

GENERATIONAL AND GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN UZBEK

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Abstract. *This study investigates generational and gender differences in the use of English loanwords in the Uzbek language. The research examines how age and gender influence the frequency, context, and communicative function of English borrowings in modern Uzbek discourse. Data were collected through sociolinguistic surveys from participants across different age groups (18-30, 31-50, and 51+) and analyzed to identify patterns of lexical usage. The findings indicate that younger speakers (18-30) use English loanwords significantly more actively than older speakers, with frequencies approximately 3.5 times higher in informal communication. Gender differences were also observed: male participants tend to use loanwords more frequently in professional and technical contexts, while female participants employ them more selectively for stylistic and expressive purposes. The study highlights the social and cultural factors shaping language change and provides empirical insight into the ongoing integration of English lexical items into Uzbek within the context of globalization and digital communication.*

Keywords: *English loanwords, Uzbek language, generational differences, gender differences, sociolinguistics, language change, language contact.*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, language contact has intensified across the world, leading to the active incorporation of foreign lexical units into national languages (Thomason, 2001). Uzbek, a Turkic language spoken by approximately 34 million people primarily in Uzbekistan and neighboring Central Asian countries, has experienced a noticeable increase in the use of English loanwords, particularly in domains such as technology, business, education, media, and popular culture (Nishonova, 2024).

This process of lexical borrowing reflects not only linguistic change but also broader social, cultural, and communicative transformations occurring within Uzbek society in the post-Soviet period.

The phenomenon of English loanword adoption in Uzbek is not unique; similar patterns have been documented in numerous languages worldwide as English has consolidated its position as a global lingua franca (Crystal, 2003). However, the use of English loanwords in Uzbek is not uniform across all social groups. Sociolinguistic research suggests that factors such as age, gender, education, and social environment significantly influence language choice and vocabulary usage (Labov, 2001). Generational differences are especially evident, as younger speakers tend to adopt English borrowings more actively due to greater exposure to digital technologies, social media, and global communication platforms (Androutsopoulos, 2006). In contrast, older generations often demonstrate a preference for native or earlier borrowed lexical forms, reflecting different linguistic norms and communicative habits shaped during the Soviet era.

Gender also plays an important role in shaping language use. Previous studies in sociolinguistics indicate that men and women may differ in their frequency, context, and motivation for using loanwords (Coates, 2015). These differences can be associated with varying social roles, professional engagement, communicative styles, and attitudes toward linguistic innovation (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). In the Uzbek context, where traditional gender roles coexist with increasing modernization and women's participation in education and the workforce, the interaction between gender and language modernization remains an underexplored area, particularly with regard to English lexical influence.

The sociolinguistic study of loanwords provides valuable insights into how languages adapt to social change and how different demographic groups participate in linguistic innovation.

Research on gender and language variation has demonstrated that women often lead linguistic change in some contexts while being more conservative in others (Labov, 1990). Similarly, age-grading studies have shown that younger speakers typically adopt innovations more readily, though not all innovations persist across generations (Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2009). Understanding these patterns in the Uzbek context contributes to broader theories of language change and social variation.

Therefore, the study of generational and gender differences in the use of English loanwords in Uzbek is both timely and relevant. It contributes to a deeper understanding of ongoing language change in Central Asia and provides insight into how social factors shape linguistic behavior in post-Soviet multilingual contexts. By analyzing patterns of English loanword usage across different age groups and genders, this research aims to reveal the sociolinguistic dynamics underlying contemporary Uzbek discourse and to highlight the broader implications of language contact in a rapidly changing society.

1.1 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do different age groups in Uzbek society vary in their frequency of English loanword usage?
2. What gender-based differences exist in the adoption and use of English loanwords in Uzbek?
3. How do generational and gender factors interact in shaping patterns of English loanword usage?
4. What communicative functions do English loanwords serve for different demographic groups?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Contact and Loanword Theory

Language contact is a fundamental linguistic phenomenon that occurs when speakers of different languages interact over extended periods (Weinreich, 1953). As a result of this interaction, lexical borrowing becomes one of the most visible outcomes, whereby words from one language are adopted into another to fill semantic, cultural, or technological gaps. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) distinguish between borrowing (which occurs in situations of language maintenance) and shift-induced interference (which occurs during language shift), noting that borrowing primarily affects vocabulary before extending to other linguistic levels.

