature, analyzing how writers from both traditions employ soft and indirect language to express affection, intimacy, and desire. Drawing on recent comparative studies, the research highlights that Uzbek euphemisms often arise from moral and ethical norms emphasizing modesty, while English euphemisms frequently reflect aesthetic delicacy, emotional sophistication, or social satire. Through literary examples and comparative linguistic analysis, this article demonstrates that euphemisms of love serve not only as linguistic shields against taboo themes but also as artistic devices that enrich emotional nuance and cultural expression. This research applies a qualitative comparative method. Selected literary texts from Uzbek and English traditions are analyzed to identify euphemistic expressions related to love. Since this research is based on literary analysis, the sample include selected literary texts rather than human participation. The sample consists of works by William Shakespeare and Alisher Navoi, chosen for their significant contribution to the literary representation of love and their rich use of figurative language. The texts were selected based on specific criteria, including the presence of love-related themes, the use of euphemistic and figurative expressions, and the portrayal of emotional relationships. The analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting euphemisms used to express affection, desire, and emotional intensity.

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1. Introduction

There are times when circumstances call for a gentler or pleasanter word or phrase rather than the most direct one. Such words and phrases are known as euphemisms, with the word *euphemism* coming, fittingly, from the Greek word *eúphēmos*, meaning “sounding good.” *Powder room*, for example, is one of many euphemisms in the English language for a lavatory, aka the place where one goes when one requires the use of a toilet and sink. (Actually, we are hard pressed to find a non-euphemistic word for such a room; like *powder room*, the terms *bathroom*, *restroom*, and *washroom* all tiptoe around the often-primary reason one has for visiting it.) Similarly *love handles* is a euphemism for fatty bulges along the sides of one's body at the waist, though as everyone who's ever snuggled up to a loved one endowed with such bulges knows, *love handles* is a much better descriptor for what makes a person extra snuggly [1].

Euphemisms can take different forms, but they all involve substituting a word or phrase considered to be less offensive than another. The substituted word might, for example, be viewed as a less coarse choice, as when *dang* or *darn* is used instead of *damn* or *damned*. Or it might replace a word viewed as insulting to a religious figure,

such as the various euphemisms for *God* (*gad*, *gadzooks*, *gosh*) or *Jesus* (*gee*, *jeeppers*, *jeez*). A euphemism may also consist of an indirect softening phrase that is substituted for the straightforward naming of something unpalatable. Thus, we hear of people being “let go” rather than “fired”; civilians killed in war described as “collateral damage”; or someone who has died having “kicked the bucket,” “passed away,” “given up the ghost,” or “joined one’s ancestors” [2].

Linguists and scholars have long defined euphemism as a strategic linguistic tool—an alternative to “dispreferred” expressions used to navigate social discomfort. At its core, the euphemism serves as a softened substitute for harsher, taboo, or unpleasant realities. Whether employed to protect one’s “face” in a social exchange, to mitigate the negative associations of sensitive subjects, or to replace blunt terminology with “socially comfortable” language, these expressions are intentionally chosen to satisfy specific communicative intentions [3]. While some view this practice as a necessary facet of polite discourse, others, such as Brain, suggest that it functions as a form of overcompensation—a psychological mechanism reflecting a collective reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths directly. According to Longman, in writing, euphemism is “a useful literary device for writers. This figure of speech allows a writer to address potentially sensitive, offensive, or unpleasant subjects in a more delicate or less damaging manner than literal words or phrasings would be.” In addition, euphemisms can add to the poetic nature of writing as a means of describing something in a more figurative manner. They can also elevate a writer’s prose. Writers must comprehend that excessive utilisation of euphemisms might lead to confusion and loss their meaning for readers. Furthermore, the use of euphemisms in literary works can often result in a more vulgar, unpleasant, or insulting tone compared to using plain and literal language. Thus, authors should meticulously and judiciously use euphemisms in order to achieve maximum effectiveness [4].

