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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Grammatical Norm in Uzbek And Its Shifts in Contemporary Usage: A Contrastive Study with English

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Abstract

The article examines the grammatical norm of Standard Uzbek and its relation to codification, actual usage and variation, using English as a point of comparison. The central question is how recurrent morphosyntactic patterns of present-day spoken and digital communication can be told apart from genuine grammatical change. Uzbek, with its agglutinative morphology, productive case and possessive marking, relatively flexible constituent order and pro-drop, is set against English, whose more analytic system relies on comparatively rigid SVO order and a developed auxiliary syntax. Several phenomena of colloquial Uzbek prove to differ in status: genitive–accusative levelling, postverbal constituents, ellipsis, syntactic fragmentation and the integration of English lexical items by means of Uzbek suffixes or the light verb qilmoq. Some reflect the new visibility of long-standing dialectal and colloquial variants in digital public space; others show productive patterns extending under language contact. On this view the grammatical norm is a historically regulated balance between systemic stability, variation and changing usage rather than a fixed inventory of prescriptions.

KEYWORDS

Grammatical norm, variation, contemporary speech, Uzbek, English, grammatical change, digital discourse, code-switching, corpus linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

Talk of a language norm usually brings to mind an opposition between "correct" and "incorrect" forms. Grammar does not fit that opposition easily. The norm of a literary language comprises the grammatical means that a community has accepted in a given historical period and that have become stable in education, publishing, official correspondence and mass communication. Actual speech does not simply reproduce this system: speakers draw on the resources of the language differently depending on the setting, the pace of interaction, social closeness, genre and intention. A conception of the grammatical norm as a rigid template standing outside speech therefore says little about how a language actually lives (Begmatov et al., 1983; Qo'ng'urov et al., 1992).

The communicative space of Uzbek has widened sharply. Alongside the press and television there are now Telegram, Instagram, YouTube, short messages, video blogs, podcasts, online teaching and fast-paced work chats. Many colloquial forms that used to live mainly in speech have moved into writing, and unedited text has become publicly visible. Claims that are easily confused must therefore be kept apart: that a form has become more frequent in usage, and that the grammatical norm of the literary language has changed. Digital space accelerates change, but it also exposes variants that were previously rarely recorded. A form that strikes an observer as new may in fact be historical, dialectal or long established in colloquial speech.

English offers a useful comparison here. Grammatical change in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century English has been studied in detail on the basis of matched corpora. Leech, Hundt, Mair and Smith traced frequency shifts in modals, semi-modals, the progressive, the passive, noun phrase structure and relative clauses (Leech et al., 2009), and Mair interprets recent developments in relation to standardization, colloquialization and movement across genres (Mair, 2006). For Uzbek, long-term and mutually comparable corpus observation of this kind is only beginning to take shape. The comparison thus brings out differences in the methods by which change can be demonstrated, as well as in structure.

The aim of the article is to redescribe the grammatical norm of Uzbek against the background of current changes in usage, to develop criteria for determining the normative status of the forms observed, and to compare them with well-documented changes in English. The discussion moves from the theoretical nature of the grammatical norm to the core morphosyntactic properties of Uzbek, the main variants found in colloquial and digital speech, the parallel processes in English, and the diagnostic features needed for codification decisions.

The novelty of the study lies in replacing the binary scheme of "norm versus error" with a model of 3 layers: a codified core, a zone of functional variants, and an innovative periphery whose units have not yet acquired normative status. The model keeps colloquial, dialectal, digital and contact phenomena from being measured by a single yardstick, while corpus research on English serves as an external check on what kind of evidence normative change requires.

The strength of a literary norm lies less in its immutability than in its capacity to regulate change. E. Begmatov and other representatives of the Uzbek school of speech culture link the literary norm to collective choice, social recognition and stable use. N. Mahmudov explains the correctness, precision and appropriateness of speech by reference to purpose and situation as well as to formal rules (Mahmudov, 2007). The grammatical norm thus draws on the internal potential of the language system on the one hand and on the historically formed choices of the speech community on the other. The system may admit several variants; the literary norm assigns some of them to the core, others to particular styles, and still others to dialectal or non-literary use.

