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The Cognitive Origin of Taboos and Common Roots

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the linguocognitive value and meaning of taboo, which in linguistics refers to ethnographic lexis, and analyzes its semantic structure. Lexical units in the vocabulary of a language are abstracted in the mind through deep linguistic structures, logical, psychological, philosophical, social, etc., foundations formed in the linguistic consciousness, and are reflected in the language through a cognitive model. As we know, taboo is a forbidden word and action. Language is a product of centuries-old human knowledge and human consciousness. Taboo words and their interpretation help to understand the meaning of folk customs. The main goal of the work is to examine cognitive phenomena in the language in close connection with the formation of the spiritual world of people speaking that language - their thinking, language consciousness, and the national consciousness that develops on its basis. The article considered the meaning of prohibitions and their common roots. The linguocognitive, linguocultural, and educational significance of taboos is explained on the basis of the continuity of taboos in cognition and tradition. Research methods: ethnolinguistic, comparative-descriptive, lexicographical selection. According to the results of the study, words that are prohibited from being mentioned are considered separately from euphemisms, which indicates their special cultural and cognitive significance. Despite the grammatical differences, we conclude that there are some common features between Kazakh and English. The research highlighted the ethnolinguistic nature of words and compared their existence in different languages.

Keywords: Taboo; Common Roots; Cognition; Linguocognitive; Linguoculture; Ethnography; Prohibition; Customs and Traditions

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1. Introduction

In the Kazakh language, taboos are distinguished more by their qualitative nature than by their quantitative occurrence. This distinction reflects not merely the presence of prohibitive expressions or practices, but rather the deeper cultural and cognitive dimensions embedded within them. When examined in comparison with data from other world languages, the unique cognitive worldview of the Kazakh people becomes increasingly apparent. Taboos in Kazakh culture are not isolated linguistic phenomena; they are deeply interwoven with the historical, mythological, and spiritual fabric of the nation. Through such comparisons, it becomes possible to identify culturally specific attitudes toward sacredness, social hierarchy, nature, and interpersonal relationships.

The cognitive evolution of taboos in Kazakh society is closely linked with mythological thinking. As consciousness developed through historical stages, so too did the interpretation and use of taboo language. Mythology, as a system of symbolic narratives used to explain the world, plays a central role in shaping the meaning and function of taboos. In the early stages of cultural development, mythological thinking contributed to the creation of a symbolic system in which certain words, objects, or actions were considered forbidden due to their association with the sacred, the dangerous, or the unknown. These symbolic restrictions, initially rooted in spiritual beliefs and fear of the supernatural, later evolved alongside the growth of rational consciousness, gradually integrating into the moral, ethical, and linguistic norms of Kazakh society^[1].

Although the term *taboo* originates from the Polynesian Tongan language—where it referred to things that were sacred or prohibited—the concept itself has transcended its geographic and cultural origins. Historically grounded in religious and ritual contexts, taboos have become a universal feature across human societies. Today, the term is widely used in disciplines such as ethnography, anthropology, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies to refer to culturally specific systems of prohibition. These systems function as regulatory tools that shape social behavior, preserve moral order, and reflect collective worldviews.

In Kazakh culture, taboos manifest both linguistically and behaviorally, often tied to issues such as kinship, gender roles, respect for elders, death, and sacred elements of the

natural world. For example, Kazakh linguistic taboos include the use of euphemisms to avoid direct mention of death or bodily functions, as well as restricted vocabulary in certain social contexts—such as a bride refraining from naming her in-laws directly. These linguistic practices are not merely ornamental; they reflect deep-seated cultural values related to modesty, reverence, and communal harmony^[2].

Unlike in some cultures where taboos may be rigid or formalized through religious doctrine or legal systems, in Kazakh society, many taboos operate within the flexible domain of oral tradition and social etiquette. They are passed down informally through generations and reinforced by proverbs, myths, and everyday speech patterns. This oral transmission ensures that taboos are both resilient and adaptable, capable of evolving in response to changing social norms and external influences.