Euphemisms of Love in English Literature

Euphemisms of love in English literature are deeply shaped by social conventions of politeness, restraint, and moral decorum, which encourage writers to express affection and desire in indirect and aesthetically refined ways. Rather than stating emotions explicitly, authors frequently employ metaphor, suggestion, and nuanced lexical choices to veil romantic and even physical love. As argued by Keith Allan and Kate Burridge euphemisms function as a means of avoiding direct reference to socially sensitive topics, allowing speakers and writers to maintain propriety while still conveying meaning [5]. This tendency is especially evident in the works of Jane Austen, where expressions such as “esteem,” “affection,” “attachment,” and “regard” operate as polite substitutes for more explicit declarations of love. In *Pride and Prejudice*, these terms enable characters to communicate deep emotional involvement within the rigid expectations of 18th–19th century social etiquette, where overt displays of passion were often discouraged. From a pragmatic perspective, such usage aligns with politeness strategies that mitigate emotional intensity and preserve social harmony [6].

In poetic and dramatic texts, euphemisms of love become even more elaborate and symbolically charged. William Shakespeare, for instance, frequently employs metaphorical and suggestive language to imply both romantic and physical intimacy. In *Romeo and Juliet*, imagery related to light, pilgrimage, and sacred devotion—such as Romeo’s comparison of Juliet to the sun or the lovers’ dialogue framed as a religious encounter—serves to elevate desire into a spiritual and aesthetic experience [7]. Similarly, in Shakespeare’s sonnets, verbs like “know” and phrases implying “union” carry layered meanings that subtly allude to physical love without direct articulation. Thus, euphemisms in English literature do not merely obscure meaning; they enhance it by adding emotional nuance, stylistic elegance, and interpretative depth. Furthermore, indirect emotional expression can reflect broader cultural framework of politeness and refinement. Ultimately, the use of euphemistic language reveals a complex interaction

between linguistic choice, cultural expectations, and artistic creativity, positioning love not simply as a personal emotion but as a socially mediated and aesthetically constructed experience [8].

Euphemisms of Love in Uzbek Literature

Uzbek literary tradition, shaped by Islamic ethics and norms of social modesty, employs euphemisms of love as a refined means of expressing emotional devotion through indirect and symbolically rich language. Rather than articulating affection explicitly, writers rely on culturally resonant expressions such as “ko’nglimda joy bor” (“you have a place in my heart”) or “yor bo’lish” (“to become someone’s beloved”), which foreground loyalty, purity, and respect while avoiding overt emotional display. As noted by Anna Wierzbicka, emotional expression is often governed by cultural scripts that determine what can be said directly and what is better conveyed through implication; in the Uzbek context, this results in a preference for symbolic and euphemistic language [9]. Classical works by Alisher Navoi and Abdulla Qodiriy exemplify this tendency, as they consistently veil intense romantic feelings beneath poetic imagery and spiritual metaphors. For instance, recurring symbols such as the rose, the nightingale, and the arrival of spring function as euphemistic representations of beauty, longing, and union, linking human love with broader moral and even divine ideals. According to Keith Allan and Kate Burridge, euphemisms often arise from the need to soften potentially sensitive or culturally restricted topics, which explains their prevalence in discussions of love and intimacy. In this way, Uzbek literary euphemisms do not merely obscure meaning; rather, they enrich it by adding layers of aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual significance. Consequently, the use of euphemistic language in Uzbek literature reflects both a cultural commitment to modesty and a sophisticated artistic strategy for elevating the expression of love beyond simple directness [10].

Research Questions:

1. How are euphemisms of love expressed in English and Uzbek literary texts?
2. What cultural and stylistic factors influence the use of euphemisms of love in these two literary traditions?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the use of euphemisms of love between English and Uzbek literature?

2. Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative comparative approach. Selected literary texts from Uzbek and English traditions are analyzed to identify euphemistic expressions related to love. The analysis focuses on: types of euphemisms used, contexts in which they appear, cultural and stylistic functions. Examples are drawn from classical works to ensure a comprehensive perspective. The analysis involved categorizing euphemisms into metaphorical, symbolic, and pragmatic types, followed by comparative interpretation [11].