Nor can the grammatical norm be equated with the rules in a textbook. A textbook presents the codified state of affairs, whereas usage shows what recurs in actual communication. Codification and usage usually coincide, though a gap may open between them. When a change in usage spreads over a long period to broad social groups, to different genres and to edited texts, codification may have to be reconsidered. Declaring a unit typical of one age group, region or platform to be a change in the literary grammar would, on the other hand, be premature.

The tension between prescription and description has a long history in linguistics. Labov argued that variation should be treated as a systematic phenomenon with a social distribution, not as random corruption (Labov, 1972). J. Milroy and L. Milroy observe that although the ideology of the standard elevates certain variants to the status of the only correct forms, variation is always present in natural languages (Milroy & Milroy, 2012). The point matters for Uzbek: agglutinative morphology supplies strong formal markers, yet the alternation between marked and unmarked case forms, the person and number markers of the predicate, word order and ellipsis together open up a wide functional space.

In Sh. Safarov's pragmalinguistic approach, linguistic form is never detached from communication: meaning and communicative function are activated in context, although context cannot load a form with any content whatsoever (Safarov, 2008). The same balance is needed in evaluating the grammatical norm. A departure from the usual SOV order need not be an error, since focus, theme–rheme structure or expressive emphasis may call for a postverbal constituent. Yet the existence of a pragmatic motive does not mean that a form has entered the literary norm. A normative description has to weigh the system, style and social acceptance together.

The study treats the grammatical norm as having 3 layers. The codified core consists of forms stabilized in grammars, textbooks, editorial practice and official writing. The zone of functional variants includes forms that do not contradict the system but are restricted to particular styles, genres, regions or to speech. The innovative periphery comprises constructions arising in digital communication, language contact, youth speech or new technological domains that have not yet gained wide normative recognition. The boundaries between the layers are permeable: over time some variants move towards the centre while others remain marginal.

Table 1. Layers of the grammatical norm and criteria for identifying them

Layer	Main feature	Typical source	Normative interpretation
Codified core	Stable, general and edited use	Grammars, textbooks, official and academic texts	Core of the literary norm
Zone of functional variants	Tied to genre, style, region or spoken interaction	Colloquial speech, dialogue in fiction, regional speech	Conditional or stylistic norm; not equivalent to the general rule
Innovative periphery	Spreading fast in a new medium; codification unclear	Digital discourse, youth speech, contact constructions	Possible change; requires continued observation

METHODS

The study combines contrastive-descriptive and functional-pragmatic analysis with a corpus-informed meta-analysis. For the codified layer of Uzbek grammar, the main sources were O‘zbek tilining nazariy grammatikasi [Theoretical Grammar of Uzbek] (Mahmudov & Nurmonov, 1995), O‘zbek tilining mazmuniy sintaksisi [Semantic Syntax of Uzbek] (Nurmonov et al., 1992), Hozirgi o‘zbek adabiy tili [Modern Literary Uzbek] (Sayfullayeva et al., 2009), classic studies of speech culture and Sh. Safarov’s pragmalinguistic work. Contemporary material was assessed with reference to the Uzbek electronic corpus (Abdurakhmonova et al., 2021, pp. 1–4), its morphological and syntactic resources, annotated datasets created in 2021–2026 and verifiable research on digital Uzbek texts.

The corpus infrastructure of Uzbek has grown considerably in recent years. Earlier work produced a morphologically and syntactically tagged corpus (Sharipov et al., 2022) and a rule-based lemmatizer built on a finite-state machine (Sharipov & Sobirov, 2022, pp. 154–159). Abdurakhmonova et al. (2025) published a dataset of 3,022 manually annotated word forms with root, affix and part-of-speech labels, and Sharipov (2026) released an open POS dataset covering 46,307 stems and 64,052 lemmas across 12 grammatical categories. None of these resources measures diachronic change in the norm directly, but together they give a reliable basis for formal observation of Uzbek morphotactics and for future corpus comparison.