The study of loanwords has evolved significantly within modern linguistics, drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. Myers-Scotton's (2002) Matrix Language Frame model provides a theoretical framework for understanding how

borrowed lexical items are integrated into the grammatical structure of the recipient language. According to this model, borrowed content morphemes are inserted into the grammatical frame provided by the matrix language, which in the case of Uzbek-English contact, is Uzbek.

English, as a global lingua franca, has become a major donor language worldwide, and its spread reflects broader patterns of power relations, cultural influence, and globalization processes (Phillipson, 1992; Crystal, 2003). The dominance of English in international communication, science, technology, and popular culture has led to what some scholars term "English linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992), though others view English borrowing as a pragmatic response to communicative needs in an interconnected world (Crystal, 2003).

2.2 English Loanwords in Uzbek

The Uzbek language has a complex history of lexical borrowing. Historically, Uzbek has incorporated substantial vocabulary from Arabic and Persian due to Islamic influence, and later from Russian during the Soviet period (Fierman, 1991). The post-Soviet era has witnessed a new wave of borrowing, primarily from English, as Uzbekistan has increased its engagement with global markets and technologies (Schlyter, 2003).

Recent research has documented the growing presence of English loanwords in various domains of Uzbek discourse. Khudaykulov and Isoqova (2024) examined the functioning of English-origin borrowed words in Uzbek political texts, finding that such borrowings serve to express contemporary political and economic concepts that emerged after independence. Nishonova (2024) argued that English loanwords contribute to lexical enrichment of the Uzbek language, particularly in technical and professional registers where native equivalents may be cumbersome or imprecise.

These borrowings often enter the language without full phonological or morphological adaptation, preserving features of their English origin while gradually integrating into Uzbek grammatical patterns. In some cases, English loanwords coexist with native Uzbek equivalents or earlier Russian borrowings, creating situations of lexical variation where speakers must choose among competing forms (Backus, 1996).

2.3 Generational Differences in Language Variation

Age-based variation in language use is a well-established area of sociolinguistic inquiry. Eckert (1997) distinguishes among three ways age can influence language: age-grading (where speakers change their language use as they age), generational change (where each generation maintains distinct features throughout life), and lifespan change (where individuals modify their speech over time in response to social changes). Younger speakers are generally recognized as leaders in linguistic innovation and change (Labov, 2001). This pattern has been observed across numerous language communities and linguistic features. Tagliamonte and D'Arcy (2009) demonstrated that adolescents and young adults play a crucial role in the adoption and diffusion of new linguistic forms. In the context of loanword adoption, younger generations' greater exposure to English through education, digital media, entertainment platforms, and social networking sites creates more opportunities for borrowing (Androutsopoulos, 2006).

Research on bilingualism and multilingualism has shown that younger speakers in contact situations tend to engage in more code-switching and lexical borrowing than older speakers (Poplack, 1980). This tendency reflects not only exposure but also attitudes toward linguistic innovation and global integration. For younger generations, English loanwords may function as markers of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and participation in global youth culture (Pennycook, 2003).

Conversely, older speakers typically demonstrate more conservative linguistic behavior, preferring established lexical forms and showing resistance to excessive borrowing (Chambers, 2002). This conservatism may reflect different educational backgrounds, socialization in different linguistic environments (such as the Soviet period for older Uzbek speakers), and different attitudes toward language purity and national identity.