Sample

This research is based on qualitative literary analysis. The sample consists of selected literary texts rather than human participants, as the study focuses on the interpretation of written works. The data were collected from a number of well-known English and Uzbek literary texts that contain themes related to love, particularly the 17th centuries.

English literary texts include works by William Shakespeare. Uzbek literary texts include works by Alisher Navoi. These authors were selected based on their significant contribution to the representation of love in literature and their use of expressive language [12].

The texts were selected based on specific criteria: the presence of love-related themes, the use of figurative language, and the representation of emotional expression through

euphemisms. Two famous English and Uzbek authors’ textual extracts were chosen for detailed analysis. This selection ensures a balanced comparison between English and Uzbek literary traditions.

3. Results and Discussion

The Table 1. analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting euphemistic expressions used to describe love, affection, and emotional relationships. A research design was developed to examine how such expressions are structured and how meaning is conveyed indirectly through language. The Table 2. collected data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretative methods.

Table 1. Comparative Table of Euphemisms in Shakespeare and Navoi.

Aspect	William Shakespeare (<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>)	Alisher Navoi (<i>Layli va Majnun</i>)
Example of Euphemism	“My bounty is as boundless as the sea”	“Ko’nglim senga oshufta”
Literal Meaning	Love is infinite and deep	My heart is captivated by you
Direct Meaning (Hidden)	I love you very deeply	I am deeply in love with you
Type of Euphemism	Metaphor (nature imagery)	Symbolic (heart/soul imagery)
Emotional Tone	Romantic, expressive, dramatic	Spiritual, devoted, emotional
Cultural Influence	Renaissance ideals, courtly love	Eastern philosophy, Sufi influence
Function	Beautifies and intensifies romantic love	Elevates love to spiritual devotion
Level of Directness	Indirect but expressive	Highly indirect and symbolic
Associated Symbols	Sea, light, stars, smoke	Heart (<i>ko’ngil</i>), fire, madness
Purpose	Artistic expression + social politeness	Emotional depth + cultural modesty

Table 2. Comparative Euphemisms of Love with Context and References.

Author	Expression	Literal Meaning	Euphemistic Meaning	Type	Context + Reference
William Shakespeare	“Juliet is the sun”	Juliet is like the sun	Deep admiration and idealized love	Metaphor (cosmic)	Balcony scene (Romeo and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2)
William Shakespeare	“With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls”	Love gives wings	Love gives strength to overcome barriers	Metaphor	Romeo reaches Juliet’s garden (Act 2, Scene 2)

William Shakespeare	"My only love sprung from my only hate"	Love from hate	Unexpected love	Paradox	Juliet realizes Romeo is a Montague (Act 1, Scene 5)
William Shakespeare	"Parting is such sweet sorrow"	Sweet sadness	Emotional attachment in separation	Oxymoron	Juliet saying goodbye (Act 2, Scene 2)
William Shakespeare	"O, that I were a glove upon that hand"	Wish to be a glove	Desire for physical closeness	Symbolism	Romeo's longing for intimacy (Act 2, Scene 2)
William Shakespeare	"Love is a smoke made with the fume of sighs"	Love is smoke	Confusion and emotional intensity	Metaphor	Romeo describes love (Act 1, Scene 1)
William Shakespeare	"This bud of love..."	Love is a bud	Growing love	Metaphor (nature)	Juliet on developing love (Act 2, Scene 2)
William Shakespeare	"Give me my Romeo..."	Romeo as stars	Eternal love beyond death	Hyperbole / metaphor	Juliet imagines Romeo in death (Act 3, Scene 2)
Alisher Navoi	"Ko'nglim senga oshufta"	My heart is captivated	Deep emotional love	Symbolism (heart)	Majnun's devotion (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	"Ishq o'ti yurakni kuydirar"	Fire burns the heart	Passion and suffering in love	Metaphor (fire)	Description of love's pain (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	"Yorim jonim ichra maskan tutdi"	Beloved lives inside me	Spiritual closeness	Symbolism	Inner unity with beloved (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	"Ko'ngil unga moyil bo'ldi"	Heart leaned toward	Romantic attraction	Euphemistic phrase	Narrative description of attraction (Layli va Majnun)

