

Scottish International Conference on Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation – SICMRI 2025

LANGUAGE AND MORALITY: HOW YOUNG PEOPLE EXPRESS UNIVERSAL VALUES IN EVERYDAY SPEECH

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for communication — it is a mirror of human consciousness, culture, and morality. The way individuals use language reflects their perception of right and wrong, their emotional sensitivity, and their social values. In this regard, the study of youth language is especially significant, as young people are often the first to respond to moral, cultural, and technological changes in society.

In the 21st century, globalization, digitalization, and social media have profoundly shaped how youth interact and express their moral positions. Young people today communicate in ways that reveal their sense of justice, empathy, equality, tolerance, and authenticity — all of which are essential universal human values. Through their everyday speech, they both reflect existing moral norms and actively reshape them.

This thesis aims to analyze how the language of youth serves as a vehicle for expressing morality and universal human values in daily communication. The research focuses on the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between language and morality in modern society.
2. To analyze how young people express universal values such as empathy, justice, equality, and respect through everyday speech.
3. To explore how digital communication and slang influence moral expression among youth.

CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE, MORALITY, AND VALUES

1.1. Language as a Reflection of Morality

Morality is the system of principles and judgments shared by society to distinguish right from wrong. Language, as a social instrument, expresses these moral principles. Halliday¹ argued that language functions as a “social semiotic,” meaning that every word choice carries social and ethical meaning.

For example, polite expressions like “*please*,” “*thank you*,” or “*excuse me*” reflect moral awareness and respect for others. Conversely, offensive or disrespectful language indicates a lack of moral restraint. Thus, morality is not only a matter of behavior but also of linguistic choice.

Every culture encodes moral norms in its language. In Uzbek, expressions such as “*rahmat*,” “*iltimos*,” “*kechirasiz*” reflect humility and respect — central values in traditional morality.

¹ Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Edward Arnold.

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Similarly, English phrases like “*no worries*,” “*my bad*,” and “*I appreciate it*” convey moral responsibility and empathy. Language, therefore, is a daily performance of ethical values.

1.2. Universal Human Values in Linguistic Expression

UNESCO² defines universal human values as moral principles shared by all people regardless of culture: respect, honesty, justice, love, equality, tolerance, and peace. These values are manifested through the way individuals speak — their tone, word choices, and communicative intentions.

Youth language, often dismissed as casual or non-standard, is in fact a powerful indicator of contemporary morality. It reveals how young people internalize universal values and reinterpret them in modern contexts. When a teenager says “*no hate*,” “*stay kind*,” “*love yourself*,” or “*we move*,” it shows a moral attitude based on empathy, resilience, and acceptance — even if expressed in informal language.

CHAPTER II. MORAL DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH LANGUAGE

2.1. Empathy and Emotional Expression

Empathy is one of the strongest moral values expressed in youth communication. Young people tend to use emotionally supportive and understanding language, especially on social media. Phrases such as “*I feel you*,” “*you got this*,” and “*don’t give up*” reflect compassion and shared emotion.

Digital expressions like emojis (, ,) or abbreviations (*ILY* – “I love you,” *TBH* – “to be honest”*) serve as emotional shorthand that conveys sincerity and affection. These linguistic habits show how empathy is embedded in the communication style of young generations.

In Uzbek youth culture, similar values appear in expressions like “*xafa bo’lma*,” “*sen zo’rsan*,” “*barchasi yaxshi bo’ladi*.” Although these phrases are informal, they reflect genuine care and optimism, revealing that morality can exist within colloquial speech as strongly as in formal discourse.

2.2. Respect and Equality

Respect is another universal value deeply rooted in language. Youth language often challenges traditional power hierarchies and promotes equality through informal but inclusive speech. For instance, English-speaking youth increasingly prefer gender-neutral terms like “*they/them*” instead of binary pronouns, reflecting moral awareness of diversity and respect for identity.

On social media, addressing others as “*bro*,” “*sis*,” “*fam*,” or “*mate*” breaks down social barriers and creates a sense of equality and community. This linguistic solidarity is a modern moral code — one that values mutual understanding over hierarchy.

² UNESCO. (2021). *Youth and Global Citizenship: Promoting Universal Values through Education*. Paris.

