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The Gradual Development and Socio-Psychological Foundations of the Interpretation of Speech Etiquette in Literature

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Abstract

This article explores the role of language in human life, focusing on its ethical use and cultural significance. Drawing on the Qur'an, hadiths, and the wisdom of scholars, it emphasizes the importance of using speech for goodness, worship, kindness, and social benefit, while warning against misuse such as gossip, slander, lies, and backbiting. The study also discusses the development of speech etiquette and oratory in both Eastern and Western traditions, highlighting the views of Mahmud Kashgari, Yusuf Khass Hajib, and Zamakhshari, as well as the evolution of *voizlik* (preaching) in Islamic culture. The article concludes that language is a divine gift and a powerful tool that reflects a person's morality, character, and social standing.

Keywords: *Speech etiquette, culture of communication, art of oratory*

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Introduction

Language is one of the invaluable blessings in human life. It serves not only as a means of communication and exchange of ideas, but also as a factor that determines a person's spiritual world and moral character. In the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the hadiths, the use of language with proper etiquette and its application solely for goodness and virtue are especially emphasized. Likewise, Eastern thinkers such as Mahmud Kashgari, Yusuf Khos Hojib, and Zamakhshari expressed valuable reflections on the role of language in society, speech culture, and the art of eloquence. Thus, the ethics of language have been studied as an important social phenomenon not only in religious teachings but also in literary and cultural sources. This article is devoted to analyzing the role of language in human life, its moral standards, and the historical development of speech culture.

Theoretical Background and Review of Previous Studies

Throughout human history, specific norms and etiquette have developed around the use of language. It has always been emphasized in folk tales, religious texts, and the works of world authors that the tongue should not be used for evil (cursing, gossiping, sowing discord, slander, or harassment), but rather for good deeds, such as good wishes, recitation, remembrance of God, prayer, comforting others, and serving the interests of the country, society, and its people.

Among the endless blessings that the Creator has bestowed upon humanity, one of the greatest, most excellent, and rare is the blessing of the tongue (speech). The greatest favor God has given to human beings among all His creatures is the blessing of speech. Humans are the only speaking creatures. There are many recommendations and instructions on how to use this blessing and what to occupy it with. For instance, in the Surah "Ar-

Rahman" of the Holy Quran, it is stated to Muslims, "He taught him speech." And in the 8th and 9th verses of the Surah "Al-Balad" of the Holy Quran, it is said that the tongue is one of the great blessings bestowed upon man ("Did We not give him two eyes, a tongue, and two lips!?").⁴

Indeed, the tongue has great power, as a person's words can either lift a person's spirits like a mountain or bring them to ruin. One can understand a person's manners and morals from just a few words they say.

In the Muslim world, there are a number of hadiths about the etiquette of the tongue. It is narrated in them that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "A believer is not one who curses much, nor one who often invokes damnation, nor one who uses obscene language, nor one who is ill-mannered," and "Cursing a Muslim is an act of disobedience (fusuq), and fighting him is disbelief (kufr)." The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said: "Allah the Almighty says: 'O son of Adam! I have given you a tongue and a sheath for it. Speak of the things I have commanded and made lawful. But if something I have forbidden comes up, hold your tongue...'"⁵ These hadiths make it clear that people should use their tongues only for good and virtuous words.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) particularly emphasized, "The beauty of a person is their tongue," and "The calamity that befalls a person comes from their tongue." Likewise, Luqman the Wise advised his son that whoever keeps company with an evil person will not be safe, whoever enters a place where evil is committed will be slandered, and whoever does not control his tongue will regret it. As emphasized, if a person does not have pleasant speech and good manners, their outward beauty is not taken into account.