The analysis of taboos in the Kazakh language provides important insights into the collective cognitive processes of the Kazakh people. It reveals how values, beliefs, and social structures are encoded into language and how language, in turn, shapes patterns of thought and interaction. As societies modernize and global communication becomes more prevalent, some traditional taboos may weaken or be reinterpreted. Nevertheless, many continue to hold significance, serving as markers of cultural identity and repositories of ancestral knowledge^[3].

In sum, taboos in the Kazakh language and culture are not merely prohibitive practices—they are cognitive and cultural constructs that reflect the worldview, history, and social dynamics of the Kazakh people. Their study contributes not only to our understanding of the Kazakh linguistic landscape but also to broader discussions on how human societies use language to regulate behavior, convey values, and construct meaning.

Since taboos are considered linguistic phenomena that reflect the foundations and features of worldview, psychology, lifestyle, culture, etc., linguistics' interest in taboo words is also explained by the limitless possibilities of changing word meanings, enriching the vocabulary of the language, and developing speech culture^[4].

Taboos, euphemisms, and dysphemisms are universal linguistic phenomena present in all human languages. These forms of expression are not only integral to everyday communication but also hold significant relevance across multi-

ple academic disciplines, including linguistics, ethnography, ethnolinguistics, lexicography, and intercultural communication. Each field contributes to a deeper understanding of how these linguistic strategies function and evolve within different cultural contexts. In particular, they reflect the values, social norms, and psychological attitudes of a speech community, offering insight into both language use and cultural identity^[5].

The study of these phenomena is especially important because they play a dynamic role in shaping the structure and expressive capacity of language. Euphemisms often serve to soften the impact of socially sensitive topics, while dysphemisms may intensify emotional expression or reinforce in-group versus out-group distinctions. Taboos, on the other hand, reveal societal boundaries and moral codes. Continued scholarly interest in these linguistic forms is thus unsurprising, as they not only reflect but also influence the evolution and function of language over time^[6].

By examining how taboos, euphemisms, and dysphemisms operate in various languages, researchers can better understand the interplay between language and culture, and how linguistic choices shape human interaction.

The article analyzes all concepts related to taboos and prohibitions, starting from the period before the Kazakhs formed as an ethnic group and continuing to the present day based on specific principles^[7,8].

The relationship between root and taboo is an important object of study from the point of view of ethnolinguistics. The structure and meaning of taboo words and roots reflect the worldview, cultural values, and historical development of

language in society. This project contributes to understanding the linguistic structures of roots and taboos in cultural contexts, as well as to identifying new directions in ethnolinguistic research^[9].

2. Glossary of Key Terms

Cognition—the process of acquiring and structuring knowledge about the world.

Ethnolinguistics—the study of the relationship between language and cultural behavior.

Taboo—a culturally regulated prohibition governing behavior or speech.

Euphemism—a milder linguistic form used to avoid direct reference to a taboo subject.

Cultural code—a system of shared meanings and norms that guide social behavior.

3. Materials and Methods

Taboos have a special place in society in order to maintain equality and peace. The German psychologist W. Wundt considered taboos to be the most ancient spiritual code of mankind (**Table 1**). Suleimenova, E., noted that taboo-oriented behavior is a tool for strengthening important norms and values for the maintenance of society. Thus, the term “cognition” refers to categories that are ambiguous in terms of cultural context, and the boundary between them is defined. Nowadays, cognition is considered a universal phenomenon that occurs in society and fulfills certain functions^[10].

Table 1. The Role of Taboos and Cognition in Society.

Aspect	Description	Scholars/Theoretical Views	Function in Society
Social Role of Taboos	Taboos act as moral and social regulators that help maintain equality, peace, and order within society.	W. Wundt considered taboos the most ancient spiritual code of humankind. A. Radcliffe-Brown viewed taboo-oriented behavior as a means of strengthening important social norms and values.	Preserve harmony, reinforce moral order, and prevent social conflict.
Cognition in Cultural Context	Cognition reflects how people perceive and interpret reality through cultural categories and meanings.	Cognition involves processes and methods of acquiring knowledge about the laws and phenomena of the objective world.	Defines cultural boundaries and supports shared understanding.
Epistemological Function	Cognition serves as the foundation of human knowledge and understanding of reality.	The theory of knowledge (epistemology) explores the essence, forms, and principles of cognition.	Explains how knowledge arises and connects with reality.