For English, the main theoretical and empirical sources were the comprehensive descriptive grammar by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), the corpus grammar by Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) for register differences, and the study by Leech et al. (2009), based on the matched Brown-family corpora, for grammatical change. Their value lies in substantiating change with corpus indicators that are comparable over time rather than with impressions.

No new statistical claims about the frequency of particular forms are made here. Uzbek does not yet have a matched diachronic corpus comparable to the English Brown–LOB/Frown–FLOB system, with texts of equal size, genre composition and annotation covering both the last century and the present. The analysis therefore aims to diagnose the normative status of forms instead of pronouncing that a change has taken place, a precaution that helps avoid mistaking present-day visibility for historical novelty.

The units of analysis fall into 4 groups: morphological variants; word order and information structure; ellipsis and fragmentation; hybrid patterns arising through language contact. Parallel phenomena in English were examined by the same criteria – integration into the system, spread across registers, codificational acceptance and historical continuity. On this basis, 5 diagnostic features for identifying grammatical

change are proposed at the end of the article.

The stability of the Uzbek grammatical system rests above all on agglutinative morphology. Grammatical meaning is usually segmented clearly by affixes added in sequence: number, possession and case in nouns; voice, negation, tense-aspect, modality and person-number in verbs, each in a fixed order. Sayfullayeva et al. describe Uzbek morphology as a systematic relation between form and content (Sayfullayeva et al., 2009). Work in computational linguistics confirms the point: in automatic analysis of Uzbek word forms, the order of affix chains, allomorphy and morphotactic constraints remain the central problems (Abdurakhmonova et al., 2025; Sharipov, 2026).

Explicit morphological marking does not block normative change, but it shapes the path that change takes. In English, grammatical relations depend largely on auxiliaries, function words and fixed word order. In Uzbek, case morphemes and the person-number endings of the verb express much of the syntactic relation within the word itself. Constituents can therefore leave their usual position for communicative purposes, whereas in English a comparable shift usually requires syntactic restructuring or a special construction. This typological difference is the main criterion for comparing current changes in English and Uzbek.

In Uzbek the subject is often recovered from the person-number marker of the predicate or from context: the subject of Keldim 'I came' is clear without the pronoun men. Most English finite clauses require an overt subject: I came. Reduction in digital and spoken Uzbek thus draws on an internal resource of the system, whereas in English it may amount to a fragment or a feature of a special register. The brevity of a sequence such as Ko'rdim. Yaxshi ekan. '(I) saw (it). (It) turned out (to be) good.' is no violation of the norm; it follows naturally from pro-drop and contextual recovery. Surface brevity alone should not be taken as a sign of grammatical erosion.

Word order calls for the same caution. The neutral Uzbek pattern is usually described as SOV (subject–object–verb), yet actual division of the sentence, theme–rheme relations, contrastive focus, emotional emphasis and rhythm all affect constituent placement. Mahmudov, Nurmonov and their co-authors showed that the formal structure of the simple sentence should not be identified with its semantic and communicative structure (Nurmonov et al., 1992; Mahmudov & Nurmonov, 1995). An increase in postverbal objects or detached constituents in present-day usage gives no ground for concluding that the SOV norm is disappearing.

A further pillar of the norm is the semantic function of case affixes. The genitive -ning, accusative -ni, dative -ga, locative -da and ablative -dan distinguish syntactic relations, and the choice between marked and unmarked genitive and accusative is tied to meaning, definiteness and discourse factors. Here the line between a normative form and a variant becomes sharp: alternation between marked and unmarked forms that the system permits cannot be equated with a merger of distinct cases.

In present-day spoken and digital Uzbek, the genitive -ning is frequently replaced by -ni: meni kitobim instead of literary mening kitobim 'my book'. Treating this as a product of the digital age is not supported by historical evidence. Formal convergence of genitive and accusative markers has long been recorded in Uzbek dialects and everyday speech, and in some dialects -ni regularly serves as a genitive (Shomaqsudov et al., 1983). The appearance of meni kitobim on social media is better explained as an earlier regional and colloquial variant entering public written space than as a grammatical innovation.