The hadiths imply that when people speak carefully, based on the recommendations and

advice found in ethical and religious teachings, it brings them beauty, adornment, respect, and dignity. On the contrary, if they do not, it can bring them hatred and misfortune. In a wise saying narrated from Sufyan al-Thawri, it is stated: "To be shot by an arrow from a bow is better for me than to be shot by a tongue. For the shot of the tongue does not miss, whereas the shot of the arrow sometimes misses." This emphasizes that when people speak, it is better for them to think and reflect first, and then speak only if it brings much benefit. A person's tongue can sometimes cause their good deeds and rewards to be nullified. This is said to happen when a person shows ingratitude, gossips, or slanders someone with their tongue.

The importance of a person's word is so great that a single word can make a person a Muslim or make them apostatize, or it can either reconcile people or cause conflict between them. Allah the Almighty encourages people to protect their tongues from evil and to speak truthfully, calling on the believers in Surah Al-Ahzab (verses 70-71) to fear God and to speak straight words.

A wise person thinks and examines their words carefully before speaking. For this reason, speech is likened to medicine. If taken in moderation, it is beneficial, but if taken in excess, it can be fatal.

Backbiting, slander, and lying are among the afflictions of the tongue. The tongue is considered to be a person's most honored but also most dangerous limb. If a person uses it for good, they will receive great reward, but if they use it for evil, they are certain to face blame. It is emphasized that the tongue is also the main reason for a person's eternal happiness and entry into Paradise or for their misery and entry into Hell.

If a person gives free rein to their tongue and speaks without thinking, it is said that they may fall victim to the greatest sins such as backbiting, slander, lying, and tale-bearing. In particular,

4 Qur'oni Karim. Uzbekcha izohli tarjima [The Holy Qur'an: Uzbek Explanatory Translation] / transl. Alovuddin Mansur. – Tashkent: Chulpon, 1992. – 503 p.

5 Shaykh Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf. Tafsiri Hilol. 6-juz [Tafsir Hilol (Hilol Exegesis). Vol. 6]. – Tashkent: Hilol, 2019. – 477 p.

backbiting is the greatest of the tongue's afflictions, defined as speaking ill of a person in their absence. In Surah Al-Hujurat of the Holy Quran, Allah forbids backbiting, saying, "And do not backbite one another," and likens the person who does so to one who eats the flesh of his dead brother.

It is narrated by Imam Muslim that the Prophet (peace be upon him) also defined backbiting, saying: "Backbiting is to say about your brother what he dislikes. If what you say is true, you have backbitten him. If what you say is not true, you have slandered him."

In a noble hadith narrated by Abu Umamah al-Bahili (may Allah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) emphasized that the state of the backbiter will be dire on the Day of Judgment, stating that the backbiter will be deprived of their virtuous deeds, and the sins of the people who were backbitten will be placed upon the backbiter.

It is known that in Sharia, it is permissible to warn people about fraudsters, extortionists, and those who openly commit sinful acts, as this prevents harm to many. Regarding this, Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his book "Sharhu Usuli Ahli Sunnah wal-Jama'ah": "Speaking about the people of innovation is not backbiting." When a woman was praised in the presence of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), saying: "She worships all night, but she has one fault: she annoys her neighbors with her tongue," the Messenger of Allah said: "She is a woman of Hell."

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "The curse of a parent upon a child causes poverty." It is said that if a parent curses their child often, it can lead to that child becoming helpless and impoverished in the future. Parents are also required not to gossip about one another in front of their children.

A person who listens to someone backbiting without stopping them also becomes a sinner. One day, a man came to Hasan Basri and told him that someone had backbitten him a lot in a gathering. When Hasan Basri learned who the backbiter was, he sent one of his students with a tray of dates and a message: "According to the information that reached me, you backbit me a lot. Please accept this gift as a token of my gratitude."

This story implies that the reward and merit of the person who backbited were transferred to the person who was backbitten, and Hasan Basri showed him this kindness as a reward for that.

Imam Shafi'i said: "If I were to backbite, I would backbite my mother. Because the only person whose good deeds are worthy of being passed on is my mother."