2.4 Gender and Language Variation

Gender has long been recognized as a crucial sociolinguistic variable influencing language behavior. Early research by Labov (1990) suggested that women tend to use more standard or prestige forms than men of the same social class. However, subsequent research has revealed a more complex picture, showing that women often lead linguistic change, particularly in the adoption of innovations that are not yet socially stigmatized (Labov, 2001). Coates (2015) argues that gender differences in language reflect and construct social gender identities rather than representing inherent differences between men and women. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) emphasize that gender interacts with other social variables such as age, class, and ethnicity to produce complex patterns of linguistic variation. Their concept of "communities of practice" suggests that language use is shaped by participation in specific social groups rather than by gender alone. In the context of loanword usage, research has yielded varied results across different language communities. Some studies suggest that men use loanwords more frequently, particularly in professional and technical contexts where they may have greater occupational engagement (Poplack et al., 1988). Other research indicates that women may adopt prestige borrowings more readily as part of linguistic innovation (Labov, 1990).

Zenner and Kristiansen (2014) found that attitudes toward English loanwords vary by gender in some European contexts, with differences in perceived prestige and appropriateness. In multilingual settings, gender may intersect with educational background and professional domains to create distinct patterns of code-switching and borrowing (Myers-Scotton, 1993).

2.5 The Uzbek Sociolinguistic Context

Understanding language variation in Uzbekistan requires attention to the country's unique sociolinguistic context. Following independence in 1991, Uzbekistan underwent significant linguistic policy changes, including the elevation of Uzbek to the status of state language and the gradual reduction of Russian's official role (Fierman, 1991; Schlyter, 2003). However, Russian remains widely used, particularly in urban areas and in certain professional domains, creating a multilingual environment where Uzbek, Russian, and increasingly English coexist.

The younger generation in Uzbekistan has grown up in a post-Soviet context characterized by globalization, internet connectivity, and exposure to international media. Access to English-language content through social media platforms, streaming services, and online education has increased dramatically, particularly among urban youth (Abdullaeva and Tukhtakhodjaeva, 2025). This exposure creates conditions conducive to English loanword adoption. Gender roles in Uzbek society reflect a complex negotiation between traditional values and modernization. These dynamics may influence how men and women use English loanwords in different social and professional contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods sociolinguistic approach combining quantitative analysis of loanword frequency with qualitative examination of usage contexts and functions.

The research design is cross-sectional, capturing language use patterns across different demographic groups at a single point in time.

3.2 Participants

The study included 180 participants from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, stratified by age and gender.

Three age groups were established:

Age Group	Age Range	Total (n)	Male	Female
Young adults	18–30 years	60	30	30
Middle-aged adults	31–50 years	60	30	30
Older adults	51+ years	60	30	30

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different occupational and educational backgrounds. All participants were native speakers of Uzbek with at least secondary education.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through three primary methods:

1. Sociolinguistic questionnaires: Participants completed surveys assessing their frequency of English loanword use in various contexts (professional, educational, informal social interaction, digital communication) using Likert-scale responses.

2. Discourse samples: Participants provided recorded speech samples in informal interview settings, discussing topics designed to elicit loanword usage (technology, education, social media, work/career). These recordings totaled approximately 30 minutes per participant.

3. Self-report usage diaries: A subset of 60 participants (20 from each age group, balanced by gender) maintained week-long diaries documenting instances of English loanword usage and the contexts in which they occurred.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software. Two-way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the main effects of age and gender, as well as their interaction effect, on loanword usage frequency. Discourse samples were transcribed and coded for English loanword occurrences, with each loanword categorized by semantic domain (technology, business, education, popular culture, general) and grammatical integration (adapted vs. unadapted). Qualitative analysis followed a thematic coding approach, identifying patterns in the communicative functions of loanwords (naming novel concepts, expressing prestige/modernity, in-group signaling, efficiency) across different demographic groups.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics committee.

All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality.

Recordings and transcripts were anonymized using participant codes.

4. Results

4.1 Overall Patterns of English Loanword Usage

Analysis of the discourse samples revealed that English loanwords are pervasive in contemporary Uzbek speech, with an average of 12.4 loanwords per 100 words in informal conversation across all participants. The most frequently occurring loanwords were concentrated in semantic domains of technology (smartphone, internet, online, app, kompyuter), business and economics (biznes, marketing, menedjer, ofis), and popular culture (trend, status, selfie, layk).

