

THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON CULTURAL IDENTITY FORMATION AMONG URBAN UZBEK-SPEAKING YOUTH

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Abstract

This thesis examines the growing role of the English language in shaping the cultural identity of urban Uzbek-speaking youth. As English continues to gain prominence in education, media, and social communication, it has emerged as a powerful agent of cultural transformation. Drawing on sociolinguistic theories and field data, the study investigates how English usage contributes to the construction of hybrid identities that reflect both local traditions and global influences. The findings reveal that English serves not only as a communicative tool but also as a symbol of modernity, opportunity, and cultural affiliation, especially among younger generations in urban centers such as Tashkent and Samarkand.

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction*
- 2. Literature Review*
- 3. Methodology*
- 4. Analysis and Discussion*
- 5. Conclusion*
- 6. References*
- 7. Appendices*

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent decades, English has become a dominant global language, influencing education systems, media landscapes, and social interactions worldwide. In Uzbekistan, the state has promoted English as a tool of modernization and global integration. Urban youth are at the forefront of this linguistic shift, actively engaging

with English in schools, universities, online platforms, and popular culture. This engagement inevitably influences their cultural identity, creating a fusion between traditional Uzbek values and globally shaped ideals.

1.2 Problem Statement

While the increasing use of English is often seen as a mark of progress, it raises important questions about cultural identity, especially in post-Soviet societies like Uzbekistan. How does the adoption of English affect the way young Uzbeks see themselves, their culture, and their place in the world?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how English influences the cultural identity of Uzbek-speaking youth living in urban areas.

1.4 Research Questions

- How is English perceived by urban Uzbek-speaking youth?
- In what contexts is English used and associated with identity?
- What are the cultural implications of English use among this group?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to sociolinguistics and identity studies by providing localized insight into how English shapes cultural identity in a non-native English-speaking country. It also offers implications for language policy, education, and intercultural understanding.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Language and Identity

Drawing from works by Norton (2013), Bucholtz & Hall (2005), and Joseph (2004), language is viewed not only as a system of communication but as a means of constructing and performing identity.

2.2 Globalization and Language Shift

English as a global lingua franca has led to new identity constructions worldwide. Research in countries such as India, Nigeria, and Kazakhstan shows that English often symbolizes modernity, global belonging, and elite status (Pennycook, 2007).

2.3 The Uzbek Context

After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has promoted Uzbek as the state language while simultaneously encouraging English learning as part of economic and educational reforms. Urban areas, where access to English education is greater, exhibit faster and deeper language shifts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-method approach was adopted, including qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys.

3.2 Participants

50 Uzbek-speaking youths (ages 16–25) from Tashkent were surveyed. Additionally, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with university students and young professionals.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

- Structured questionnaire with Likert-scale and open-ended items
- Semi-structured interviews
- Observation of language use on social media platforms

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Thematic coding was applied to qualitative data to identify patterns related to identity and language use.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Attitudes Toward English

Most participants associated English with opportunity, progress, and sophistication. Common phrases included: “English means success,” and “Knowing English means you are educated.”

4.2 Contexts of Use

Participants used English in academic writing, professional communication, social media, and entertainment. Code-switching between Uzbek and English was especially common online and in university settings.

4.3 Cultural Identity and Hybridity

Many respondents reported a dual sense of self—feeling both traditionally Uzbek and cosmopolitan. For instance, one participant stated, “I watch Uzbek dramas with my family, but I prefer to read books and follow news in English.”

4.4 Challenges and Identity Conflict

A few interviewees noted tension between older and younger generations. While parents valued fluency in Uzbek and cultural preservation, younger participants prioritized English for social mobility and international relevance.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

- English is a powerful cultural resource for urban Uzbek-speaking youth.
- It is associated with global identity, modernity, and career advancement.
- Identity among these youths is increasingly hybrid, balancing local traditions and global aspirations.
- Tensions exist between generational values and language ideologies.

5.2 Recommendations

- Language education policy should support bilingual and bicultural development.
- Cultural identity should be integrated into English curriculum to avoid alienation from Uzbek roots.

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