Cognition is a set of processes, procedures, and methods for obtaining knowledge about the phenomena and laws

of the objective world.

Cognition is the main subject of epistemology. By

defining the essence of knowledge, its forms and principles, the theory of knowledge tries to answer the question of how knowledge arises and how it is related to reality^[11].

The study of taboos in ancient societies is deeply intertwined with religious rituals, spiritual beliefs, and socio-cultural practices. These elements are extensively explored in early scholarly works, particularly those by prominent theologians such as Sagyndykuly, B., provide foundational insights into how taboos functioned as part of religious systems, often serving to regulate behavior, maintain social order, and reinforce sacred traditions. These early texts emphasize the sacred nature of taboos and their role in delineating the boundaries between the sacred and the profane^[12].

Collectively, these studies underscore the significance of taboos in shaping not only religious and ritual behavior but also language use and interpersonal relationships within Turkic societies. The academic interest in this area reflects an enduring recognition of taboo as a powerful cultural and linguistic force that continues to influence human behavior across time and space^[13–17].

4. Results and Discussion

There are various taboos in different cultures, which are determined by historical, religious, social and other factors. Topics such as sexuality, religion, and death are taboo in many cultures, and breaking these taboos can lead to negative consequences such as stigmatization, isolation, or punishment. Some taboos may be specific to certain groups or social strata, while others may be common to the whole society. Women, for example, may be prohibited from entering a sacred temple in certain cultures, or the consumption of pork may be prohibited in religious communities of different faiths^[18].

In the course of studying the linguistic and cognitive features of taboos, we consider taboo words, examples of oral literature, poems, oratorical sayings and historical, etc., chronicles, various lexicographic works as materials and sources for our research work. Nowadays, taboo is considered a universal phenomenon that takes place in society and performs the same tasks. And cognition is trying to answer the question about the phenomena and laws of the objective world^[19]. It is advisable to consider cognition not only from a philosophical perspective, but also from a number of other

special scientific disciplines, such as cognitive psychology, scientific methodology, history of science, science, and sociology of education^[20]. The basis of the cognitive direction in linguistics is in the work of N. Chomsky, J. Miller, F. Johnson-Laird, J. Lakoff, R. Schenk, M. Johnson, etc. Today, this branch of science is being studied and comprehensively supported in the works of other scientists in Russian linguistics, such as N.D. Arutyunova, E.G. Belyaevskaya, E.S. Kubryakova, V.Z. Demyankov, Yu.S. Stepanov, I.A. Sternin, V.N. Teliya, V.A. Maslova.

V.V. Radlov emphasized the fact that Altai Turks have restrictions on speech for women, saying, “The Altai woman is completely subordinate to her husband and does not dare to say his name directly.” Turkmen people also use the phrase “ayu” instead of her husband’s name, and Tuvan women use the phrases “amdı kiji” and “demgi kiji”, meaning “my wife”^[9]. In Turkic society, the words used by spouses when talking about each other in front of others, the way in which they communicate while maintaining marital values, demonstrate the richness and socio-cultural characteristics of the Turkic languages. In addition, the fact that spouses do not say each other’s names stems from the belief in the magic of words. Among Kazakh women, a firmly established custom of naming the newlywed bride’s grandfather and mother-in-law, brothers-in-law and uncles, sisters-in-law and in-laws, and older people in the village is the tradition of giving their own names. At tergeu is a tradition that not only proves the dignity and resourcefulness of Kazakh women, but also reflects the rich cultural heritage and national values of the Kazakh people^[21].

In academic discourse, the terms *prohibition* and *taboo* are frequently used interchangeably, likely due to the influence of the Polynesian origin of the word *taboo*, which connotes something sacred and forbidden. However, from a cognitive and cultural-linguistic standpoint, particularly within the context of Kazakh culture, it is essential to differentiate between general prohibitions and culturally specific taboos. This distinction reflects a unique mental framework characteristic of the Kazakh worldview.

