

THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LEXICAL UNITS ON THE UZBEK LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Annotation: *This article examines the increasing penetration of English lexical units into Uzbek-language social media communication and their subsequent psycholinguistic effects on Uzbek speakers. Drawing on theories of lexical borrowing, code-switching, and language attitudes (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Pavlenko, 2014), the study analyzes how English words and phrases—such as like, share, comment, story, follow, and post—are integrated into everyday Uzbek digital discourse. Through a psycholinguistic lens, the article explores cognitive processing mechanisms (e.g., word recognition, semantic mapping, and emotional resonance), as well as the impact on identity construction, social evaluation, and language prestige. Empirical findings from a corpus analysis, survey, and reaction time experiment indicate that while English borrowings enhance expressiveness and digital efficiency (Tashpulatov, 2022), they also contribute to linguistic insecurity among certain Uzbek speakers and shift habitual word associations in the Uzbek mental lexicon (Gafaranga, 2019). This research underscores the need for balanced language planning that respects both natural language evolution and native linguistic heritage in the digital age.*

Keywords: *psycholinguistics, English borrowings, Uzbek language, social media, lexical influence, code-switching, digital discourse.*

Introduction

Over the past decade, social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, and Facebook have become central to daily communication for millions of Uzbeks. Along with this shift, the Uzbek language has absorbed a noticeable number of English words. Expressions like “okay”, “sorry”, “like”, “follow”, “comment”, “post”, “story”, “mem”, and “live” are now typed and spoken routinely by Uzbek users, especially younger ones. Language borrowing is not a new phenomenon; as Myers-Scotton (2006) notes, it has always accompanied human contact. However, the speed at which English borrowings are penetrating Uzbek through digital spaces—and the psychological consequences of this process—remain underexplored. Therefore, this study poses the following question: In what

ways do English lexical units used on social media influence the cognitive processing, emotional responses, and social identity of Uzbek speakers? To

understand borrowing beyond mere vocabulary lists, one must consider the mental and social dimensions involved. Pavlenko (2014) argues that borrowing affects not only language structure but also how speakers store, retrieve, and feel about words. Several concepts guide this investigation:

- Lexical access and the mental lexicon. According to Spivey and Marian (1999), when a bilingual or bidialectal speaker hears a word, competing candidates from both languages become activated. English borrowings thus compete with native Uzbek equivalents during real-time word recognition and speech production.

- Code-switching as a communicative tool. Alternating between Uzbek and English can serve practical and expressive purposes, such as marking emphasis, humor, or group belonging (Gafaranga, 2019).

- Language attitudes and perceived prestige. English often symbolizes modernity, education, and global participation. Consequently, English borrowings may enjoy higher social status than their native Uzbek counterparts (Dovchin, 2019).

Social media amplifies these dynamics because it collapses the traditional gap between spoken and written language. Users produce informal, fast-paced text that mimics conversation, creating ideal conditions for rapid lexical change (Androutsopoulos, 2015).

Research Methods

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, following recommendations for psycholinguistic fieldwork in digital contexts (Altarriba & Heredia, 2018). The research consisted of three components.

Between January 2023 and December 2024, the authors compiled 5,000 comments and posts from Uzbek-language Instagram and Telegram channels. The material included public posts, responses to popular influencers, and group chat exchanges. All user identifiers were removed to protect anonymity.

A survey was distributed to 310 Uzbek speakers aged 16 to 35. All participants reported using social media actively for at least two hours per day. Recruitment was carried out through snowball sampling via Telegram groups. The survey measured three things: familiarity with 20 frequently used English borrowings, preference for English versus Uzbek equivalents on a five-point Likert scale, and emotional valence ratings (from 1 = very negative to 5 = very positive) for loanwords compared to native words.

Results

What English Words Are Used Most Often?

The corpus analysis showed that the most frequent borrowings relate directly to platform functions. These included “layk” (like), “comment” (comment), “post”, “shestirit” (derived from “share” → “shera” → “shestirit”), “stori” (story), and “trend” (Tashpulatov, 2022). In addition, hybrid expressions appeared, such as “layk bos” (to press like) and “post joyla” (to place a post). Myers-Scotton (2006) describes such hybrid constructions as typical of intense language contact.

How Quickly Are These Words Processed?

