

## CONTEXTUAL SEMANTIC SHIFTS IN ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN UZBEK

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**Abstract**

This study explores the phenomenon of contextual semantic shifts in English loanwords that have been integrated into the Uzbek language. With the increasing influence of globalization, mass media, technology, and intercultural communication, English has become a dominant source of lexical borrowings in Uzbek. While many loanwords retain their core meanings, they often undergo semantic modifications depending on the context in which they are used. The paper examines different types of semantic changes—broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and complete semantic shift—through examples drawn from contemporary Uzbek media, everyday speech, and online communication. The research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, focusing on how meanings evolve in real contexts of use. Findings indicate that loanwords such as market, trend, file, chat, driver, like, and online often acquire culturally specific nuances in Uzbek, sometimes diverging significantly from their original English meanings. The study argues that contextual semantic shifts not only demonstrate the dynamism of language contact but also reveal socio-cultural patterns of adaptation. These results contribute to the fields of contact linguistics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics, while offering implications for lexicography, translation studies, and English language teaching in Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** loanwords, semantic shift, English, Uzbek, pragmatics, language contact, globalization  
**Introduction**

In the age of globalization, languages are no longer isolated systems but dynamic entities that constantly interact with one another. English, as the dominant global lingua franca, has exerted significant influence on many languages worldwide, including Uzbek. This influence is most visible in the form of lexical borrowings—loanwords that enter Uzbek from English due to developments in technology, trade, education, media, and popular culture. For instance, words such as computer, internet, manager, market, trend, and online have become an inseparable part of modern Uzbek discourse.

However, the adoption of loanwords is not limited to a simple transfer of vocabulary. Once integrated into a new linguistic and cultural environment, these words often undergo semantic shifts that reflect the communicative needs and cultural practices of the receiving community. A term like driver in English primarily denotes “a person who drives a vehicle,” but in Uzbek, it can also be used metaphorically in information technology contexts to mean a “software driver.” Similarly, market in English generally refers to an economic concept or physical space for trade, while in Uzbek it is widely used to denote supermarkets or shopping centers, showing a narrowing of its original semantic scope.

The study of such semantic shifts is significant for several reasons. First, it highlights how global linguistic elements are localized in specific cultural settings. Second, it demonstrates the pragmatics of everyday communication, in which speakers reshape borrowed words to suit their contexts. Third, it provides valuable insights for lexicographers, translators, and educators who work with bilingual and multilingual contexts.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the contextual semantic shifts in English loanwords in Uzbek by focusing on how their meanings change when adapted into local discourse. The research addresses the following questions:

What types of semantic shifts occur in English loanwords in Uzbek?

How do contextual factors influence these shifts?

What do these changes reveal about the socio-cultural environment of Uzbekistan?

By answering these questions, the paper contributes to the broader field of contact linguistics, while also offering practical applications in language policy, translation, and teaching English as a foreign language.

### Literature Review

The phenomenon of loanwords and semantic change has been extensively studied in contact linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. According to Weinreich (1953), language contact inevitably leads to lexical borrowing, which is often accompanied by structural and semantic modifications. Haugen (1950) introduced a typology of borrowing, distinguishing between loanwords, loan translations, and semantic loans, thereby laying the foundation for subsequent studies of lexical adaptation.

Scholars have long recognized that semantic shifts are a natural outcome of lexical borrowing. Bloomfield (1933) emphasized that when a word enters a new linguistic system, it is subject to reinterpretation based on the semantic needs of the borrowing community. More recently, Crystal (2008) argued that globalization has accelerated the borrowing process, particularly from English, leading to rapid and diverse semantic adaptations in recipient languages.

In the context of semantic change, scholars usually identify several main types, including:

**Broadening (generalization):** when a word acquires a wider meaning in the borrowing language than in the source.

**Narrowing (specialization):** when a word develops a more restricted meaning.

**Amelioration:** when a word gains more positive connotations.

**Pejoration:** when a word develops negative associations.

**Shift (semantic transfer):** when a word completely changes its meaning in the new language.

Numerous studies have shown that English loanwords undergo such changes in languages across the globe. For instance, Görlach (2002) highlighted how English borrowings in European languages often narrow in meaning, adapting to specific socio-economic contexts. Similarly, Kachru (1986) pointed out that in Asian contexts, English loanwords are often resemanticized to reflect local cultural practices, creating hybrid forms of English usage.