The example points to a central methodological problem: more written records say nothing about how old a phenomenon is. Pronunciation and morphological variants once confined to everyday conversation are now written down in chats, comments and posts. If statistical observation begins only with the present, an old variant will look new. Any claim about grammatical innovation must therefore be checked against historical grammar, dialectology and earlier written sources. English singular they teaches the same lesson: its present normative expansion is recent, but the form itself goes back to Middle English (Hwang, 2022, pp. 175–194).

Departures from the literary case norm also need to be kept apart from reduction or allomorphy within the system. In the pronouns men and sen, forms such as mening, sening, meni, seni are codified results of morphophonological processes. The poetic or archaic -n genitive and phonetic variants in dialects belong to the functional and regional layer. There is no evidence that genitive -ni in current writing has displaced the codified norm: -ning remains stable in official, academic and edited journalistic texts. What we observe is a difference in visibility between registers, not a change of norm.

Person-number agreement is another area often discussed on

the borderline between "error" and "change". In Uzbek a 3rd person plural subject may combine with a singular predicate under certain semantic conditions, especially with inanimate or collective subjects, and with plural human subjects the use of -lar on the predicate depends on pragmatic and stylistic factors. Judgments based on formal agreement alone are therefore insufficient. The Uzbek norm is not a copy of the strict English model of subject–verb agreement; the typology of the language itself must be the main criterion.

The omission of affixes in digital writing covers 2 distinct phenomena. Sometimes it is graphic abbreviation or careless spelling caused by typing speed; sometimes phonetic reduction from speech is carried directly into writing. Graphic abbreviation is not grammatical change. Grammatical change requires more than the occasional loss of a form in writing: a syntactic relation must come to be expressed regularly by other means, or the function of an older marker must be systematically redistributed.

The speed of present-day communication encourages syntactic compactness. Chats and comments abound in isolated predicative cores, nominal fragments, evaluative units and chains of short turns: Boraman. '(I)'ll go.', Keyin. 'Later.', Zo'r ekan. 'It's great.', Yana o'sha gap. 'The same old story.' Many of these are natural features of dialogue that the digital medium did not create; they are simply recorded more often now that written space has become dialogic. Fragmentation can be recognized as an important trend in current usage, but not every instance of it is a breach of the norm.

The relatively free word order of Uzbek favours detached constructions in digital and spoken discourse. Compared with the neutral Men uni kecha ko'rdim 'I saw him yesterday', structures such as Men ko'rdim uni kecha or Ko'rdim uni, kecha may serve to specify the object afterwards, delay the focus or add a constituent as the exchange unfolds. They are not the central neutral pattern of literary prose, yet they have a functional basis in dialogue and fiction; in poetry, postposition and inversion of this kind have long been exploited as stylistic devices (Egamnazarova, 2025, pp. 107–110). To speak of grammatical change, one would have to show that postverbal constituents have become a regular, stylistically unmarked pattern in edited neutral prose as well. Diachronic corpus evidence for such a claim is not yet available.

Because of its more rigid SVO order, English makes information restructuring visible through special constructions: left and right dislocation, clefts, existential there, topicalization. Huddleston and Pullum describe these as distinct devices of syntax and information packaging rather than disruptions of word order (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, pp. 1365–1447). Since Uzbek case markers keep grammatical roles intact, reordering has wider formal scope. The same surface phenomenon in both languages, a constituent leaving its usual position, may therefore have different systemic value.

Ellipsis reveals the same typological contrast. In the Uzbek exchange Kelyapsizmi? – Ha, kelyapman 'Are (you) coming? – Yes, (I) am coming' the subject is naturally left out, whereas the English reply Yes, I am keeps both subject and auxiliary. English chat does have subject drop of the type Coming? or Looks good, but it is not regarded as the general model of the standard finite clause. In Uzbek, recovery of the subject from context is encoded in the grammatical system itself, and short messages simply make greater use of an existing potential for ellipsis.

