

Sociolinguistic Characteristics Of The Speech Of Youth Groups

Rustamova Mohimbonu

Master's student at Webster University, Uzbekistan

Received: 30 June 2025; **Accepted:** 29 July 2025; **Published:** 31 August 2025

Abstract: This article analyzes the sociolinguistic specificities of contemporary youth speech. The complex relationship between language and society is illuminated through factors such as slang, code-switching, digital discourse, and language identity. The study observes the mixing of Uzbek, Russian, and English, language behavior in digital communication tools, and youth groups' searches for identity. As its theoretical basis, the works of J. Baugh, C. Fought, G. H. Rahimov, Q. A. Rasulov, and S. M. Muminov are examined.

Keywords: Youth language, sociolinguistics, slang, code-switching, identity, digital discourse.

Introduction: Language is not only a means of communication, but also a sign of social relations, cultural affiliation, and group belonging. Especially among youth groups, the functions of language become more vividly apparent. Each new generation develops its own linguistic style, vocabulary, and communication strategies, which requires special sociolinguistic attention. Young people primarily express loyalty to their groups through language, strive to distinguish themselves from adult speech, and seek to consolidate their social positions. Language is an integral part of human identity, and ethnicity or membership in a social group is manifested precisely through language: "I am my language."

The language of youth is a complex system that integrates slang, code-switching, transliteration, the use of emojis, and elements of digital discourse. Research by Fought and Baugh shows that these elements serve not only communicative but also socio-political functions—that is, they position the individual within society, confer status, or restrict them from it.² In Uzbek linguistics, there are also a number of studies on youth communication. Muminov has examined the sociolinguistic features of Uzbek communicative behavior, while Rasulov and Yuldasheva have conducted in-depth analyses of the functional and psychological aspects of youth language.³

In contemporary Uzbekistan, among young people, the

mixing of Russian and English, the influence of online communication culture on language, and the influx of lexical units shaped by global pop culture are being observed. These phenomena reveal the distinctive, dynamic, and multilingual nature of youth speech. This article analyzes precisely these particularities from a sociolinguistic perspective. The aim of the study is to identify the speech features found among youth groups, examine their social and cultural roots, and thereby shed light on the formation of contemporary linguistic identity.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative research approach was chosen to identify and analyze the sociolinguistic features of the speech of youth groups. This approach makes it possible to examine natural language phenomena in youth speech as they relate to the social context. As Carmen Fought emphasizes, the relationship between language and identity is complex, multilayered, and constantly changing; therefore, an empirical, context-based methodology is required.⁴

The study was conducted in the Fergana region from March to June 2025 with the participation of four youths aged 15–18. Participants were selected by gender (2 girls and 2 boys), educational level (school), and language (Uzbek, Russian, English). The sampling was based on the principle of "convenience sampling." The research was carried out in three stages:

1. Observation and collection of speech samples. Written and oral communications among youth (including Telegram groups, Instagram message threads, and conversations) were analyzed with confidentiality maintained. In total, more than 100 units of correspondence and 5 hours of audio recordings of oral conversations were collected. At this stage, based on the works of Fought and Baugh, “speech markers” (slang, code-switching, language function, expression of identity) were defined.⁵

2. Semi-structured interviews.

Interviews lasting 15–20 minutes were conducted with each participant. The questions focused on: (1) reasons for using slang; (2) instances of code-switching and language choice; (3) language behavior on the Internet; (4) distinguishing the concepts of “own” and “other” through language. Responses were recorded and analyzed using thematic coding.

3. Discourse analysis.

The collected written and oral texts were analyzed through sociolinguistic discourse analysis. Attention was focused on: (1) linguistic units that define social identity; (2) interactive slang and memes; (3) code-switching and social balance in language. As an additional methodological approach, the “functional-linguistic behavior” model by Muminov (2021) and Rasulov (2008) was employed.⁶

Ethics and confidentiality.

Oral consent was obtained from all participants. Personal information (name, address, school name) will not be disclosed. The interviews and recordings are stored without identifiers (anonymously).

