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SEMANTIC GRADATION AND VERB HIERARCHIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study explores how graduonomic features function within hyper–hyponymic relations in the verb systems of English and Uzbek from a lexical-semantic perspective. It focuses on how factors such as degree, intensity, and manner contribute to the formation of hierarchical structures in verb meanings. The findings provide a clearer understanding of how verbs are semantically organized in both languages, highlighting both shared tendencies and language-specific differences in expressing gradation. The analysis shows that English typically distinguishes meanings through separate lexical items, whereas Uzbek conveys similar distinctions through derivational processes, affixes, and manner-related markers. Despite these structural differences, both languages employ multi-level hypernym–hyponym hierarchies to organize verb semantics effectively. Using corpus-based data and componential analysis of motion, speech, and action verbs, the study identifies key semantic features that shape these relationships. The results demonstrate that linguistic structure plays a crucial role in determining how meaning is expressed and categorized. Additionally, the research suggests that verb classification systems form well-organized internal networks and opens up opportunities for further investigation into degree-based semantic organization across languages.

Introduction. The concepts of hypernymy and hyponymy represent an important semantic relationship in linguistics, where general words (hypernyms) are connected to more specific words (hyponyms). These relationships help to organize vocabulary into structured systems, showing how meanings are hierarchically arranged in a language. According to Cruse (2011), such semantic relations are essential for understanding how lexical systems are built and how meaning is distributed across different word categories. In verb systems, this relationship becomes more complex because verbs not only express actions but also carry additional information such as manner, intensity, speed, and degree.

In both English and Uzbek languages, verbs form layered semantic networks, but they differ significantly in how these layers are constructed. English tends to use separate lexical items to express different levels of meaning. For example, the general verb *"move"* can develop into more specific forms such as *walk* → *stroll* → *tiptoe*, where each verb represents a more precise type of movement. Similarly, *run* → *jog* → *sprint* shows increasing intensity and speed through entirely different words. In contrast, Uzbek mainly expresses such semantic differences through morphological and syntactic means rather than separate lexical items. For instance, the verb *"yurmoq"* (to walk) can be modified as *sekin yurmoq* (to walk slowly) or *juda sekin yurmoq* (to walk very slowly), where the core verb remains unchanged but degree is expressed through adverbs. Likewise, *yugurmoq* (to run) becomes *tez yugurmoq* or *juda tez yugurmoq*, indicating variation in speed and intensity without changing the root verb. These examples show that English relies more on lexical differentiation, while Uzbek depends more on derivation, affixation, and modifiers. This difference reflects deeper cognitive and structural patterns in how speakers of each language organize meaning. Recent linguistic studies suggest that such

differences are not only grammatical but also cognitive in nature, as speakers conceptualize actions differently depending on their native linguistic systems (Taylor, 2015; Croft & Cruse, 2004). Therefore, analyzing hypernym-hyponym relations in English and Uzbek verb systems provides valuable insight into how languages encode semantic gradation and how meaning is structured across linguistic boundaries.

Methods. This study employs a corpus-driven comparative framework combined with lexical-semantic analysis to examine graduonomic patterns in English and Uzbek verb hypernym–hyponym systems. The investigation is based on three major corpora: the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), the British National Corpus (BNC), and the Uzbek National Corpus (O‘zbek Milliy Korpusi). The methodology is organized into four main stages. The first stage involves selecting appropriate corpora and compiling relevant verb data. In the second stage, verbs are extracted and categorized semantically, followed by a comparative assessment of their usage patterns across languages. The third stage focuses on semantic classification, while the final stage involves cross-linguistic comparison and interpretation of results. Verb groups representing motion, speech, and action were selected as the primary focus of analysis, as these semantic fields demonstrate clear hierarchical organization and allow for detailed observation of variation in degree, intensity, speed, and manner. English verbs were collected from COCA and BNC based on frequency and contextual relevance, whereas Uzbek verbs were drawn from the Uzbek National Corpus, prioritizing commonly used lexical items and their morphological variants.To ensure reliability, frequency data, concordance lines, and collocational patterns were analyzed to confirm typical usage and contextual behavior of each verb. In the third stage, componential analysis was applied to identify core semantic features such as degree, force, intensity, speed, and manner. This enabled the systematic mapping of relationships between hypernyms and their corresponding hyponyms and sub-hyponyms. The final stage involved a comparative examination of how English and Uzbek encode semantic gradation within verb systems. Particular attention was paid to linguistic mechanisms such as affixation, word formation patterns, syntactic structure in Uzbek, and lexical differentiation in English. This comparison helped reveal how both languages organize semantic hierarchy and express gradational meaning through hypernym–hyponym structures.

Results. 1. Hierarchical structures in motion verbs

The cross-linguistic analysis of motion verbs demonstrates that both English and Uzbek construct clear hypernym–hyponym networks extending across multiple semantic levels, though they differ in the linguistic strategies used to express gradation. In English, distinctions in meaning are predominantly encoded through separate lexical verbs, while Uzbek more frequently relies on adverbial modification and morphological expansion to indicate differences in degree and manner. These patterns reflect broader differences in how the two languages conceptualize and categorize motion events (Taylor 2015).