In one of the hadiths related to the tongue cited in Imam Ismail al-Bukhari's book "Al-Jami' al-Sahih," it is said: "The one who does not harm others with his hand or his tongue is a Muslim".⁶

In the section "The Book of the Afflictions of the Tongue" of Imam Ghazali's work "Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din," it is stated in one of the hadiths related to the tongue: "Know that the tongue is a great blessing of God, a wonderful and subtle art. For both disbelief and faith are manifested only by the testimony of the tongue. And disbelief and faith are the starting points of obedience and rebellion."⁷

In verse 105 of Surah An-Nahl of the Holy Quran, it is stated who tells lies: "Indeed, it is those who do not believe in the verses of Allah who fabricate falsehood. And it is they who are the liars." In a narration by Imam Tirmidhi, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said about lying: "When a person tells a lie, the angel moves away from that person for a distance of a mile because of the stench of that lie." This means that a liar's angel will not be with him. It is also emphasized that a truthful person will enter Paradise and be described as a "Siddiq" (the

6 Imom Buxoriy. Al jome as-sahih [Al-Jami' al-Sahih (The Authentic Collection)]. Vol. 1, Book 3. - Tashkent : Qomuslar Bosh Tahririyati, 1991. - 7 p.

7 Ghazzoliy, Abu Homid. Ihyo ulumid-din [Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)] / transl. R. Zohid. - Tashkent : Uzbekistan NMIU, 2019. - 386 p.

truthful one) in the presence of Allah the Almighty. This is because, through truthfulness, the truth in one's heart is brought to the tongue. As narrated by Qays ibn Abi Hazim, Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "Beware of lying, for lying surely distances one from faith."

Great attention has been paid to speech etiquette, speaking culture, and the art of oratory since ancient times. They have developed as an important social phenomenon, accumulating rich experience. In ancient Greece, for example, rhetoric, or the art of speaking, emerged as a separate field alongside epic poetry, drama, music, and other forms of art and achieved high development.⁸

In the history of Central Asian culture, issues of speech etiquette, culture, and style have also been addressed since ancient times. In this regard, some reflections and linguistic evidence on this matter are found in Mahmud al-Kashgari's work *"Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk."* In particular, the saying *"Erdam boshi til"* (The head of virtue is the tongue), which emphasizes that the beginning of good manners is the tongue, attracts special attention. E. Begmatov, who conducted research on the expression of Uzbek speech culture, also noted the presence of proverbs and aphorisms in the *Dīwān*, such as "a person is captivated and enslaved by the sweetness of words."

The *Dīwān* also includes interjections related to customs. Words like *uva/ova* ("yes," "sir/ma'am"), *a* ("oh"), *aj* ("hey"), *awa* ("oh"), the interjection *öp-öp* expressing regret and disapproval, and the interjection *saq-saq* meaning "be careful" are examples. Each of them conveys a specific meaning.

The wisdom "The head of etiquette is the tongue" was also recognized by Yusuf Khos Hajib.

The issue of speech etiquette was also covered in the work *"Navobig' ul-Kalim"* (Subtle Expressions) by the great Khorezmian linguist Abu-l-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar az-Zamakshari, who lived and worked in the 11th century.

The art of oratory was widespread not only in the West but also in the ancient East. In the East, it was known as *"voizlik."* This term is derived from the Arabic word *"wa'z,"* which means to encourage beautiful speech and to give advice and admonition. A person who spoke beautifully and wisely was called a *"voiz."* The term *"voiz"* denoted a person who preaches or delivers a speech.

Until the 9th century, the role of a *voiz* in the East was fulfilled by caliphs and kings. From the 9th century onward, state rulers entrusted this duty to special masters of speech under their authority, adding the word *"voiz"* to their names, such as Husayn Voiz Koshifiy, Muhammad Rafiq Voiz, Voiz Qazviniy, Voiz Shirvaniy, Muhammad Voiz, and Voiz Samarqandiy.