Approximately 67% of identified loanwords showed some degree of phonological or morphological adaptation to Uzbek, while 33% retained their English pronunciation and were inserted into Uzbek syntactic frames without modification. Common adaptation patterns included vowel adjustments to conform to Uzbek phonotactics and the addition of Uzbek case markers and possessive suffixes.

4.2 Generational Differences

Statistical analysis revealed highly significant generational differences in English loanword usage ($F(2,174) = 87.32, p < .001$). Young adults (18-30) demonstrated the highest frequency of loanword usage (mean = 18.7 loanwords per 100 words), followed by middle-aged adults (31-50, mean = 10.3), and older adults (51+, mean = 5.4). Post-hoc Tukey tests indicated that all pairwise comparisons between age groups were statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming that each successive generation uses English loanwords significantly less frequently than the younger generation.

The domains in which loanwords appeared also varied by age group. Young adults used English loanwords across all conversational topics, with particularly high frequencies in discussions of technology (27.3 loanwords per 100 words) and social media (24.6 per 100). Middle-aged adults' loanword usage was concentrated in professional and educational contexts (13.2 per 100) but remained lower in personal and social topics (7.8 per 100). Older adults' usage was largely restricted to technology-related terms where native equivalents are less established (8.1 per 100) and business contexts (6.7 per 100), with minimal usage in casual conversation (2.1 per 100).

Qualitative analysis of self-report diaries revealed that younger participants often used English loanwords spontaneously and unconsciously, with many noting in post-collection interviews that they were surprised by how frequently they had used such terms. One 24-year-old female participant commented, "I didn't realize I was using so many English words until I started writing them down. It just feels natural now." Older participants, conversely, reported more conscious and deliberate choices when using English loanwords, often explaining that they use such terms only when native alternatives are unavailable or less precise. A 58-year-old male participant stated, "For new technology, I use the English words because there aren't good Uzbek words yet. But for everyday things, I prefer our own language."

4.3 Gender Differences

Gender also emerged as a significant factor in loanword usage ($F(1,174) = 24.61, p < .001$), although its effect size was smaller than that of age. Overall, male participants used English loanwords more frequently than female participants (males: mean = 13.8 per 100 words; females: mean = 10.9 per 100 words). This gender difference was particularly evident in professional and technical discourse, where male participants showed significantly higher loanword use (males: 16.7 per 100 words; females: 11.3 per 100 words; $t(178) = 4.52, p < .001$), especially in discussions related to business, technology, and academic topics.

In contrast, in informal social communication and in discussions of lifestyle, fashion, and interpersonal relationships, female participants displayed comparable or slightly higher loanword usage than males (females: 12.1 per 100 words; males: 11.4 per 100 words; $t(178) = 0.87, p = .39$). Qualitative analysis indicated that female participants tended to employ English loanwords more selectively and strategically, often for stylistic or expressive purposes rather than as default lexical choices. Moreover, female participants demonstrated greater awareness of sociolinguistic variation and code-switching, frequently reporting conscious adjustments of language use

according to interlocutor and communicative setting, whereas male participants less often articulated such strategic considerations.

4.4 Interaction Between Generation and Gender

A significant interaction effect between age and gender was observed ($F(2,174) = 8.73, p < .001$), indicating that gender differences in loanword usage vary across age groups. Among young adults (18-30), males showed substantially higher loanword usage (mean = 21.3 per 100) compared to females (mean = 16.1 per 100), with this difference being statistically significant ($t(58) = 3.24, p < .01$). In the middle-aged group (31-50), gender differences were smaller but still significant (males: 11.7 per 100; females: 8.9 per 100; $t(58) = 2.41, p < .05$). Among older adults (51+), gender differences were minimal and not statistically significant (males: 5.8 per 100; females: 5.0 per 100; $t(58) = 0.74, p = .46$).

These patterns suggest that gender differentiation in loanword usage is most pronounced among younger speakers and decreases with age. This may reflect changing gender roles and educational opportunities, with younger men and women occupying increasingly distinct social and professional niches that involve different levels of exposure to English.

