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SEMANTIC FEATURES OF FORMAL SPEECH ACTS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Xoshimova Dilnoza Sobit qizi

Student of Alfraganus University

dxoshimova8@gmail.com

Z. Raxmatullayev

Academic Advisor

Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of the semantic characteristics of formal speech acts in English and Uzbek. It explores the linguistic means specific to the formal style, their communicative functions, and the influence of social and cultural factors on the formation of speech acts. Furthermore, the study identifies similarities and differences in formal speech conventions in both English and Uzbek languages.

Keywords: Formal style, speech acts, semantics, pragmatics, comparative linguistics, conventional expressions

INTRODUCTION

Speech acts used in formal style serve as key pragmatic tools that regulate social interactions between individuals. Language functions not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a mechanism for performing specific social functions such as commanding, requesting, informing, and promising—acts that can prompt real-world actions. This function becomes particularly significant in the context of formal communication. Speech acts within the domain of formal style are characterized by structural rigidity, semantic neutrality, and communicative precision. The founders of speech act theory, J. Austin and J. Searle, placed special emphasis on the illocutionary force carried out through



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linguistic expressions—that is, the intended effect of an utterance. According to them, an utterance does not merely convey a fact; it performs an action. For example, the phrase “I appoint you to this position” is not just a statement of fact—it constitutes the act of appointment itself. In this regard, formal speech acts generate communicative actions with authoritative force. English and Uzbek differ significantly in the way formal communication is realized. This divergence stems not only from grammatical structures but also from differences in semantic strategies, cultural values, and social roles. For instance, while formal commands in English are typically direct and explicit, in Uzbek they are often expressed in softer, more indirect terms, such as “it is requested” or “please be advised.”

This article aims to explore these differences through comparative analysis, focusing on the semantic characteristics of speech acts in formal style. The study draws on authentic formal texts to highlight both structural and semantic distinctions between English and Uzbek formal discourse.

Development of Speech Act Theory: The theory of speech acts in linguistics emerged in the second half of the 20th century, beginning with J. L. Austin’s seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin argued that language is not merely a means of conveying information, but also a medium through which speakers perform practical actions—i.e., speech acts. For example, the utterance “*I apologize*” is not just a statement of information but constitutes the act of apologizing itself.

Austin categorized speech acts into three distinct types:

- **Locutionary act** – the act of producing a grammatically and semantically well-formed utterance;
- **Illocutionary act** – the speaker’s intended function behind the utterance (such as requesting, commanding, or offering);
- **Perlocutionary act** – the effect that the utterance has on the listener.

Building on Austin’s work, J. R. Searle further developed the theory by classifying illocutionary acts into the following categories:

- **Representatives** – statements that assert or describe reality (e.g., reporting, affirming);



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- **Directives** – acts intended to get the hearer to do something (e.g., requesting, commanding);
- **Commissives** – acts that commit the speaker to a future course of action (e.g., promising, offering);
- **Expressives** – acts that express the speaker's emotional or psychological state (e.g., congratulating, apologizing);
- **Declarations** – acts that bring about a change in the external situation simply by being uttered (e.g., appointing, sentencing).

The Interrelation between Formal Style and Semantics

The formal style represents one of the most standardized and precise forms of linguistic expression. It is predominantly used in social and legal contexts, characterized by strict terminological discipline, structural consistency, and stylistic neutrality. Speech acts in formal contexts are semantically structured in accordance with these defining features.

Semantic clarity and neutrality are particularly important in formal discourse.

For instance:

- In Uzbek: "*Hisobotni iloji boricha tezroq topshirishingiz so‘raladi.*"
- In English: "*You are required to submit the report by Friday.*"

While the English version carries a direct and semantically strong modal force, the Uzbek version presents the request in a more polite and indirect form. This contrast highlights the semantic strategy differences shaped by cultural expectations and communicative norms.

Methods of Comparative Linguistic and Semantic Analysis

This study employs a comparative method as its principal approach. Comparative linguistics involves the examination of linguistic phenomena across two or more languages with regard to their structural, semantic, and functional aspects.

The following methodological frameworks are utilized in this research:

- **Descriptive analysis** – to illustrate examples from authentic formal documents and speech;



- **Semantic analysis** – to explore the internal meanings of speech acts and the influence of cultural-linguistic factors;
- **Pragmatic approach** – to uncover the communicative purposes and functions of utterances;
- **Contrastive analysis** – to identify similarities and differences in formal expressions between English and Uzbek.

The Role of Linguo-Cultural Context

Language is not only a tool of communication but also a mirror of culture. Thus, semantic analysis of speech acts must take into account the linguo-cultural context. For example:

- In English formal discourse, legal precision, formalism, and structural rigidity are prioritized;
- In Uzbek formal discourse, deference, politeness, and contextual ambiguity play a greater role.