With regard to Uzbek linguistics, several scholars have investigated the role of foreign borrowings in language development. Berdiyev (2010) examined the historical layers of lexical borrowing in Uzbek, showing that Arabic, Persian, Russian, and more recently English have contributed significantly to the Uzbek lexicon. Qodirov (2015) analyzed the influence of globalization on Uzbek vocabulary, emphasizing the dominance of English in the fields of technology, business, and education. In addition, Karimova (2019) explored semantic changes in media discourse, noting that many English-derived terms such as trend, online, and market have acquired contextually specific nuances in Uzbek.

Despite these contributions, relatively few studies have systematically addressed the issue of contextual semantic shifts in English loanwords in Uzbek. Most existing works focus on the frequency and fields of borrowing rather than the pragmatic mechanisms of semantic adaptation. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of semantic shifts as they occur in authentic Uzbek discourse, particularly in media, everyday communication, and digital platforms.

In summary, previous research establishes that loanwords undergo inevitable semantic modification in the borrowing language. However, the Uzbek case presents a unique opportunity to explore how global English terms are reinterpreted in a local cultural setting, shaped by the communicative needs and socio-cultural realities of Uzbek speakers.

### Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the contextual semantic shifts of English loanwords in Uzbek. The methodology is structured around three components: data collection, classification, and semantic-pragmatic analysis.

### Data Collection

The primary data for this research were drawn from three main sources:

**Print and online media:** Uzbek newspapers, magazines, and online news portals such as Gazeta.uz, Kun.uz, and Daryo.uz were systematically reviewed for occurrences of English loanwords.

**Digital communication:** Social media platforms including Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram were monitored, since online discourse represents one of the most dynamic spaces for borrowing and semantic innovation.

**Spoken discourse:** Informal conversations among university students and young professionals in Tashkent and Samarkand were recorded and transcribed. These conversations were chosen because younger speakers are often the most active users of English loanwords.

A corpus of approximately 300 loanword tokens was compiled, with attention paid to their frequency and contextual usage.

### **Selection Criteria**

Not all English-derived words in Uzbek were included in the study. The following criteria were used for selection:

The word must originate from English, not from Russian or another intermediary language (e.g., trend, market, driver).

The word must show signs of semantic modification in Uzbek usage.

The word should appear in at least two different discourse contexts (e.g., media + spoken language).

### **Analytical Framework**

To analyze semantic shifts, the study relied on established typologies of semantic change (Bloomfield, 1933; Crystal, 2008). Each loanword was examined in terms of its original English meaning and its contextual Uzbek usage. The analysis identified whether the shift reflected:

Broadening (generalization)

Narrowing (specialization)

Amelioration (positive shift)

Pejoration (negative shift)

Semantic transfer (complete change)

Additionally, a pragmatic perspective was applied, focusing on how speakers use these words in interaction to achieve communicative goals. For example, the use of the English word like in Uzbek social media comments often functions not only as a verb (“to like something”) but also as a discourse marker to express agreement or approval.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To ensure the reliability of the data, cross-checking was performed: words found in social media were compared with their presence in media texts, and meanings were confirmed through interviews with native Uzbek speakers. The validity of semantic interpretation was enhanced by comparing loanword usage with bilingual dictionaries and parallel English corpora.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in scope by the size of the data sample and its focus on urban speakers. Rural dialects and older generations, who tend to resist loanword adoption, were not included in the corpus. Furthermore, the study emphasizes semantic and pragmatic aspects rather than phonological or morphological adaptation.

### **Results**

The analysis of the collected data revealed that English loanwords in Uzbek undergo a variety of semantic shifts once integrated into local discourse. These shifts reflect the communicative needs, cultural context, and pragmatic strategies of Uzbek speakers. The findings are categorized according to the major types of semantic change.