4.5 Communicative Functions of Loanwords

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that English loanwords perform multiple communicative functions that vary across demographic groups. Across all participants, loanwords were commonly used to name novel concepts—particularly in the domain of digital technologies such as *internet*, *smartphone*, *Wi-Fi*, *app*, and *online*—for which stable Uzbek equivalents are lacking. In professional contexts, especially among middle-aged specialists, English loanwords were preferred for their efficiency and precision, as business and technical terminology was perceived to enhance clarity and reduce ambiguity in workplace communication. Among young adults, loanwords additionally functioned as markers of prestige and modernity, signaling education, cosmopolitan identity, and engagement with global culture; lifestyle-, fashion-, and social-media-related terms (e.g., *trend*, *style*, *selfie*, *like*, *post*) were used primarily for expressive and identity-constructive purposes. Furthermore, within groups of young urban professionals and students, English loanwords served as in-group signals, with code-switching between Uzbek and English-origin items fostering solidarity and indicating shared values. Finally, female participants across age groups demonstrated more strategic and stylistically motivated use of loanwords for emphasis, humor, and aesthetic effect in informal communication, suggesting a heightened awareness of loanwords as flexible stylistic resources.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Generational Patterns

The findings of this study strongly support existing sociolinguistic theories that emphasize the role of age as a primary driver of linguistic innovation and change (Labov, 2001; Tagliamonte & D'Arcy, 2009). The substantially higher frequency of English loanword usage among younger Uzbek speakers (18-30) compared to older generations can be explained by multiple converging factors.

First, younger Uzbek speakers have unprecedented exposure to English through digital technologies, social media platforms, and online content that was unavailable to previous generations during their formative years. This exposure creates both passive familiarity with English vocabulary and active contexts for loanword usage in digital communication. Androutsopoulos (2006) documented similar patterns in European contexts, where internet-mediated communication serves as a primary channel for English influence on local languages.

Second, the educational experiences of different generations differ markedly. Young adults in contemporary Uzbekistan have learned English as a foreign language from early ages, with English instruction beginning in primary school and continuing through higher education. In contrast, older generations were educated during the Soviet period when Russian, not English, was the primary foreign language taught in schools. This educational difference creates divergent linguistic repertoires and comfort levels with English borrowing.

Third, English loanwords appear to function as markers of modern identity and global participation for younger Uzbek speakers, similar to patterns observed in other post-Soviet contexts (Ryazanova-Clarke, 2014). The association between English and modernity, technology, and international connection makes loanword usage attractive to younger speakers seeking to position themselves within globalized culture. The finding that older speakers restrict loanword usage primarily to domains where native alternatives are genuinely lacking (such as digital technology) suggests a more pragmatic approach to borrowing driven by necessity rather than stylistic preference. This pattern aligns with research showing that older speakers tend to be more linguistically conservative and more concerned with language preservation (Chambers, 2002).

5.2 Gender and Social Roles

The gender-based differences observed in this study align with broader sociolinguistic research on gender and language variation, while also revealing context-specific patterns related to Uzbek society. The overall higher frequency of English loanword usage among male participants, particularly in professional and technical contexts, likely reflects occupational segregation and differential access to English-dominated professional domains.

In Uzbekistan, as in many societies, men are overrepresented in fields such as information technology, engineering, business, and international trade where English technical terminology is prevalent (Saida, 2022). Greater professional engagement with these domains provides both exposure to English loanwords and communicative contexts where such terms are normative and efficient. The finding that male participants used significantly more loanwords in professional discourse but comparable levels in informal social communication supports this interpretation.

Female participants' more selective and strategic loanword usage may reflect what Coates (2015) describes as greater sociolinguistic awareness and sensitivity to contextual appropriateness. Several female participants in this study explicitly discussed adjusting their language based on interlocutor and situation, suggesting conscious attention to language choice that was less evident among male participants.

The observation that female participants used loanwords more for stylistic and expressive purposes aligns with research showing that women may adopt innovations to construct specific social identities or achieve particular communicative effects (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). In the Uzbek context, where women navigate complex negotiations between traditional expectations and modern opportunities, English loanwords may serve as resources for performing educated, cosmopolitan identities while maintaining appropriate feminine presentation.