These cultural features directly influence the semantics of formal speech acts. Particularly in high-context social interactions, the softer semantic tone in Uzbek formal speech reflects a cultural adherence to social norms and hierarchical respect.

Formal Context in English Communication

English formal communication favors clarity, rigidity, and directness. This is particularly evident in legal, administrative, and diplomatic texts. In such contexts, speech acts are shaped by social roles, authority, and legal consequences. Formal speech acts in English often rely on pre-established formulas and carry strong semantic weight.

Example:

“You are hereby instructed to vacate the premises within 14 days.”
This utterance is not merely a command but constitutes an official legal act (an eviction notice).



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Directives

Directives are speech acts whereby the speaker requests or commands the listener to perform an action. In English, directive acts are commonly expressed using strict formulaic expressions:

- “*You must...*”
- “*It is required that you...*”
- “*You are to...*”
- “*You are hereby ordered to...*”

These forms increase the level of formality and obligation. Particularly, the adverb “*hereby*” signals that the act has formal legal force.

Semantic characteristics:

- Express obligation
- Call for action (command/request)
- Indicate hierarchical relationship (superior → subordinate)

Example:

“*Employees must complete the annual compliance training by December 31.*”

Here, the modal verb “*must*” conveys strictness and obligation. Such acts frequently appear in employment contracts, policies, and legislation.

Representatives

Representatives are speech acts that assert facts or truths, often used for formal declarations:

- “*We confirm that...*”
- “*It has been determined that...*”
- “*This certifies that...*”

Semantic characteristics:

- Assert facts
- Ensure reliability and objectivity
- Suitable for formal documents (statements, reports)



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Example:

“We hereby confirm that the aforementioned employee was employed from January 2020 to April 2024.”

This act serves as a confirmation and official response regarding employment status.

Commissives

Commissive acts indicate the speaker’s commitment to perform some future action. In formal communication, they are expressed as follows:

- “*We undertake to...*”
- “*We agree to...*”
- “*We are committed to...*”
- “*We assure you that...*”

Semantic characteristics:

- Commitment to future action
- Legal obligation
- Maintains diplomatic balance

Example:

“*We undertake to deliver all products within 30 business days from the date of purchase.*”

Such acts are typical in contracts and agreements. The verb “*undertake*” carries significant legal semantic weight, implying liability if the obligation is not fulfilled.

Expressives

Although emotional expressions are limited in formal discourse, expressive acts are important in protocol-driven situations:

- “*We congratulate you on...*”
- “*We regret to inform you that...*”
- “*Please accept our sincere condolences...*”



Semantic characteristics:

- Express social attitudes
- Have a formal and protocolized structure
- Emotionally cautious and restrained

Example:

“We regret to inform you that your application has not been successful.”
This phrase is a standard rejection act, yet formulated politely and socially acceptably.

Declaratives

Declaratives bring about changes in social or legal situations through official recognition or decisions. They are performed by persons holding high authority:

- *“I hereby declare...”*
- *“The court finds that...”*
- *“The contract is hereby terminated.”*

Semantic characteristics:

- Produce real changes as a result of the act
- Have legal or institutional force
- Executed by representatives of official positions

Example:

“By the power vested in me, I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.”
This speech act results in a legal reality—the establishment of marriage.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the semantic characteristics of formal speech acts in English and Uzbek within the framework of comparative linguistic analysis. The investigation reveals that while both languages utilize similar categories of speech acts—such as directives, representatives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—their semantic realization and pragmatic deployment reflect distinct cultural and social norms inherent to each linguistic community. English formal discourse is characterized by semantic directness, explicitness, and legal precision, especially in administrative, legal, and diplomatic contexts. Speech acts tend to be formulated with clear, standardized expressions that convey



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unambiguous obligations and rights, underscoring hierarchical relationships and institutional authority. Conversely, Uzbek formal communication often employs a more indirect, polite, and context-dependent semantic strategy. This reflects the high value placed on interpersonal respect, social harmony, and linguistic politeness within Uzbek culture. The semantic neutrality and softening devices present in Uzbek formal speech acts accommodate nuanced interpersonal relations while fulfilling communicative functions. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of the linguo-cultural context in shaping the semantic structure of formal speech acts. Understanding these cultural and pragmatic differences is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication, translation, and interpretation in formal settings. In conclusion, the comparative semantic analysis of formal speech acts enriches our comprehension of how languages encode social relations, authority, and politeness through linguistic means. Future research may further explore other discourse genres and include a broader range of languages to deepen the understanding of formal communication strategies worldwide.

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