From the 12th century, many scholarly, historical, and stylistic treatises were written by *voizes* that interpreted and described the theory and practice of the art of *voizlik*. Examples include Muhammad Rafiq Voiz's *"Avbob ul-inon,"* Voiz Qazviniy's *"Zilolu maqol,"* Voiz Shirvaniy's *"Ahsan ul-ahodis,"* Muhammad Voiz's *"Hidoyat ul-taqvim,"* Quraysh Saidi's *"Anis ul-voizin,"* Voiz Samarqandi's *"Ravzat ul-voizin,"* Qazi Oshi's *"Miftoq ul-najjih,"* and Voiz Koshifi's *"Dah Majlis"* and *"Mahzan ul-insho."* Additionally, some historians, poets, and narrators of hadith expressed their thoughts on the art of *voizlik* in their works. In their view, speaking in a beautiful and artistic manner, and maintaining the etiquette of a concise yet meaningful speech, was considered a unique art.

In Yusuf Khos Hajib's work *"Qutadghu Bilig,"* oratory developed as a form of ethics, closely intertwined with morality, and was valued as an important component of a person's spiritual character.

During the era of Alisher Navoi, the status of the Uzbek language and the art of oratory rose to a very high level. For this reason, Alisher Navoi spoke about the oratory skills of dozens of *voizes* in his works, such as Khoja Muayyad Mehnagi, Mawlana Riyazi, Mawlana Irshad, Hatam Asom,

8 Antik adabiyot tarixi [History of Ancient Literature]. – Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 1959. – 412 p.

Voiz Koshifi, and Muin Voiz.

Alisher Navoi wrote: "Do not look at the state of the speaker, but look at the state of the word." He himself also seriously engaged with issues of speech culture and the art of oratory.

During Navoi's time, those involved in the art of oratory and related fields were known as nadims (companions), qissago'ylar (storytellers), masalgo'ylar (parable tellers), badihago'ylar (improvisers), qiroatkhonlar (reciters), muammogo'ylar (riddle makers), voizes (preachers), go'yandalar (orators), maddohlar (eulogists), and qasidakhonlar (reciters of odes). The art of voizlik was conducted mainly in three forms: a) dabilirlik – reciting state correspondence; b) khatiblik – delivering a sermon (khutbah); c) muzakkirlik – giving a speech on Fridays, during Eid, and other ceremonies.

The art of voizlik was also divided into three categories based on the social-political status and position of the audience and voizes, as well as other characteristics: a) sultoniyya – speeches for the upper class; b) jihadiya – speeches for participants in battle; c) gharibona – speeches intended for ordinary citizens.

Each of these differed in its writing, delivery, and the conditions and methods of preaching. In ancient times, the art of words was equated with the art of military command. This is because states and borders that could not be conquered with an army could be subdued with the art of words. It is for this reason that Alisher Navoi correctly stated that he conquered places the sword could not with the pen.

Research method

In the process of preparing the article, historical, contextual, conceptual, ethnofolkloristic, and cultural sources were analyzed through a comparative method. Information derived from the Holy Qur'an and the hadiths, as well as the

views expressed in the works of prominent thinkers such as Mahmud Kashgari, Yusuf Khos Hojib, Imam al-Ghazali, and Zamakhshari, were examined as a scientific foundation. Based on these sources, the significance of linguistic etiquette, speech culture, and the art of eloquence in social and spiritual life was revealed. In addition, through a literary-historical approach, the formation of speech etiquette within both Eastern and Western cultural traditions was analyzed.

The study employed methods of comparison, generalization, and logical deduction to determine the role of language in shaping human morality and social standing. Furthermore, the research highlighted that language is not only a communicative tool but also a powerful medium for preserving cultural identity, transmitting values across generations, and fostering intercultural dialogue. By placing language within a broader philosophical and cultural framework, the article emphasizes its enduring importance as a unifying element in human civilization.