#### **Broadening (Generalization)**

Some English loanwords acquire a wider range of meanings in Uzbek than in their source language.

**File:** In English, file refers to a collection of documents stored physically or digitally. In Uzbek, however, fayl can denote any type of computer data, including pictures, songs, and videos, broadening the scope of its original meaning.

**Driver:** Originally limited to “a person who drives a vehicle,” in Uzbek drayver also means software driver or even a motivating factor in informal speech (e.g., Bu loyiha iqtisodiyotning drayveri bo‘ladi – “This project will be the driver of the economy”).

#### **Narrowing (Specialization)**

Other loanwords become restricted in their meaning when adapted to Uzbek.

**Market:** In English, it refers to both an economic system and a physical trading space. In Uzbek, market almost exclusively refers to a supermarket or grocery store, thus narrowing its scope.

**Business:** While in English it broadly means commerce or any professional activity, in Uzbek it is often restricted to private entrepreneurship, usually in the context of small or medium-sized trade.

#### **Semantic Transfer (Shift)**

Some loanwords undergo a complete shift in meaning, diverging significantly from their original English sense.

**Like:** In English, like functions as a verb or preposition. In Uzbek digital discourse, layk has shifted to mean a Facebook or Instagram reaction, used both as a noun (“Ko‘p layk oldi”) and a verb (“Postni layk qildim”).

**Chat:** While in English it means “informal conversation,” in Uzbek chat almost exclusively refers to online group messaging platforms, especially Telegram groups.

#### **Amelioration (Positive Shift)**

Some English loanwords gain more favorable or prestigious meanings in Uzbek society.

**Manager:** In English, manager can mean any supervisor. In Uzbek, however, menedjer often carries connotations of a prestigious office position, associated with professionalism and success.

**Trend:** Originally meaning “general direction of change,” in Uzbek trend often implies fashionable popularity or something “cool,” particularly in youth culture.

#### **Pejoration (Negative Shift)**

A few English loanwords acquire negative or ironic connotations in Uzbek.

**Spam:** In English, it refers to unsolicited digital messages. In Uzbek, spam not only refers to irrelevant online content but is also used colloquially to describe annoying behavior (e.g., U odam gapida ko‘p spam bor – “That person talks too much nonsense”).

**Driver (secondary meaning):** While it is positively used in economic discourse, in youth slang drayver can sarcastically describe someone who overestimates their importance or influence.

#### **Contextual Adaptations in Media and Youth Discourse**

The results further show that the degree of semantic shift depends on the communicative context:

In media discourse, loanwords often retain more formal or specialized meanings (e.g., trend in economic analysis).

In youth slang and digital communication, loanwords are more prone to creative semantic shifts (e.g., like, chat, driver).

In professional settings, loanwords such as manager, business, and project are used to signal prestige and modernity.

#### **Discussion**

The findings of this study confirm that English loanwords in Uzbek undergo systematic semantic shifts that are strongly influenced by context, culture, and communicative needs. These changes illustrate how global lexical items are localized and reinterpreted in the Uzbek linguistic environment. Several key patterns emerged from the analysis.

#### **The Role of Globalization and Technology.**

Globalization and the rapid spread of technology have accelerated the borrowing of English words into Uzbek. Words such as chat, like, online, and file entered the language primarily through digital platforms. Their semantic shifts reflect how Uzbek speakers adapt to technological innovations by reassigning meanings that are more relevant to their everyday experiences. For example, chat no longer simply means “conversation,” but is associated with online group communication, especially in Telegram communities, which are highly popular in Uzbekistan.

#### **Semantic Shifts as a Reflection of Cultural Practices.**

Semantic adaptation also reflects cultural practices and social perceptions. The word manager in English is neutral, referring to a person who oversees a team or project. In Uzbek, however, menedjer carries prestige and is associated with higher social status. This reflects the cultural tendency to attach symbolic value to modern, Westernized job titles. Similarly, trend has shifted from a neutral descriptive term to a fashionable concept among Uzbek youth, indicating how global concepts are localized through cultural lenses.