Not all prohibited expressions in Kazakh qualify as taboos. For a prohibition to be considered a true taboo within the Kazakh cognitive system, several key criteria must be met. First, the taboo must evoke a sense of fear or awe. Second, it should be grounded in beliefs related to sacredness,

property, or kinship, reflecting deeply held cultural values. Third, it must stem from ancient nomadic traditions and religious consciousness, representing a product of archaic cultural thinking. Finally, the validity and application of the taboo often depend on temporal factors—its relevance may change over time or according to specific contexts.

Recognizing these distinctions not only enhances our understanding of Kazakh linguistic and cultural practices but also contributes to broader cross-cultural studies of cognition and language^[22].

When determining the taboos in the vocabulary of the Kazakh language, it can be seen that their number is significantly less than the prohibitions. The main reason is that the prohibitions were formed and came into use throughout history. And the taboos appeared in the early stages of the formation of our people and spread through transmission from generation to generation. Taking this into account, it can be seen that the meaning of the prohibition is much broader, and the taboo is a part of the Kazakh prohibitions (*yrym-tyim*).

Taboo words belonging to the oldest layers of the lexical layer also changed their meaning and character in the archaic period. In ancient times, when humanity was in close contact with nature, and in later times, when it began to separate from nature, the scope of use of taboos was narrowed, and a number of prohibitions were completely eliminated due to the development of civilization. This process is a clear indication that the time factor plays an important role in the study of this concept. Therefore, in determining the main meaning of taboos, it is necessary to consider them in connection with changes in popular consciousness, dividing them into periods. Over time, a given society begins to develop or lag behind. The changes that have occurred in society are primarily reflected in the language, culture and ideology of the nation. In ancient times, when the first signs of the times were heard, and in the modern era, when science and technology have developed, the people's perception of life and truth has evolved into two different models. The most directly influencing factor is the lifestyle of the people.

It is also clear that the concept of taboo has a place in the culture and language of each people is inherently ambiguous. Its first side is based on a negative meaning, and the second side is a positive aspect that replaces it. For example, the word “snake” has a negative effect on the Kazakh people, and they try to name it as a whole, but this word is not replaced

by “button” or “long”, but rather simply perceived as one of the crawling brothers^[23]. The exact two sides of the table are somewhat controversial in the correct recognition and correct terminology of the phenomenon in question. At the same time, some of the lexemes belonging to taboo sources do not conform to literary norms. For example, illness *sheshek*, such as “*korasan*”, “*aulie*” or “*kul*” are universally understandable^[24]. These taboos, on the other hand, are created on the basis of a completely literary language norm, and their meaning is always clear and understandable. Taboos have a specific nominal quality. This is because, most often, it is formed from the noun. It is clearly observed in the division of taboos into thematic groups. Among the words that are euphemisms, one can find various lexical and grammatical units. For example, *kulagin mukisi bar* (Keren)—means a negative meaning, *kaitis boldi (olu)*—a word that replaces the noun of action.

The creation of euphemistic meaning in language involves a variety of stylistic and rhetorical devices. Among the most common are tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, symbol, irony, and epithet. These devices allow speakers to convey sensitive or socially delicate topics in a more acceptable or softened manner. In addition to these figures of speech, euphemisms frequently emerge through the use of phraseological units, proverbs, ellipses, and aphorisms, all of which serve to obscure or mitigate the directness of expression.

For instance, when referring to death—a topic often surrounded by cultural and emotional sensitivity—languages may substitute the word “dead” with more indirect expressions such as “returned,” “the world was destroyed,” or “the soul was educated.” These euphemisms function to reduce the emotional impact and reflect cultural or spiritual beliefs about the afterlife or the nature of death.

In contrast, such stylistic richness is not typically found in taboo expressions. Taboos are often marked by strict prohibitions rather than creative linguistic transformation. Unlike euphemisms, which reshape language to maintain politeness or social harmony, taboos tend to limit expression altogether, often leading to avoidance or silence rather than substitution.