Results

The study revealed that language, particularly the use of the tongue, occupies a central place in human life, religion, morality, and culture. The analysis of religious texts, literary sources, and historical works demonstrated that speech etiquette is regarded not merely as a communicative tool but as a determinant of human dignity, ethical conduct, and spiritual refinement.

The Qur'an and the Hadiths consistently emphasize the responsible use of the tongue, encouraging truthfulness, prayer, remembrance of God, and beneficial communication, while strongly condemning lying, backbiting, gossip, and slander. The findings highlight that the tongue is considered both the most honorable and the most dangerous human faculty, capable of bringing eternal happiness or misfortune depending on its use.

The research also found that classical Muslim scholars and thinkers—such as Mahmud al-Kashgari, Yusuf Khos Hajib, Imam al-Ghazali, and Zamakhshari—viewed the tongue as the foundation of virtue and social harmony. Their works provide numerous aphorisms, reflections, and examples that underscore the social, moral, and aesthetic role of speech. Similarly, the stories and anecdotes about Luqman the Wise, Hasan al-Basri, and Imam Shafi'i further illustrate the profound moral responsibility attached to language.

A comparative analysis showed that the art of oratory developed both in the East and the West as a highly respected discipline. In the Muslim East, the tradition of *voizlik* (eloquent preaching and moral instruction) emerged as a unique form of rhetorical culture, evolving through various stages and producing a rich legacy of treatises, sermons, and scholarly writings. Figures like Alisher Navoi raised the status of the Uzbek language and eloquence, recognizing the power of words as equal, if not superior, to military might.

The study also revealed that speech culture in Central Asia is deeply embedded in proverbs, aphorisms, and folklore, which preserve moral wisdom and linguistic etiquette across generations. Expressions recorded in *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* and *Qutadghu Bilig* testify to the long-standing value placed on the tongue as the beginning of virtue.

Overall, the results indicate that:

1. Speech is both a divine blessing and a moral responsibility, capable of determining an individual's faith, dignity, and destiny.
2. The ethics of the tongue have been a universal concern, emphasized equally in sacred texts, classical scholarship, and folk wisdom.
3. The art of eloquence developed as a distinct cultural and intellectual tradition, serving religious, political, and social functions in both Eastern and Western civilizations.

4. Central Asian thinkers contributed uniquely to the theory and practice of speech etiquette, embedding it within the broader context of morality, culture, and statecraft.

These findings demonstrate that speech etiquette, as a cultural and moral phenomenon, remains highly relevant today, reminding modern society of the enduring importance of words in shaping human behavior, social relations, and collective identity.

Discussion and conclusion

Language is one of the greatest blessings granted to humanity, and its proper and purposeful use defines a person's morality, spirituality, and social standing. The Qur'an, the hadiths, and the works of classical thinkers emphasize that the tongue should be devoted exclusively to noble purposes—such as truth, kindness, and remembrance of God—while avoiding vices like gossip, slander, and falsehood. Historical and cultural sources equally affirm that speech etiquette, eloquence, and the art of oratory have always been recognized as vital components of social life. Therefore, adherence to the ethics of speech is not merely a personal virtue but also a decisive factor in the development, harmony, and stability of society. This research reaffirms that language, as a spiritual and cultural value, has held an unparalleled place in human civilization since ancient times.

Moreover, the enduring wisdom of religious teachings, philosophical reflections, and cultural traditions reveals that language is more than a communicative tool; it is a force that preserves identity, transmits values, and unites communities. In the modern era—marked by globalization and rapid digital communication—the ethical use of language becomes even more critical. Respectful, truthful, and thoughtful speech can help maintain mutual trust, prevent social discord, and foster peace both within societies and across cultures.

In this sense, the study underscores that the true beauty of humanity lies not in outward appearance or power but in the nobility of the word. Language, when used with wisdom and restraint, remains a timeless source of human dignity, moral guidance, and collective progress.

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