



ADJECTIVAL REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL CONCEPTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17701979>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 22nd November 2025

Accepted: 23rd November 2025

Online: 24th November 2025

KEYWORDS

cultural adjectives, cultural linguistics, English-Uzbek contrastive linguistics, adjectival derivation, cultural scripts, gradability

ABSTRACT

This article explores how cultural concepts are encoded and expressed through adjectives in English and Uzbek, two typologically distant languages belonging to the Indo-European and Turkic families respectively. Drawing on cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, and corpus-based approaches, the study demonstrates that adjectives do not merely describe objective properties but actively construct culturally salient categories. English tends to lexicalize cultural values through abstract, gradable, and often metaphorical adjectives, whereas Uzbek frequently employs derivational morphology, relational suffixes, and compound-like structures that reflect collectivist worldview, respect hierarchy, and Islamic-Turkic cultural scripts..

The representation of cultural concepts through adjectives offers a particularly revealing window into the interplay between language, cognition, and culture, for adjectives do not merely modify nouns in a neutral fashion but actively participate in the conceptualisation and evaluation of experience in ways that are profoundly shaped by cultural schemas. When one compares English, a language whose adjectival system has evolved within a predominantly individualistic and universalist cultural matrix, with Uzbek, a Turkic language deeply embedded in collectivist, hierarchical, and Islam-influenced cultural scripts, the differences in how cultural meanings are packaged adjectivally become strikingly apparent and demand a systematic contrastive analysis grounded in contemporary cultural-linguistic and cognitive-semantic frameworks.

At the most fundamental level, cultural concepts are rarely encoded in adjectives as simple descriptive labels; rather, they emerge from the interplay of lexical semantics, morphological productivity, and pragmatic conventions that reflect what Sharifian (2017) terms cultural conceptualisations—distributed patterns of knowledge shared by a speech community. In English, many culturally salient values are expressed through abstract, highly gradable adjectives that allow for scalar modulation and metaphorical extension, a pattern consistent with the individualistic orientation that privileges personal evaluation and contextual flexibility. Terms such as empowering, inclusive, sustainable, or authentic carry heavy cultural baggage in contemporary Anglophone discourse, yet their gradability (very empowering, somewhat inclusive) and susceptibility to metaphorical transfer enable

speakers to negotiate meaning situationally rather than invoking fixed cultural categories. This scalar openness aligns with a cultural schema in which individual perspective and contextual nuance are foregrounded, permitting the same adjective to be intensified, downtoned, or ironically subverted according to speaker intent.

Uzbek, by contrast, tends to crystallise cultural concepts in morphologically rich adjectival forms that are often non-gradable or only marginally gradable when they encode culturally idealised states. The suffix *-li*, for instance, derives a large class of evaluatively loaded adjectives—*hurmatli* “respected”, *muhtaram* “venerable”, *qadrdon* “dear/precious”—whose very morphology signals an obligatory cultural script of respect and social hierarchy. Unlike English *respected*, which may be used descriptively and gradably (quite respected, more respected than X), Uzbek *hurmatli* in formal address is virtually non-gradable; to say **juda hurmatli* in the sense of “very respected” would sound odd or marked because the adjective already embodies the culturally expected maximum of deference. Native-speaker judgments and corpus evidence from the National Corpus of Uzbek consistently confirm that such forms function less as scalable properties than as performative markers of cultural alignment, instantiating what Goddard and Wierzbicka (2018) would analyse as culturally specific exponents of social cognition.

A similar pattern obtains in the domain of hospitality, arguably the most emblematic cultural value in Uzbek society. The adjective *mehmondo‘st* “hospitable” is not simply descriptive but serves as a moral-evaluative cornerstone; its frequency in the Uzbek corpus far outstrips that of *hospitable* in English corpora even when normalised, and it readily accepts intensifiers (*juda mehmundo‘st*, *o‘ta mehmundo‘st*) yet resists downgrading or negation in positive contexts because hospitality is construed as an intrinsic, non-negotiable virtue rather than a variable trait. English *hospitable*, while positive, remains comfortably scalar and context-dependent, allowing constructions such as *fairly hospitable* or *not particularly hospitable* without cultural offence. This contrast reveals a deeper divergence: where English adjectives often invite personal judgment along an open scale, many Uzbek cultural adjectives presuppose a culturally agreed-upon ideal that speakers either affirm or, in marked cases, lament deviation from.

Purity concepts provide another illuminating domain. Uzbek *pokiza* simultaneously encompasses physical cleanliness, moral integrity, and ritual purity within an Islamic frame of reference—a polysemy that is systematically exploited in everyday and literary discourse. A single lexeme thus activates an entire cultural schema of *poklik* that links the material, ethical, and spiritual. English requires distributional specialisation: *clean* for the physical, *pure* for the moral or abstract, *chaste* or *pious* for the religious dimension. Attempts to render *pokiza* with a single English adjective inevitably result in cultural thinning, underscoring how Uzbek adjectival semantics can compress culturally dense networks of meaning that English distributes across multiple lexemes or circumlocutions.

Kinship-derived evaluatives further highlight morphological and conceptual differences. Uzbek productively forms adjectives with the suffix *-cha* or *-gi* from kinship terms—*o‘g‘ilcha* “manly, courageous” (literally “son-like”), *qizcha* “modest, gentle” (literally “daughter-like”)—thereby encoding culturally idealised gender behaviour directly in adjectival morphology. These forms are strongly evaluative and often non-gradable when used normatively,

reflecting a cultural schema in which gendered virtue is tied to familial roles. English equivalents such as boyish or girlish exist but are marginal, frequently pejorative or nostalgic in contemporary usage, and lack the moral weight carried by their Uzbek counterparts.

Even national identity reveals divergent adjectival strategies. Uzbek *o'zbekona* "in the Uzbek way" or *milliy* "national" function as powerful in-group markers that evoke pride and cultural authenticity with minimal contextual qualification. English resorts to analytic phrases—typically British, quintessentially American—whose adjectival component is often an adverbialised adjective or a compound attribute, reflecting a preference for compositional rather than synthetic encoding of cultural typicality.

These patterns are not accidental but correlate systematically with broader typological and sociocultural tendencies. English, as an analytic language with limited adjectival morphology, favours lexical richness and scalar openness that accommodate individualistic negotiation of meaning. Uzbek, with its agglutinative morphology and Turkic-Islamic cultural heritage, packages cultural concepts into compact, often non-gradable adjectival forms that presuppose shared cultural scripts and hierarchical relations. The implications extend beyond theoretical linguistics into translation, intercultural communication, and language pedagogy: direct adjectival equivalence is frequently impossible without either cultural loss in the English rendering or explanatory overload in the Uzbek one. Contemporary Anglophone concepts such as empowering or triggering often resist single-word translation into Uzbek precisely because no morphologically integrated adjectival slot exists for such individual-centred, psychologically nuanced evaluations.

In sum, a contrastive examination of cultural-concept adjectives in English and Uzbek demonstrates that far from being peripheral modifiers, adjectives serve as critical sites where cultural conceptualisations are crystallised, negotiated, or distributed. The scalar, contextually flexible adjectives typical of English reflect and reinforce an individualistic cultural metaphysics, whereas the morphologically dense, often idealised and less gradable forms of Uzbek instantiate a collectivist, hierarchical, and script-based cultural cognition. Such findings not only enrich our understanding of how culture is grammatically encoded but also underscore the necessity of culturally attentive approaches in cross-linguistic semantics and intercultural praxis.

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