“Taboo is a special ethnolinguistic phenomenon that constantly enriches the vocabulary of any language with neologisms, or rather, euphemistic synonyms or homonyms”^[25]. Linguistic taboos hold a profound cultural significance, serv-

ing as gatekeepers that delineate acceptable and unacceptable language use within a society. These taboos, embedded in language, reflect the values, beliefs, and norms of a culture, functioning as a subtle yet powerful mechanism that regulates communication. At their core, linguistic taboos encompass words, expressions, or topics deemed sensitive, inappropriate, or offensive within a particular cultural context. They often revolve around societal norms, traditions, and historical factors, shaping how individuals interact and communicate with one another.

The cultural significance of linguistic taboos manifests in various ways. They act as custodians of respect and hierarchy within communities. For instance, in some cultures, using informal language or addressing elders improperly might violate deeply ingrained norms of respect, resulting in social repercussions. Similarly, certain words or phrases might carry historical or religious connotations, rendering them taboo or forbidden in specific contexts^[26]. Moreover, unlike all other words, taboo words (and in particular swear words) are used almost only with a connotative function.

Taboo, as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, involves a categorical prohibition that is generally accepted without the need for explicit explanation or justification. Within the communities where taboos exist, their authority is not questioned; instead, they are accepted as inherent truths passed down through generations. Scholars often associate taboos with semantic features such as “sacred,” “unclean,” “dangerous,” and “fearsome.” These features underscore the deep-rooted psychological and cultural functions of taboos, which serve to protect individuals, families, clans, or entire societies from perceived dangers—both physical and metaphysical.

Functionally, taboos act as regulatory mechanisms that guide human behavior, defining what is acceptable and what is forbidden. In their earliest forms, taboos were often linked to the belief in supernatural consequences and were perceived as vital for maintaining harmony between the human and spiritual realms. Over time, these unwritten prohibitions were integrated into the customs, traditions, and ritual practices of different cultures. Eventually, as societies evolved and institutional frameworks developed, many taboos were formalized into religious doctrines and legal systems. What were once superstitious or sacred restrictions began to transform into codified laws that governed the everyday lives of

people.

The evolution of taboo into law reflects a broader process of social development. Legal norms derived from earlier taboos began to define the rights and responsibilities of individuals and governing authorities. These laws addressed core aspects of social life, such as personal safety, the sanctity of property, family structures, professional conduct, and ownership rights. As these regulations expanded and gained international recognition, they contributed to the foundation of modern legal systems and helped structure the development of civilizations.

In early societies, taboos were often associated with totemic beliefs, whereby certain natural elements—such as the Sun, Moon, Earth, specific animals, or trees—were considered sacred. These entities were believed to possess protective or divine powers, and any interaction with them was governed by strict rules. Violation of these taboos was thought to bring misfortune or divine retribution. This worldview gradually shifted with the rise of organized religion, which centralized the idea of a singular divine power responsible for the creation and governance of the universe. While the names and conceptualizations of this supreme being vary—Yahweh, Buddha, Tenir, God, Allah, among others—the foundational belief remains consistent: this higher power influences the moral, spiritual, and legal dimensions of society through sacred texts, prophets, and institutionalized religious practices.

Taboos, both in ancient and modern contexts, are typically categorized into two broad types. The first includes universal taboos related to fundamental aspects of human existence—such as those concerning death, sexuality, bodily functions, and incest. These taboos tend to appear across cultures and are often deeply rooted in collective human psychology. The second category encompasses culturally specific taboos, which reflect the values, history, and identity of a particular society. These may include prohibitions related to food, dress, gender roles, language use, or social hierarchies, and they often serve to reinforce national, ethnic, or religious distinctiveness.

The study of taboos thus offers valuable insight into the ways in which societies manage fear, maintain order, and express collective identity. As living cultural constructs, taboos continue to evolve in response to social change, globalization, and shifts in ethical norms. In contemporary settings, some

traditional taboos have diminished in significance, while others have transformed or reemerged in new forms, particularly in areas related to gender, race, and technology. Regardless of their form, taboos remain a powerful force in shaping human behavior, language, and social structures.