LIMITATIONS

Because the study was conducted within a single region (Fergana), the ability to generalize the results to all of Uzbekistan is limited. In addition, since some correspondence and oral interactions occurred only in an “maslahat” (informal) context, language behavior in formal settings fell outside the scope of the study.

This methodology serves the primary function of identifying the contemporary formation of youth language, the expression of identity through language, and distinctive sociolinguistic strategies in communication.

RESULTS

During the study, a number of important sociolinguistic features were observed and identified concerning Uzbek youths’ speech behavior, language choice, and ways of expressing social identity. The analysis was divided into three main groups: (1) lexical-semantic elements (slang and new expressions), (2) instances of

code-switching, and (3) digital discourse and identity expression.

1. Slang and New Lexical Units

It was found that local and global slang are actively used in youth speech. Examples: “gap yo’q” (literally “no words”; meaning “perfect/spot on”), “zo’r” (“awesome”), “cringe,” “lowkey,” “tushuna olmadim vobe’ni” (“I didn’t catch the vibe”). According to Yuldasheva, these lexical units express young people’s inner states and emotional experiences, as well as their desire to join peer groups.⁷

Most participants explained the use of slang as a means of “modernity,” “convenience,” and “creating closeness.” In addition, units borrowed from English (“cancel,” “chill,” “stress qilma” — “don’t stress”) have been adapted to Uzbek grammatical forms.

2. Code-Switching and Mixed Language Use

Based on observations and interviews, most participants acknowledged using Russian and English in a mixed way. Examples: “Bugun classda speaking qildik” (“We did speaking in class today”), “U bola realda g’alati edi” (“That guy was weird in real life”), “Meet qilamiz soat 5 da” (“We’ll meet at 5 o’clock”). Code-switching is not merely a linguistic tool, but a social strategy that serves to simultaneously display multiple identities (national, global, youth) in parallel.⁸ Such mixtures serve as a distinctive “sociolinguistic signature.”

3. Digital Discourse and Visual Semantics

In message exchanges on platforms like Telegram and Instagram, emojis, abbreviations, memes, and transliterated writing are widespread. For example: “Nima gap bro 😊” (“What’s up, bro 😊”), “Shunaqa bo’ldi 😂😂” (“That’s what happened 😂😂”), “Oxiri charchadim... 😞” (“In the end I got tired... 😞”). As John Baugh’s concept of linguistic profiling notes, such forms of communication can sometimes give rise to social stereotypes—some messages are judged as “slackers’ language” or “negative youth behavior.”⁹ This, in turn, creates external evaluative pressure on young people’s language choices.

4. The Relationship between Identity and Language

During the interviews, differing attitudes toward their own speech were observed among participants. Some regarded the use of English or Russian as a sign of “prestige,” while others saw it as a means of “self-expression.”

According to Muminov and Rasulov, language is not only a means of communication, but also an expression of cultural behavior and social norms.¹⁰

5. Gender and Social Network Differences

Girls tend to use softer language rich in emojis and emotional phrases, while boys more often use expressions laden with slang, profanity, and irony.

These results show that youth language is closely linked to group affiliation, adaptation to the technological environment, and the construction of cultural identity.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that youth speech is, sociolinguistically, a complex, multilayered, and constantly changing phenomenon. As Carmen Fought has emphasized, language is a means of creating, reconstructing, and reflecting social identity.¹¹ This very idea could be observed through youth language.