The reaction time experiment yielded clear patterns. High-frequency borrowings like “layk” and “ok” were recognized as rapidly as native Uzbek words (mean reaction times 612 ms versus 605 ms, $p > .05$). This suggests that for active social media users, these English items have become fully integrated into the mental lexicon (Spivey & Marian, 1999). In contrast, lower-frequency borrowings such as “feil” (used to mean “fail”) produced significantly slower responses (843 ms, $p < .01$) and higher error rates (23% compared to 6% for native words). Thus, the frequency of exposure on social media directly predicts how deeply a borrowing becomes entrenched in the speaker’s mind (Pavlenko, 2014).

Emotional and Attitudinal Patterns

Survey responses fell into three broad categories. Fifty-four percent of participants described English borrowings as “modern” and “cool.” Thirty-two percent expressed concern that excessive use of English makes “Uzbek sound less pure.” The remaining 14% held neutral views.

An interesting finding concerned emotional weight. The English borrowing “sorry” received a mean valence score of 3.1 out of 5, whereas the native Uzbek equivalent “kechir” scored 4.7. Many participants explained that they use “sorry” for small, everyday mistakes—such as replying late or accidentally sending a wrong message—but reserve “kechir” for genuine, heartfelt apologies. This emotional attenuation of loanwords has been documented in other bilingual settings as well (Dewaele, 2010).

Identity and Social Belonging

When asked why they use English words on social media, participants gave several reasons. They said it helps them fit into global digital youth culture, appear educated or cosmopolitan, and signal that they belong to tech-savvy communities. However, participants over the age of 30—although not the primary focus of this study—frequently voiced anxiety that younger Uzbeks might lose connection with authentic Uzbek. Such generational divides have been reported in other post-Soviet Central Asian contexts (Dovchin, 2019; Ishkabulova, 2021).

Discussion

The findings reveal that English borrowings in Uzbek social media produce both positive and negative psycholinguistic effects.

Positive Effects

First, borrowings enable more concise expression of platform-specific actions. For instance, “repost” replaces the much longer Uzbek phrase “qayta e’lon qilish” (Tashpulatov, 2022). Second, they enhance perceived digital competence and global connectedness (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Third, they support code-mixed creativity, which has become a hallmark of informal youth identity (Gafaranga, 2019).

Negative Effects

On the other hand, several negative consequences emerged. Some speakers experience lexical insecurity; they feel that their Uzbek sounds inadequate unless they include English words (Dovchin, 2019). Native equivalents also show signs of attrition. For example, “ma’qullash” is used far less frequently than “layk” in digital contexts. Pavlenko (2014) has observed similar patterns in other bilingual communities under pressure from a dominant language. Furthermore, English borrowings may undergo semantic narrowing: they do not always carry the same emotional weight in Uzbek as they do in English, which can lead to subtle misunderstandings (Dewaele, 2010).

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the Uzbek mental lexicon appears to be undergoing adaptive restructuring (Pavlenko, 2014). English borrowings are not simply added to an existing store; they actively compete with and sometimes replace native words during lexical selection. This competition is strongest for high-frequency, low-emotion digital actions. Myers-Scotton’s (2006) Matrix Language Frame model helps explain the process: the grammatical structure remains Uzbek, but content words—especially those related to social media—are increasingly drawn from English.

Social media accelerates this entire process because it prioritizes speed, brevity, and novelty over linguistic purism (Androutsopoulos, 2015). The outcome is a bifurcated lexicon. Uzbek speakers now maintain one set of words for traditional, emotional, or formal contexts (native Uzbek) and another set for digital, casual, or globally marked contexts (English borrowings).

Conclusion

English lexical units circulating on social media are not merely changing what Uzbek speakers say; they are influencing how quickly words are recognized, what emotions attach to those words, and how speakers construct their identities. Although these borrowings bring clear benefits in terms of communication efficiency and global youth identity, they also carry risks: native lexical attrition, linguistic insecurity, and altered emotional meanings (Pavlenko,

2014; Ishkabalova, 2021). The appropriate response is not prohibition—which would be impractical and unnatural—but rather balanced digital multilingualism. Language educators and policymakers should encourage awareness of both English borrowings and the rich Uzbek equivalents that remain available (Tashpulatov, 2022).

Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies that track the same speakers over several years to observe how their lexical preferences change. Comparative work with other Turkic languages, such as Kazakh and Kyrgyz, would also help determine whether the patterns observed here are unique to Uzbek or reflect a broader regional trend (Dovchin, 2019).

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