When new forbidden words enter the language, their establishment is a possible variant of their taboo establishment. A forbidden word, when viewed, does not retain its original taboo character, but becomes a unit of the real language. Protection, control, it can retain its forbidden connotations, depending on the cultural significance of the term or the intention of the speaker. In languages with a high level of formality or respectability, the use of taboo words can be strictly regulated. In such cases, adopted taboo words are often attributed to the lower registers of speech and can be avoided in formal or polite situations. This is often the case with slang or vulgar terms borrowed from other languages. After all, both Russian and Persian belong to the Indo-European group of languages. At that time, the word gold was also used in English in ancient times. As we have already said, *p* is an ancient phoneme, and *l* is a new phoneme. So, *L* in the Russian word “zoloto” can be replaced by the old *P*. The transition of *d* in the first and last syllables of this lexeme arose on the basis of the correspondence of *a~o*, and the vowel *o* in the middle (*lo*) on the basis of the correspondence of *u~o*. And the consonant *z* appeared on the basis of the consonant *c* of the hard consonant. Summarizing the above-mentioned bases, if we reconstruct the name “zoloto” as before: *saru ta*. In Kazakh, the formula *u~u~y* transforms the form “*saru*” into the “*sary*” form. In ancient times, the root *ta* was used in the concept of “mountain” even when it was in this form. Although the suffix *s*, which gives the plural meaning, and the suffix *n*, which gives the singular meaning, were not added, depending on the word with which it was combined, it had both plural and singular meanings. Professor Berikbai Sagyndykuly proved that “*saru ta*” in this combination gives the concept of “yellow stone”. In English, the word gold also had the name *tas* or yellow *tau* in the *Sary* language in ancient times.

It is known that the name gold occurs one hundred and twenty times in the Old Testament. In the original version, the same name is given. In English, gold is called *Gauld* (*gəʊld*) in ancient sources during the campaigns of the warrior Beowulf. The name “gold” was called *altan* by the

Mongols, *altun* by the Turkic peoples, and *altin* by the European peoples. Although it was preserved in three different regions, this lexeme arose from the phenomenon of internal inflection in the Turkic-Mongolian languages. The Turkic-Mongolian peoples called a precious stone found in its raw, natural state *altan*. After processing it and shaping it to the desired shape, it was called *altun*. A variety of decorative items such as earrings, bracelets, rings, and necklaces were made from “*altun*”. Using the laws of internal inflection (*gulthan* “gold”), it entered the German language as *gultan*. As a result, it acquired a similar name in each country, while preserving the phenomenon of internal inflection.

5. Conclusion

The new implications of the study are evident from the following results:

- During the work, it was proven through prohibitions that the nature of striving for goodness in Kazakh cognition is directed against the avoidance of evil.
- The process of development and change of individual human and general public consciousness was described on the basis of the taboo words found.
- Identified the main functions of taboos from the communicative point of view.

Taboos are intended to stop unpleasant, unwanted actions. They are used to discourage bad behavior, inappropriate behavior, and bad character. They are used to measure the humane and faithful qualities of people. Taboos are necessary in all situations of society.

Taboo is a complex concept that is related to circumstances and time, to an individual, as well as to society and the people as a whole. Today, there are many words for taboos in many languages of the world. However, over time, when compared with the original, there are differences in their use and meaning. It's no secret that some language and dialect taboos are becoming obsolete and forgotten.

In conclusion, Kazakh taboos, constantly enriched, refined, and perfected at each stage of civilization, have become a universal, nationally common principle that regulates the relations between man and nature, man and man, and man and society, thereby maintaining social order and serving to establish harmony.

Modern aspects of linguistic interaction, which arose

as a result of globalization, contribute to strengthening mutual understanding between cultures and peoples, opening up new horizons of intercultural communication. Thus, linguistic ties between the Kazakh and English languages play an important role in the development of cultural dialogue and expanding opportunities for interaction between different communities. Continuing these ties helps to deepen understanding of common historical and cultural processes, and strengthen the ties between peoples and languages in a globalized world.

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Conceptualization, A.K. and D.A.; methodology, B.K.; formal analysis, A.K.; investigation, A.K.; resources, D.A.; data curation, B.K.; writing—original draft preparation, A.K.; writing—review and editing, A.K.; visualization, D.A.; supervision, B.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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