

**IDENTIFYING GENDER INEQUALITY ELEMENTS IN CURSES AND
METHODOLOGY FOR DISCUSSING THEM IN EDUCATION**

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Abstract: This article examines the presence of gender inequality elements in curses as part of oral folklore and proposes a methodological framework for integrating their critical discussion into the educational process. Curses, while functioning as expressive speech acts, reflect social attitudes, stereotypes, and cultural perceptions of gender roles. In many contexts, curses directed toward women are linked to their domestic responsibilities, appearance, or motherhood, whereas curses toward men emphasize authority, strength, and social dominance. This imbalance reproduces gender inequality embedded in cultural heritage. The article argues that discussing these linguistic elements in education not only enhances cultural literacy but also promotes critical thinking and gender sensitivity among students.

Keywords: gender inequality, curses, folklore, education, methodology, stereotypes, cultural literacy, critical thinking.

Language is not only a means of communication but also a powerful instrument that reflects and shapes cultural values, social relations, and collective identities. Folklore, in particular, carries deep insights into the worldview of a community. Among the various genres of oral folklore, curses occupy a special place as emotionally charged linguistic expressions that often expose hidden attitudes toward individuals, families, and social groups. While curses may seem to be merely spontaneous outbursts, they serve as valuable cultural texts that embody social norms and power relations.

From a gender perspective, curses provide a rich field for analysis because they often highlight unequal perceptions of men and women. In many societies, including Uzbek culture, curses directed at women are commonly associated with their roles in the domestic sphere: their duties as wives and mothers, their physical appearance, or their perceived moral behavior. By contrast, curses targeting men are generally tied to public and social domains such as authority, courage, strength, or economic responsibilities. This division illustrates how language encodes patriarchal values and perpetuates gender inequality through everyday speech.

The persistence of such expressions is not accidental. Folkloric forms like curses, proverbs, and sayings are passed down across generations, becoming part of the shared cultural memory. As a result, they influence how individuals perceive gender roles, even if unconsciously. For young learners, repeated exposure to such biased expressions can normalize unequal expectations of men and women, limiting their ability to envision more egalitarian relationships.

Education, therefore, has a critical responsibility in addressing this issue. The classroom provides a space where students can analyze, question, and reinterpret cultural artifacts. By critically examining curses, learners can recognize how language reflects historical inequalities and consider how society can move beyond them. Such discussions not only strengthen cultural literacy but also equip students with the skills of critical thinking, empathy, and gender sensitivity, which are essential competencies in contemporary education.

Moreover, integrating gender analysis of folklore into the curriculum aligns with the goals of modern pedagogical reforms, which emphasize inclusivity, respect for diversity, and the development of reflective citizens. Addressing sensitive cultural elements such as curses must be done with methodological care, but if handled appropriately, it transforms a seemingly negative tradition into an effective educational tool. In this way, teachers contribute not only to language learning and cultural studies but also to the promotion of social justice and equality.

The relationship between language, folklore, and gender has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate in linguistics, anthropology, and education. Many researchers agree that language not only reflects but also reproduces power relations and social hierarchies, including those based on gender. Curses, as part of oral folklore, are especially revealing because of their emotional intensity and symbolic function in expressing social norms.

One of the earliest contributions to the study of language and gender was made by **Robin Lakoff (1975)** in her seminal work *Language and Woman's Place*, where she argued that linguistic practices are deeply connected to women's subordinate position in society. Her observations have been expanded by **Deborah Cameron (1992)**, who examined how gendered discourse functions as a system of control, shaping both identity and social relations. These insights are relevant to folklore, where gender-biased curses serve as clear examples of how cultural language practices perpetuate inequality.

Judith Butler (1999) advanced the discussion with her theory of performativity, which suggests that gender is not an innate quality but is constructed through repeated linguistic and social practices. In this light, curses can be understood as performative acts that reinforce traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity. Similarly, **Janet Holmes (2008)** emphasized that sociolinguistic practices often normalize inequality by embedding stereotypes in everyday communication.

From a folkloristic perspective, researchers have long noted that oral traditions act as cultural mirrors. Proverbs, sayings, and curses often encapsulate collective wisdom, yet they also reveal biases and stereotypes. **Finnegan (1992)**, in *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts*, highlighted how folklore encodes power dynamics, while **Abu-Lughod (1990)** demonstrated how oral practices reflect and resist social structures, particularly in relation to women in Bedouin societies. In Central Asian contexts, studies of oral folklore similarly note the persistence of patriarchal norms embedded in traditional speech.

In terms of education, **Sunderland (2004)** argued for the importance of analyzing gendered discourses in classroom contexts to promote awareness and critical reflection. Her work demonstrates that discussing linguistic stereotypes can help students challenge traditional roles and imagine new possibilities for equality. **Hmelo-Silver (2004)** also showed that problem-based learning and critical inquiry methods enhance students' ability to reflect on complex issues, making folklore analysis a useful pedagogical strategy.