5.3 The Intersection of Generation and Gender

The significant interaction between age and gender indicates that these variables jointly shape loanword usage rather than operating independently. Gender differences were most pronounced among young adults and decreased with age, suggesting generational changes in

language socialization and gender roles. Young men's higher loanword use likely reflects their stronger presence in technology-oriented fields and digital communication spaces where English mixing is common, while young women's slightly lower—but still substantial—usage suggests engagement with the same domains alongside additional social expectations regarding feminine language. Minimal gender differences among older adults may result from Soviet-era socialization and limited exposure to English across both genders, producing a floor effect. Overall, the narrowing gender gap appears to reflect broader social changes in Uzbekistan, including increased female participation in higher education and professional domains (Buckley, 1997).

5.4 Implications for Language Change in Uzbek

The patterns documented in this study have important implications for understanding ongoing language change in Uzbek. The high frequency of English loanword usage among younger speakers, combined with the systematic nature of this usage across contexts, suggests that English borrowing is becoming increasingly normalized in Uzbek discourse. Unlike temporary fashion or code-switching phenomena, these loanwords appear to be integrating into the core vocabulary of young Uzbek speakers.

The apparent-time analysis (comparing different age groups at one point in time) suggests real-time language change is occurring, with each generation exhibiting distinct linguistic profiles. If younger speakers maintain their current usage patterns as they age (generational change rather than age-grading), Uzbek will likely experience continued expansion of English-origin vocabulary.

However, the persistence of loanword usage across the lifespan remains an empirical question requiring longitudinal research. Some innovations adopted by youth may be abandoned as speakers age and enter different social roles (Labov, 2001). The finding that middle-aged adults use fewer loanwords than young adults but more than older adults could represent either age-grading (reduction in usage with age) or generational change (each cohort maintaining distinct levels).

The observed resistance among older speakers, while expected, points to ongoing tension between linguistic innovation and concerns about language preservation and cultural identity.

Public discourse in Uzbekistan often frames excessive Russian or English borrowing as threatening linguistic purity (Fierman, 1991), creating potential stigmatization of loanword usage that could influence future patterns.

5.5 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study's focus on Tashkent, the most cosmopolitan city in Uzbekistan, limits the generalizability of the findings to rural areas and smaller cities, where exposure to English is likely lower and patterns of loanword usage may differ. In addition, the cross-sectional design offers only apparent-time evidence and cannot conclusively distinguish generational change from age-related variation; longitudinal research would provide stronger evidence of real-time change.

Moreover, although multiple social variables were considered, factors such as education level, occupational domain, and language attitudes were not systematically controlled and should be incorporated into future, more comprehensive models.

Finally, the combination of self-reported data and recorded speech may have introduced response bias, as participants' awareness of observation could have influenced their language use; more naturalistic data collection methods would help address this limitation.

6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the use of English loanwords in Uzbek is socially patterned rather than uniform, with age and gender emerging as key factors shaping linguistic variation. Younger speakers show substantially higher rates of loanword usage than older generations, reflecting their greater exposure to digital technologies, global media, and English-dominated communicative environments. For these speakers, English loanwords function not only to fill lexical gaps but also to index modernity, education, and participation in cosmopolitan culture.

Gender further refines this pattern of variation. Male speakers use English loanwords more frequently overall, particularly in professional and technical domains linked to occupational exposure to English, whereas female speakers tend to employ loanwords more selectively and in a context-sensitive manner for stylistic and expressive purposes. The interaction of age and gender reveals that young men are the most active users of English loanwords, highlighting how ongoing social changes and shifting gender roles are most visible among younger generations.

Overall, the findings confirm that language change in Uzbek is socially conditioned and unevenly distributed across the speech community. The growing presence of English loanwords reflects broader processes of globalization and technological change, offering communicative advantages while also raising questions about linguistic identity and language planning.

Continued sociolinguistic research—especially longitudinal and regionally diverse studies—will be essential for informing language policy that balances linguistic innovation with the preservation of Uzbek linguistic and cultural heritage.

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