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In Uzbekistan, the younger generation often uses more egalitarian speech patterns than older people. While traditional Uzbek emphasizes respect through honorifics (*sizlash*), modern youth combine it with informal friendliness (*senlash*), balancing equality and politeness in their communication.

2.3. Honesty and Authenticity

Another essential moral aspect of youth language is authenticity. In contemporary slang, being “*real*” or “*true to yourself*” is considered morally good, while “*fake*” or “*two-faced*” is condemned.

Expressions like “*no cap*” (meaning “no lie”), “*fr*” (“for real”), or “*lowkey*” (meaning “honestly, but quietly”) show that young people value transparency and sincerity. This linguistic honesty demonstrates that morality in youth discourse is based on authenticity rather than conformity.

Similarly, Uzbek expressions like “*rostini aytsam,*” or “*chin dildan*” also highlight the moral significance of truthfulness. The universality of such expressions across cultures proves that honesty remains a shared moral value among youth worldwide.

CHAPTER III. DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND MORALITY IN YOUTH SPEECH

3.1. The Internet as a Moral Space

Digital communication platforms have become the main environment for modern moral dialogue. Social networks allow youth to express their ethical beliefs instantly and globally. Movements such as *#BeKind*, *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#StopBullying*, and *#SaveTheEarth* illustrate how linguistic expression can inspire moral awareness and social responsibility.

Youth language in these digital spaces often carries a moral tone — defending justice, promoting kindness, or rejecting discrimination. Online phrases like “*don’t judge*,” “*respect all*,” “*hate has no home here*” illustrate how moral values are integrated into everyday online speech.

3.2. The Role of Slang and Humor in Moral Expression

Slang and humor, often perceived as amoral or rebellious, actually serve as vehicles of ethical communication. Through jokes, memes, and wordplay, young people criticize injustice, hypocrisy, or social inequality in creative ways.

For example, memes mocking arrogance or discrimination implicitly support humility and fairness. Humor becomes a moral tool — allowing youth to discuss serious issues through accessible and non-confrontational language.

In Uzbek online communities, humor is frequently used to address moral and social topics — such as kindness, patience, and respect for parents — often wrapped in sarcasm or irony. This shows that moral discourse can adapt to youth culture without losing its ethical essence.

CHAPTER IV. CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES AND GLOBAL MORALITY

4.1. Globalization and Shared Linguistic Morality

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Globalization has fostered a new kind of moral community — one that transcends national borders through shared language trends. English, as the global lingua franca, serves as the main carrier of moral expressions among young people. Phrases like “*spread love*,” “*choose peace*,” “*be humble*,” and “*help others*” circulate across cultures, reflecting a global moral vocabulary.

Uzbek youth, like their peers elsewhere, often adopt these expressions, translating or localizing them into “*mehr ulash*,” “*tinchlikni tanla*,” “*kamtar bo‘l*,” etc. This adaptation indicates moral globalization — the blending of linguistic and ethical consciousness.

4.2. Language, Identity, and Moral Agency

Language not only reflects morality but also shapes moral identity. Through linguistic choices, young people define who they are and what they stand for. When youth consciously reject hate speech, prefer inclusive terms, or express compassion in conversation, they actively perform morality.

According to Eckert³, youth speech is a performance of social identity. Therefore, moral expression in language is not passive; it is an act of agency — young people use words to construct a morally aware identity. This aligns with the global value of responsibility — the moral duty to use language ethically.

CONCLUSION

Language and morality are inseparable dimensions of human interaction. Every word we choose, every phrase we repeat, contributes to the moral climate of our community. Among the younger generation, this connection becomes especially visible, as youth constantly redefine the boundaries of what is acceptable, respectful, and kind.

Through their everyday speech — whether in face-to-face interactions or on digital platforms — young people express universal human values such as empathy, honesty, equality, and freedom. Their language is filled with expressions of care, tolerance, and self-awareness. Even slang, emojis, and abbreviations serve moral purposes, helping to build understanding and emotional connection.

The moral power of youth language lies in its inclusivity and creativity. It allows individuals to communicate across cultures, question injustice, and promote kindness in ways that feel natural and authentic.

Therefore, studying the moral aspects of youth language reveals not only linguistic innovation but also the ethical evolution of humanity. In the words of David Crystal⁴, “Language is the index of human spirit” — and in the case of youth, it is also the voice of global moral consciousness.

³ Eckert, P. (2012). *Language and Adolescence*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press.

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