The integration of folklore into educational practice has been further supported by **Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005)**, who stressed that preparing teachers for the 21st century requires equipping them to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Similarly, **UNESCO (2015)** emphasized the role of education in promoting gender equality, noting that curricula must include critical engagement with cultural practices that reinforce inequality.

Finally, research on critical pedagogy, such as **Paulo Freire's (1970)** *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, highlights the necessity of empowering learners to question cultural norms and oppressive

structures. In this framework, analyzing curses as part of folklore becomes a tool for liberation, allowing students to uncover hidden ideologies and resist inequality.

In summary, the literature confirms that curses, as part of oral folklore, are not merely linguistic curiosities but meaningful cultural artifacts that reproduce gender norms. Scholars across disciplines—from sociolinguistics to pedagogy—highlight the importance of critically analyzing such practices to foster awareness, reflection, and social change.

The collected data consisted of a range of curses drawn from Uzbek oral folklore, literature, and everyday speech. The analysis focused on identifying linguistic patterns, semantic structures, and cultural contexts that reveal gender-based differences in the use and meaning of curses.

The analysis revealed clear asymmetries in the way curses are directed at men and women:

1. Curses toward women

- Frequently associated with domestic and reproductive roles (e.g., infertility, loss of children, failure as a wife).
- Often emphasize appearance or physical qualities, reinforcing stereotypes that a woman's value lies in her beauty and ability to maintain family honor.
- Highlight moral behavior, such as accusations of disobedience or dishonor, indicating the societal expectation that women safeguard tradition and family reputation.

2. Curses toward men

- Primarily focus on social and economic responsibilities (e.g., loss of wealth, failure in leadership, weakness in protection of family).
- Symbolically target power and authority, reflecting men's perceived role as decision-makers and providers.
- Less frequently involve appearance or domestic duties, suggesting that men are judged mainly by their social position rather than private life.

This imbalance demonstrates that curses reproduce and reinforce patriarchal norms, assigning women to private and reproductive domains while positioning men in public and authoritative roles.

When these findings were introduced in classroom discussions with students, several patterns emerged:

- **Critical awareness:** Students began to recognize how everyday language reflects cultural stereotypes. Many expressed surprise that curses, often considered “harmless” expressions, actually reveal deeper inequalities.

- **Engagement:** Interactive activities such as debates and role-plays helped students reinterpret traditional curses into expressions promoting equality. For example, replacing curses based on appearance with those emphasizing fairness or kindness.

- **Gender sensitivity:** Female students reported feeling validated when the discussion highlighted how linguistic traditions often place unequal burdens on women. Male students also became more reflective about the cultural expectations of masculinity.

- **Cultural literacy:** The process deepened students' appreciation for folklore as a cultural heritage, while also understanding that traditions can be critically analyzed and reinterpreted for modern values.

The study showed that integrating gender analysis of curses into the educational process has the following outcomes:

1. **Raised gender awareness** – Students became more conscious of the unequal ways men and women are represented in cultural language.

2. **Improved critical thinking** – Learners developed skills to question and analyze cultural norms rather than passively accepting them.

3. **Enhanced participation** – Interactive and problem-based methods increased classroom engagement and discussion quality.

4. **Positive attitudinal change** – Students showed greater openness to equality-based values and a willingness to reinterpret traditions in constructive ways.

Overall, the results indicate that curses, while traditionally seen as negative speech acts, can be transformed into effective pedagogical tools when critically analyzed. They provide an accessible way for students to connect cultural heritage with modern principles of equality and social justice.

The analysis of curses within Uzbek folklore has demonstrated that these linguistic expressions serve as important cultural artifacts, carrying not only emotional force but also deep insights into social structures and gender relations. While curses are often dismissed as mere verbal aggression, they in fact reproduce collective assumptions about men and women's roles in society. The findings of this study revealed a clear asymmetry: women are predominantly cursed in relation to domestic responsibilities, appearance, and reproductive functions, while men are cursed in terms of authority, social standing, and economic roles. This distinction illustrates how patriarchal values are embedded in oral traditions, reinforcing unequal expectations for both genders.

The educational significance of these findings is profound. By critically examining curses, students are encouraged to reflect on how language shapes thought, identity, and social norms. Classroom discussions based on this material proved to be highly engaging, helping learners to question stereotypes, develop critical thinking, and strengthen cultural literacy. The process also promoted gender sensitivity, with students recognizing how cultural expressions can influence attitudes toward equality. Thus, curses, traditionally seen as negative, can be recontextualized as valuable teaching tools for fostering awareness, inclusivity, and social justice.

In broader terms, the study highlights the role of education in transforming cultural practices. Rather than rejecting folklore, educators can reinterpret it, showing that traditions are not static but dynamic, capable of evolving alongside contemporary values. When approached thoughtfully, folklore becomes not only a subject of study but also a means of social progress.

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