English

move → walk → wander → meander
run → jog → dash → sprint

Uzbek

yurmoq → asta yurmoq → juda asta yurmoq
yugurmoq → tez yugurmoq → juda tez yugurmoq

The findings indicate that English tends to lexicalize fine-grained distinctions by introducing distinct verbs to express subtle variations in motion, such as *wander* or *meander* for slow or directionless movement, and *dash* or *sprint* for increased speed and intensity. In contrast, Uzbek primarily maintains a stable core verb and modifies its meaning through adverbs and intensifiers like *asta* (slowly), *tez* (fast), and *juda* (very), rather than expanding into multiple independent lexical items. Both languages systematically organize motion verbs into hierarchical semantic structures; however, English shows a stronger tendency toward lexical differentiation, whereas Uzbek more consistently expresses gradation through syntactic and morphological means, particularly through adverbial modification.

2. Gradation patterns in speech verbs

The analysis of speech-related verbs reveals clear graduonomic structuring, where variation is primarily determined by factors such as volume, clarity, and communicative intent. As noted by Croft & Cruse (2004), languages differ in how they encode meaning lexically, with some relying on rich verb inventories while others depend more on syntactic or phrasal constructions. In English, semantic distinctions are largely realized through a wide range of verbs that explicitly mark differences in intensity and communicative force. This aligns with Levin's (1993) observation that English verb meaning is strongly shaped by lexical classes and alternation patterns. In contrast, Uzbek tends to express similar distinctions through manner expressions and adverbial modifiers rather than distinct verb roots.

English examples

speak → say → whisper → murmur
speak → shout → yell → scream

Uzbek examples

gapirmoq → shivirlab gapirmoq → past ovozda gapirmoq
aytmoq → baland ovozda aytmoq → qichqirib aytmoq

The data shows that English systematically differentiates levels of speech intensity by using separate lexical verbs, each carrying a specific degree of force or softness. Uzbek, however, conveys comparable distinctions through descriptive constructions and adverbial elements such as *shivirlab* (in a whisper), *past ovozda* (in a low voice), and *baland ovozda* (in a loud voice), which modify a more general verb form rather than replacing it with entirely new lexical items.

3. Scalar variation in action verb systems

The analysis of action verbs in both languages reveals a structured system of hyponymic relations where meaning is differentiated according to varying levels of intensity, force, and precision. Corpus-based studies show how lexical items are distributed across authentic language use and how scalar meaning is encoded differently across linguistic systems (Geeraerts, 2010). English tends to express fine-grained distinctions through independent verb forms, whereas Uzbek more commonly relies on morphological and adverbial strategies such as intensification, reduplication, and affixation. As highlighted by Lyons (1995), examining usage in context helps to identify subtle boundaries between general hypernyms and their more specific hyponyms.

English

hit → pat → strike → slam → smash
cut → snip → slice → slash → hack

Uzbek

urmoq → yengil urmoq → keskin urmoq → juda qattiq urmoq
kesmoq → ehtiyotkorlik bilan kesmoq → tez va aniq kesmoq → chuqur kesmoq

The English verb sequences (such as *pat, strike, slam, smash* and *snip, slice, slash, hack*) demonstrate clear lexical segmentation, where each verb represents a distinct level of intensity or manner of action. In contrast, Uzbek conveys similar gradational meanings through modifying expressions like *yengil* (light), *keskin* (sharp/strong), *juda qattiq* (very strong), *ehtiyotkorlik bilan* (carefully), and other descriptive markers attached to a more general base verb. From a cross-linguistic perspective, English distributes semantic gradation across separate lexical units, while Uzbek primarily encodes these differences through syntactic and morphological modification of a core verb, allowing both languages to represent hierarchical action structures in distinct ways.

4. Cross-linguistic strategies for expressing gradation

Across all examined verb domains, both languages demonstrate consistent but structurally different approaches to encoding semantic gradation. The way lexical systems organize meaning shows that word choice directly shapes the range of possible interpretations within a language (Saeed, 2016). English and Uzbek therefore differ not in the presence of gradation itself, but in the linguistic mechanisms used to represent it. In English, gradational meaning is mainly realized through the use of distinct lexical verbs, where each verb carries a relatively fixed degree or manner of action. This results in a highly differentiated verb system in which semantic fields are extensively segmented. English also tends to express nuance by expanding its vocabulary inventory, allowing fine-grained distinctions between closely related actions. In contrast, Uzbek more frequently relies on grammatical and syntactic devices to indicate differences in degree. Adverbial modifiers and manner expressions play a central role in shaping meaning, while a smaller set of core verbs is used across multiple contexts. Morphological and syntactic adjustments are therefore key resources for expressing variation rather than lexical replacement. English shows a preference for lexical expansion and verb specialization, whereas Uzbek primarily encodes gradation through structural modification of verb phrases, resulting in fewer but more flexible verb categories.