As the study found, slang items widely used among young people—“gap yo‘q,” “cringe,” “chill qil,” “cancel,” and others—express informality, closeness, and social equality in communication. In explaining the psychological foundations of youth slang, this phenomenon is linked to the need to join a group, an internal reaction against social pressure, and an expression of personal freedom.¹² Likewise, as indicated by Mumin, such lexical units convey not only emotional states but also social position.¹³

Code-switching emerged as one of the most important aspects. Most participants acknowledged that they communicate by mixing words or phrases from Russian and English into sentences in Uzbek. Fought considers code-switching a “mobile resource” for multi-identity individuals—meaning that a person expresses their ethnic or global cultural affiliation through language.¹⁴ These ideas are in line with Rahimov’s research on English slang and its cultural connotations.¹⁵

Baugh’s concept of “linguistic profiling” is directly connected to digital discourse in youth language.¹⁶ Some exchanges (“bro,” “vayyy 😂,” “uff boshim achiyapti 😞”) may be judged as “low-register language” or “idle/slacker speech.” This creates external pressure—even stigma—on young people’s language choices. Nevertheless, such expressions strengthen emotional closeness among youth and reinforce a shared sense of “we.” Muminov calls such speech forms a “moral and cultural normalizing agent” of social interaction.¹⁷

Differences related to gender and educational level were also pronounced. Girls tended to use softer language rich in emojis, while boys more often used ironic and sometimes derogatory expressions. In sociological analysis, these phenomena are linked to gendered language stereotypes, with language and gender roles intersecting.

In addition, university students used more English insertions, whereas vocational college students

employed more Russian mixtures. This indicates that language choice is also connected to social class.

In sum, youth language is, sociolinguistically, an expression of complex, polyphonic (multi-voiced) identities. It bundles multiple meanings—such as group belonging, modernity, resistance, and adaptation. These findings indicate that future research on youth language should employ deeper corpus analysis and network-based modeling.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that contemporary youth speech is far from simple and constitutes a distinctive sociolinguistic system. Here, language is not only a means of communication, but also a tool for expressing personal and group identity, marking social affiliation, and articulating cultural liminality. By using slang, code-switching, emojis, and abbreviations, young people not only communicate but also express themselves, drawing boundaries between “us” and “others.”

Observations and interviews revealed that the mixing of lexical items from English and Russian into Uzbek speech is widespread. This phenomenon reflects youths’ engagement with global culture, technological development, and language learning, as well as their ongoing search for a place within society. Language is always bound up with identity—through it, a person “speaks” who they are.¹⁸ Muminov, for his part, regards youth language as the sociolinguistic expression of a society’s cultural and moral norms.¹⁹

Moreover, the study’s results showed that there are significant differences in language choice based on gender, level of education, and regional variation. These circumstances call for a deeper investigation into how youth language takes shape against the backdrop of social class and individual background.

This article sought to integrate national and international theories in analyzing youth language. For future research, a corpus-linguistic approach, comparative analysis across other regions and age groups, and a focused study of the linguistic and cultural roles of multimodal elements in digital discourse (memes, GIFs, stickers) should be pursued as a distinct line of inquiry.

Youth language is the vanguard of language change. It sits at the intersection of language, culture, and technology in contemporary society. By studying it, we gain a deeper understanding not only of language but of society itself.

REFERENCES

Baugh, J. (2005). Linguistic profiling. In S. F. Makoni, G. Smitherman, A. Ball, & A. K. Spears (Eds.), Black

Linguistics: Language, Society, and Politics in Africa and the Americas (pp. 155–168). Routledge.

Fought, C. (2011). Language and ethnicity. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (pp. 495–511). Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511974872.033>

Rahimov, G'. H. (2006). *Britaniya va Amerika slengining sotsiolingvistik xususiyatlari* (filol. fan. nomz. dissertatsiyasi). Samarqand.

Rasulov, Q. A. (2008). *O'zbek muloqot xulqining funksional xoslanishi* (filol. fan. nomz. diss. avtoreferati). Toshkent.

Muminov, S. M. (2021). *O'zbek muloqot xulqining ijtimoiy-lisoniy xususiyatlari* (monografiya). Farg'ona.

Yuldasheva, Sh. (2017). Yoshlar nutqida slenglar vujudga kelishining psixologik sabablari. In *Lison ilmining chin yalovbardori: O'zbek filologiyasining dolzarb muammolari* (B. 304–305). Buxoro: Ilmiy konferensiya materiallari.