Alisher Navoi	“Hijron azobi jonimni ezar”	Separation pains the soul	Emotional suffering of distance	Symbolism	Expression of separation pain (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	“Ishq yo’lida majnun bo’ldim”	Became mad	Extreme devotion in love	Metaphor (madness)	Majnun’s condition (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	“Yor yuzidek gul ochildi”	Face like a flower	Beauty and admiration	Metaphor (nature)	Description of beloved’s beauty (Layli va Majnun)
Alisher Navoi	“Ko’ngil dardiga davo topilmas”	No cure for heart pain	Love as incurable feeling	Metaphor (illness)	Reflection on permanence of love (Layli va Majnun)

Note. Expressions from Shakespeare are cited from *Romeo and Juliet* with act and scene numbers. Examples from Navoi are drawn from *Layli va Majnun*; exact line numbering varies by edition and translation.

These examples were selected because they clearly demonstrate different types of euphemistic expression—metaphor, symbolism, and indirect emotional language—across both literary traditions [13].

Interpretation of the Table

The table clearly demonstrates that both Shakespeare and Navoi rely heavily on euphemistic language to express love, yet they differ in imagery, purpose, and cultural grounding. Shakespeare’s euphemisms are primarily based on natural and cosmic imagery such as the sea, sun, and stars. These euphemisms create vivid and dramatic expressions of romantic love while maintaining a level of indirectness appropriate to social norms of his time.

Conversely, Navoi’s euphemisms are deeply rooted in inner emotional and spiritual symbolism, particularly the concept of the *heart* (*ko’ngil*) and the metaphor of love as fire. His expressions are more abstract and philosophical, reflecting the influence of Eastern poetic traditions and Sufi thought, where love is often interpreted as a path to spiritual enlightenment [14].

Another important distinction lies in function. Shakespeare uses euphemisms to enhance aesthetic beauty and rhetorical impact, often within interpersonal and social contexts. Navoi, however, employs euphemisms to convey devotion, suffering, and transcendence, making love appear as a profound and sometimes painful inner experience. Regardless of these differences, both authors demonstrate that euphemisms serve as a powerful literary tool. They allow writers to express complex emotions in a way that is indirect, culturally appropriate, and artistically rich. This confirms that euphemistic expression of love is both a universal literary phenomenon and a culture-specific stylistic strategy [15].

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that euphemisms of love play a crucial role in both English and Uzbek literary traditions, functioning not only as linguistic tools but also as

cultural and aesthetic devices. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of the works of William Shakespeare and Alisher Navoi, it has been shown that both authors employ indirect and figurative language to express complex emotional experiences associated with love. The findings reveal that, while euphemisms in both traditions serve a similar purpose—namely to soften, refine, and enrich the expression of affection—they differ significantly in their stylistic realization and cultural motivation. Shakespeare’s use of euphemisms is primarily based on metaphorical and natural imagery, reflecting Renaissance ideals of beauty, romance, and social politeness. His expressions tend to dramatize love and make it vivid through comparisons with elements such as the sea, light, and celestial bodies.

In contrast, Navoi’s euphemistic expressions are deeply rooted in spiritual and philosophical traditions, where love is conceptualized as an inner, often transcendent experience. His reliance on symbols such as the *heart* (*ko’ngil*), fire, and suffering reflects the influence of Eastern poetics and Sufi thought. In this context, euphemisms do not merely soften expression but elevate love to a moral and spiritual dimension. Despite these differences, the comparative analysis confirms that euphemisms of love represent a universal literary phenomenon shaped by cultural context. They allow writers to navigate social norms, avoid directness, and create deeper emotional resonance. At the same time, they enhance the aesthetic quality of literary texts by transforming simple emotional statements into rich, symbolic expressions.

In conclusion, the study highlights that the use of euphemisms in expressing love is both a reflection of cultural values and a demonstration of artistic creativity. Understanding these expressions contributes not only to linguistic and literary analysis but also to a broader appreciation of how different cultures perceive and communicate one of the most fundamental human emotions—love.

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