5. Cross-linguistic patterns of similarity and divergence in gradation systems

Both languages demonstrate organized hypernym–hyponym structures, yet they realize these semantic hierarchies through different linguistic strategies. English typically forms semantic distinctions by introducing separate lexical units, thereby expanding its vocabulary to express finer shades of meaning. In contrast, Uzbek more commonly relies on modifying existing verb roots to convey comparable distinctions, rather than creating a large number of independent lexical items. The analysis suggests that graduonomic organization is a shared feature of both languages, although each language employs distinct structural mechanisms to express it (Qurbonboyeva, 2025).

Discussion. The findings clearly indicate that English and Uzbek differ in how they construct verb-based hypernym–hyponym and graduonomic relationships. English primarily relies on lexical differentiation, where gradation is encoded through sets of distinct verbs. For instance, spatial or posture-related meanings can be represented along a continuum such as *stand, lean, crouch, kneel, lie* (Levin, 1993). These verbs carry relatively fixed semantic values, allowing English to organize meaning through a finely segmented lexical system (Murphy, 2010). In contrast, Uzbek tends to express gradation through morphological and syntactic means, particularly by combining a stable verb root with adverbial or descriptive modifiers. For example, the verb *yugurmoq* (to run) can be modified as *yengil yugurmoq* (run lightly), *tez yugurmoq* (run fast), or *qattiq yugurmoq* (run intensely) (Ochilova, 2024). In this structure, the core verb remains unchanged, while additional elements function as markers of degree, creating flexible semantic variation through modification rather than lexical replacement. The analysis further shows that English frequently distributes near-synonymous meanings across separate lexical items, while Uzbek tends to group such meanings under broader hypernyms and expands them through modifiers. As a result, English verbs often appear in more context-specific lexical clusters (e.g., *walk, stride, march, tiptoe*), each associated with distinct usage conditions. Uzbek, however, extends the meaning of a single verb base through adverbial constructions instead of introducing multiple independent lexical units. These patterns suggest that linguistic systems establish their own constraints on how meaning is structured and divided (Geeraerts, 2010). English generally maintains sharper lexical boundaries between verb forms, resulting in clearer distinctions among related actions. Uzbek verbs, by contrast, exhibit more flexible semantic boundaries, since variation is primarily achieved through external modifiers rather than changes to the verb stem itself. These structural differences also influence translation practices (Akhmedzhanova, 2023). English hyponyms often require multi-word equivalents when rendered into Uzbek, while a single Uzbek hypernym may correspond to several distinct English verbs. Furthermore, the omission of modifiers during translation can lead to shifts in meaning, particularly in terms of intensity and manner (Lyons, 1995). Typological evidence suggests that such patterns align with broader cross-linguistic tendencies. Languages with highly developed derivational verb systems often rely on lexical means to encode gradation, whereas languages with productive adverbial systems tend to express similar meanings syntactically (Fillmore, 2003). Accordingly, both English and Uzbek follow recognizable but different strategies for representing semantic degree. Despite these differences, limited overlap exists between the two languages in the use of fixed expressions to indicate intensity in speech. For example, English *speak softly* corresponds to Uzbek *past ovozda gapirmoq*, both conveying reduced volume through multi-word constructions. Such parallels indicate that languages may converge in certain communicative strategies despite structural differences (Birner, 2013). Speakers of the two languages appear to conceptualize action and gradation in different ways, influenced by the structure of their native linguistic systems. English speakers are more likely to encode actions through discrete lexical choices, while Uzbek speakers often conceptualize actions as scalable units that can be adjusted through modifiers. These patterns reflect how linguistic structure shapes the representation of subtle distinctions in motion, manner, and intensity. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that language structure plays a central role in determining how much semantic detail is encoded within verb systems and how hierarchical relationships between hypernyms and hyponyms are linguistically realized.

Conclusion. This article has offered a detailed examination of how English and Uzbek languages structure hypernym–hyponym relations and graduonomic meanings within their verb systems. The analysis shows that English predominantly encodes gradation through distinct lexical verbs, which results in clearly defined semantic boundaries and relatively rigid verb

groupings. In contrast, Uzbek more commonly expresses degree through adverbial elements and morphological modification, allowing a single verb root to extend its meaning in a more flexible and context-dependent way. These differing strategies significantly influence how each language represents nuanced meanings, organizes action categories, and handles translation between lexical systems. They also affect how motion and manner distinctions are conceptualized and expressed in discourse. The study further indicates that graduonomic relations arise from the interaction of lexical choice, semantic specification, and syntactic structure. Overall, the findings confirm that both English and Uzbek encode degrees of meaning through structured verb hierarchies, but they do so using different linguistic mechanisms that are nevertheless systematic and rule-governed. This research also opens up opportunities for further comparative studies involving other lexical categories and additional languages to better understand how graduonomic systems operate cross-linguistically.

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