Digital discourse also tends to break a complex thought into a series of independent fragments. Where academic or official writing prefers subordinate clauses, conjunctions and a coherent syntactic chain, social media favour parataxis: Ko'rdim. Ishonmadim. Yana tekshirdim. '(I) saw (it). (I) didn't believe (it). (I) checked again.' Studies of colloquialization report a similar movement of written English genres towards spoken patterns (Leech et al., 2009). The same tendency is present in Uzbek, but assessing its effect on the grammatical norm would require comparative material over time from journalism, official correspondence, academic writing and fiction.

One of the most conspicuous layers of present-day Uzbek is the incorporation of English, and to a lesser extent Russian, items into Uzbek morphology. In digital domains, words such as post, comment, like, story, meeting, deadline and submit appear in bare form and also with Uzbek affixes: postim 'my post', meetingga 'to the meeting', deadlinegacha 'until the deadline', assignmentimni 'my assignment (acc.)'. In a small online corpus, Yoqubjonova and Yoqubjonova found that English loanwords regularly take Uzbek plural and case suffixes (Yoqubjonova & Yoqubjonova, 2025, pp. 112–119), and Polvannazirova links the spread of such borrowings to social media (Polvannazirova, 2025, pp. 98–102). What the process shows is Uzbek morphology subordinating new lexical material to its own rules, not the grammar of the donor language displacing that of Uzbek.

Verb formation shows the same strength of the native pattern.

Instead of English verbs being inflected directly, analytic hybrids emerge: post qilmoq, save qilmoq, submit qilmoq, share qilmoq. Qilmoq 'to do, to make' has long been a highly productive auxiliary in Uzbek, forming compound verbs with nouns, adjectives and borrowed stems. These hybrids create no new grammatical mechanism; they place new English lexical bases into an existing light-verb pattern. The grammatical system stays intact while its lexical filling adapts to globalized communicative needs.

Haugen's classic analysis of borrowing and Myers-Scotton's work on contact linguistics explain how donor items adapt to the structure of the recipient language to different degrees (Haugen, 1950, pp. 210–231; Myers-Scotton, 2002). Uzbek suffixation and the qilmoq pattern fit the Matrix Language principle well: the grammatical frame of the clause remains Uzbek, while the English item enters as a content morpheme. In a mixed construction such as Assignmentimni teacherga submit qildim 'I submitted my assignment to the teacher', the lexical layer comes from different languages, yet possession, case and the tense and person markers of the verb all follow Uzbek grammar.

It would be premature to equate this with the literary norm. Where an adequate Uzbek equivalent exists, editors of official, academic and general journalistic texts usually prefer it, although some terms, particularly in technology, may settle in their international form and eventually enter the lexical norm. From a grammatical perspective the key questions lie elsewhere. Does the borrowing take Uzbek affixes? Does it follow Uzbek syntactic placement? Does it form a regular pattern with an Uzbek auxiliary verb? If so, the contact phenomenon testifies to the assimilative capacity of the grammatical system rather than to its weakening.

English itself is historically a product of intensive contact, but its present global position makes it appear mainly as a donor. New English verbs often arise directly through conversion: to message, to google, to friend. In Uzbek the same meanings are usually integrated through affixation or an auxiliary verb. Even when a new communicative need arises at the same pace in both languages, the way it is grammaticalized follows the typological structure of each.

Large corpora have made claims about recent grammatical change in English considerably more cautious. Comparing corpora of the 1960s and the 1990s with identical genre proportions, Leech et al. documented shifts in the frequency and function of many grammatical forms (Leech et al., 2009). Their approach carries an important methodological lesson for Uzbek linguistics: individual examples, however numerous, do not prove change over time; what is needed is a sequence of texts produced under the same conditions and statistical comparison.

Colloquialization, the approach of certain written genres towards the units and structures of conversation, is among the major factors of present-day grammatical change in English. Contractions, personal address, verb-centred structures, conversational markers, simpler sentence structure and the growth of some semi-modals are all associated with it. The movement of spoken language into writing is equally evident in digital Uzbek, but the diachronic corpus evidence is far stronger for English. A "similar tendency" and a "demonstrated historical change" should not be placed on the same level.