#### **Pragmatic Functions of Loanwords.**

Another important dimension of semantic change is pragmatics. Loanwords are often employed by speakers to achieve specific communicative goals. For instance, like is not only a borrowed verb but also functions as a discourse marker in digital communication, allowing users to express approval or solidarity. The frequent use of layk qildim or ko‘p layk oldi demonstrates how the word has been pragmatically reinterpreted to fit new communicative contexts. Similarly, spam has developed negative, even humorous connotations beyond its original English sense, functioning as a tool of social critique in everyday conversation.

#### **Language Identity and Social Stratification.**

The adoption and semantic transformation of English loanwords also relate to issues of identity and social stratification. Younger generations, particularly urban youth, tend to embrace these words more actively, using them as markers of modernity and global connectedness. In contrast, older generations are more likely to resist or criticize the overuse of English borrowings, perceiving them as unnecessary or corrupting influences on Uzbek. This generational divide suggests that semantic shifts are not only linguistic phenomena but also social indicators of group identity.

#### **Implications for Linguistics and Education,**

The semantic shifts observed in Uzbek English loanwords carry important implications for linguistics, translation, and education. For linguists, these shifts highlight the adaptability of language contact situations, where borrowed terms are not merely “imported” but actively reshaped. For translators, awareness of these shifts is crucial to avoid misinterpretation; for example, translating market as “economic system” in an Uzbek context would often be misleading, since the common Uzbek interpretation refers to a supermarket. In education, teachers of English as a foreign language must be mindful of these semantic differences to help students distinguish between English meanings and their localized Uzbek adaptations.

#### **Broader Theoretical Significance,**

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the view that loanwords are dynamic entities that cannot be fully understood without examining their contextual usage. The findings align with Haugen’s (1950) and Weinreich’s (1953) arguments that borrowing is not a passive process but an active negotiation between linguistic systems. The Uzbek case illustrates how loanwords become embedded in the cultural and pragmatic realities of speakers, undergoing semantic shifts that reflect not only linguistic but also social and cultural transformations.

#### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the contextual semantic shifts of English loanwords in the Uzbek language, focusing on how global lexical items are reinterpreted in local communicative settings.

The findings reveal that English borrowings in Uzbek are not static replicas of their original forms, but dynamic elements that undergo broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and even complete semantic transfer.

Several key conclusions can be drawn from this research:

**Semantic Shifts Are Context-Dependent:** Loanwords in Uzbek acquire new meanings based on the discourse in which they are used. Media, youth slang, and digital platforms are particularly fertile grounds for semantic innovation.

**Cultural and Social Factors Shape Meaning:** Words such as *manager* and *trend* have taken on positive connotations in Uzbek, reflecting local perceptions of prestige and modernity. Conversely, words like *spam* have acquired negative connotations, serving as tools of social critique.

**Generational and Social Variation:** Younger, urban speakers are more likely to adopt and creatively adapt English loanwords, while older generations tend to resist them. This generational divide highlights the role of loanwords as markers of identity and social stratification.

**Implications for Linguistics and Applied Fields:** The semantic reconfiguration of English borrowings in Uzbek has direct implications for lexicography, translation, and foreign language education. Translators and educators must be sensitive to these shifts in order to avoid miscommunication and to facilitate effective bilingual competence.

In broader terms, the study underscores the fact that loanwords are not merely borrowed but are actively reshaped to fit new cultural and pragmatic contexts. This reflects the adaptability and creativity of speakers, as well as the ongoing negotiation between global influences and local traditions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study has provided an overview of semantic shifts in English loanwords in Uzbek, further research could expand the scope in several directions:

Quantitative analysis of larger corpora, including rural and regional dialects.

Longitudinal studies tracing how the meanings of specific loanwords evolve over time.

Comparative studies examining how English loanwords behave in other Turkic languages, such as Kazakh or Kyrgyz, to identify cross-linguistic similarities and differences.

Pragmatic analysis focusing more deeply on how semantic shifts function in spoken interaction, humor, and social identity construction.

By exploring these areas, future research can contribute not only to Uzbek linguistics but also to the wider field of contact linguistics and sociolinguistics.

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