Shifts within the modal system have been well studied for English. Several central modals have declined in frequency, while semi-modal and periphrastic forms such as have to, be going to and need to have gained ground in some contexts; Aarts, Close, Leech and Wallis trace changes in the verb phrase across several corpora (Aarts et al., 2013). In Uzbek the modal field is formed by analytic and morphological means such as kerak, mumkin, lozim, shart, -sa kerak and -ishi mumkin, but corpus research suited to measuring diachronic frequency shifts among them has not yet been carried out on a large scale.

The spread of the English progressive to new verb classes and new pragmatic functions is another clear case. Grammatical change here does not mean the sudden appearance of a form: an existing construction extends its semantic distribution. Uzbek also has a system of means expressing duration and process, among them -yap-, -moqda, -ib tur-, -ib yot- and -ib bor-. The most promising line of comparative research would be to measure their relative distribution in spoken, official, academic and digital genres over time.

Singular they is a particularly instructive example of normative expansion. Its use for a single person is not new and is attested from Middle English onward. What is new is the extension of its use to referents of unknown gender and to non-binary persons, together with its growing acceptance in major dictionaries, style guides and editorial practice (Hwang, 2022, pp. 175–194). Grammatical change, then, may consist in widening the social function, referential range and normative status of an existing variant rather than in creating a new form.

Uzbek meni kitobim and English singular they may both look like "modern variants", but their normative trajectories differ. Meni kitobim remains a dialectal-colloquial form from the standpoint of literary writing, and its visibility online does not mean that it has been codified. Singular they, in contrast, has moved from a historical variant towards broad standard use and has secured a firm place in editorial practice. The contrast shows why normative change has to be linked to social diffusion and codification.

The comparison shows that the languages differ less in the speed or scope of change than in the level at which it becomes visible. Because English is analytic, redistribution within auxiliaries, periphrastic modals, verb complementation and fixed word order is central. In Uzbek, morphological markers hold syntactic relations firmly in place, so present-day variability shows up chiefly in variant affixes, ellipsis, the communicative placement of constituents and the adaptation of lexical borrowings to native morphology.

A simple contrast between morphological "stability" and syntactic "freedom" would be misleading: Uzbek morphology changes too, and English syntax has its variants. The question is where the grammatical load is concentrated. In Uzbek, case marking, possession and verbal morphology place most semantic relations within the word form; in English, syntactic position and function words carry more of the load. It is natural, then, that a new Uzbek borrowing takes on morphemes while a new English lexical item usually slots straight into an existing analytic position.

The acceleration of present-day communication does not have the same consequences in Uzbek and English. Since dropping the subject and some repeated constituents is consistent with Uzbek grammar, short messages mostly exploit the resources of standard syntax. In English, the same economy may surface as a fragment, headline syntax or non-standard subject drop, although contractions are firmly codified in some registers of the standard. Economy is a universal communicative pressure; its grammatical solution is language-specific.

Contact, too, works asymmetrically. English lexical items enter Uzbek in large numbers, while Uzbek grammatical influence on English is negligible. The lexical, one-way character of this influence does not imply passivity on the part of the recipient grammar. Forms such as assignmentimni, postga and share qildim actively deploy Uzbek possessive, case and verbal morphology; contact usually renews the lexical filling of a pattern, not the pattern itself.

Accordingly, present-day Uzbek shows 3 distinct processes: the popularization of existing variants, the increased productivity of existing grammatical patterns with new lexical material, and genuine structural redistribution. Current observations mostly support popularization and increased productivity. Claims about structural redistribution, that is, a stable change in grammatical paradigms or syntactic obligations, call for caution until sufficient diachronic corpus data become available.

These processes correspond to different relations between norm and usage. The visibility of an existing variant may increase; an existing pattern may become more productive with new lexical or pragmatic material; or the social and stylistic range of a formerly restricted variant may widen until codification begins to accept it as part of the standard. The routes look alike but carry unequal weight in the system. Frequency in digital space is only a starting point: a judgment about normative shift must also take into account social diffusion, movement across registers and structural function.

Greater visibility is the typical route for dialectal and colloquial forms entering written space, as the genitive -ni discussed above illustrates. Social media did not create such variants; they gave formerly ephemeral spoken forms a written trace, searchability and a mass audience. In the process that Androutsopoulos describes as mediatization, the medium alters the conditions under which linguistic items spread without being the sole source of structural innovation (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 3–48). Greater frequency in writing cannot, therefore, be equated with grammatical status.

The productivity route looks different. Hybrid predicates of the submit qilmoq type and forms like deadlinegacha accept English bases but place them in a ready-made Uzbek morphosyntactic template. What is renewed is the lexical range and frequency of an existing pattern, while the framework of the grammar stays as it was. Such subordination of donor items to recipient morphology is a sign of integrative capacity, and the Uzbek–English comparison makes the point concrete: an English lexeme does not override local morphotactic constraints but adapts to them.

Renormalization involves an expansion of the range of use recognized within the norm, not merely of frequency. In singular they, the novelty lies in the redrawing of normative boundaries rather than in the pronoun itself. Future grammatical change in Uzbek should be monitored by the

same yardstick. Is the variant entering official, academic and edited journalistic writing? Does it form a functional division of labour with the older form? Do school grammars and dictionaries record it as a neutral option? Until consistent positive answers emerge, declaring a form popular in digital communication to be a new literary norm is premature. The value of the comparison lies precisely here: it lines up the social, structural and codificational stages that lead to normative status, whatever the outward similarity of forms.

Frequency alone is not enough for a form to count as grammatical change. A new form may spread for many reasons: platform fashion, age-specific slang, regional pronunciation entering writing, a growing volume of unedited text or the terminological needs of a particular field. Grammatical change, by contrast, alters the status of a form within the system. We therefore propose 5 diagnostic criteria.

Recurrence requires that the form occur regularly in large and varied sources, not in the writing of individual authors or small groups. Social diffusion tests whether the variant has spread beyond a particular age, occupational or regional group to the wider speech community. Register expansion examines how far the unit is moving from informal conversation into edited journalism and educational, official or academic texts. Structural integration requires the new form to possess a grammatical paradigm, combinatorial rules and analogical productivity. Codificational acceptance determines how far it is accepted in grammars, dictionaries, style guides and professional editing.

The criteria do not form a simple scoring system of equal weights. A phenomenon may be highly frequent yet strongly marked stylistically; another may be less frequent but officially codified. Grammatical change therefore demands convergence of evidence rather than a single verdict. The Uzbek post qilmoq pattern, for instance, is recurrent and structurally well integrated, yet its literary use depends on field and context. It is better described as a productive extension of the existing qilmoq pattern under contact than as a "new rule of Uzbek grammar".

Meni kitobim has social and regional reach, but it has not been observed to displace the codified genitive -ning, and its historical-dialectal roots show that it is not a modern innovation. Singular they has reached a different status through historical recurrence, wide social diffusion, entry into edited genres and codificational acceptance. Applied together, the criteria keep these phenomena from being lumped under a single label of "internet-driven change".

Table 2. Diagnostic interpretation of selected contemporary phenomena in Uzbek and English

Phenomenon	Language	Systemic explanation	Current status	Cautious assessment of change
meni kitobim	Uzbek	Genitive–accusative convergence; historical and dialectal basis	Colloquial and regional variant	Not a grammatical innovation; greater digital visibility
post/submit/share qilmoq	Uzbek	English lexical base + Uzbek light-verb pattern	Productive in digital and professional speech	Extension of an existing pattern through contact
Postverbal object and fragment	Uzbek	Focus, afterthought, dialogic planning	Active in spoken and digital speech	No evidence that neutral SOV is being replaced

Expansion of semi-modals	English	Redistribution within the analytic modal system	Confirmed diachronically in corpora	Strong case of genuine change in usage
Singular *they*	English	Wider referential and social range of an old variant	Increasingly accepted in standard writing	Case of normative expansion and restandardization

DISCUSSION

Present-day communication has changed the way the grammatical norm can be observed, as well as the norm itself. Linguists once had to record colloquial forms, transcribe them or search for them in literary dialogue; now millions of informal messages and posts leave a written trace. The impression that the language has "suddenly broken down" often reflects a change in the means of observation. If analysis ignores this optical effect, a colloquial variant may be misread as a grammatical crisis and a contact item as erosion of the system.

Yet digital communication is not merely a written copy of old speech. The technical conditions of a platform – rapid exchange, screen size, multimodality, comment threads, emoji and reactions – put new planning pressure on sentence structure, as early descriptions of the internet as a medium in its own right already noted (Crystal, 2006). Syntactic fragments, delayed specification, chains of short predications, unexpected code-switching and English terms with Uzbek affixes may all become productive in this environment. Productivity, however, is not codification; it remains a strong signal at the level of usage.

In considering the future of the Uzbek grammatical norm, the agglutinative core of the language and its openness to contact should not be seen as opposing forces. Forms such as postim, linkni and meetingga show Uzbek case and possessive morphology at work, adapting the new lexical flow to its own morphotactic rules. The task of normative grammar is not to reject borrowings but to describe precisely which of them have entered the general lexical norm and which remain in professional or informal layers.

The English experience shows that a standard language is itself the outcome of repeated historical selection. Some constructions decline, others expand; written and spoken registers converge; a once-disputed variant may become accepted in edited usage. The boundaries of the standard are redrawn over time, and the standard survives. Future codification of Uzbek cannot ignore actual usage, though it should not follow every social media trend either. The function of the norm is to sift change while preserving general intelligibility, functional precision and systemic coherence.

Corpus linguistics should accordingly occupy a central place in normative research on Uzbek. The morphological and POS resources published in 2025–2026 have considerably extended the possibilities for automatic analysis. The next step requires matched corpora annotated for time, region, age, genre and degree of editing. The question "Which form has increased?" could then be put more exactly: where, among which speakers, relative to which period, at the expense of which genre and in what grammatical function?

This methodological shift matters for the standards of internationally indexed research. Individual examples should not be turned into general claims about the system; normative judgments should rest on frequency, distribution, structural integration and editorial practice; and Uzbek phenomena should be interpreted within their own typology, not as copies of English categories. Comparison then reveals similarities and, more importantly, clarifies the normative mechanisms specific to Uzbek grammar.

CONCLUSION

The grammatical norm of Uzbek lives in the interaction between stable rule and living variant, and digital communication has made this interaction more visible. Ellipsis, fragmentation, freer word order and regional variants have entered public written space, while English lexical items are assimilated through Uzbek affixes and the qilmoq pattern. Calling all of these processes "grammatical change" blurs

important distinctions.

The codified morphological core – case, possession, verb forms and affix order – retains high structural stability in current usage. Forms like meni kitobim are closer to old colloquial and dialectal variants becoming visible in writing than to a new digital grammar. Hybrids like submit qilmoq show an existing light-verb pattern becoming more productive with new lexical material, and shifts in word order and fragmentation relate mainly to communicative planning and register.

The comparison with English clarified the standard of evidence that grammatical change requires. Shifts in semi-modals, the progressive and other constructions have been measured in matched diachronic corpora, and singular they shows that the widening social and codificational range of an old variant can itself be a significant form of normative change. Uzbek needs a comparable standard of evidence.

The proposed criteria of recurrence, social diffusion, register expansion, structural integration and codificational acceptance allow contemporary grammatical phenomena to be evaluated in an orderly way, which is of practical value for language policy, editing, textbook writing and corpus annotation. Preserving the grammatical norm does not mean freezing the language; it means sorting changes in usage on scientific grounds while protecting the internal regularity, communicative precision and historical continuity of the language.

A matched diachronic corpus of Uzbek is an important next step, ideally comparing texts of the same genres from the 1960s–1980s, the early years of independence and the 2020s. If spoken language, the edited press and digital correspondence are annotated as separate layers, it will become clearer where the grammatical norm is actually changing and where only the visibility of variants is increasing. Such work could bring Uzbek normative grammar into closer contact with descriptive, corpus and pragmatic research.

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