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# STYLISTIC AND PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF THIRD-PERSON PRONOUNS: A CROSS-GENRE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN FIVE LANGUAGES

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## Abstract

This paper explores the stylistic and pragmatic functions of third-person personal pronouns across five structurally distinct languages: Uzbek, English, Russian, Arabic, and Persian. Drawing from literary, political, and religious genres, the study analyzes how pronouns encode degrees of formality, respect, gender, and social distance. It highlights how the speaker–referent relationship is linguistically mediated within different cultural and discursive contexts. The comparative approach offers theoretical and practical insights for linguists, translators, and intercultural communication scholars, emphasizing the cultural and pragmatic weight carried by pronouns in multilingual texts.

**Keywords:** Third-person pronouns, stylistic pragmatics, intercultural communication, discourse genres, politeness strategies, gender neutrality

## Introduction

In the evolving field of cross-cultural linguistics, personal pronouns serve not only as grammatical elements but also as significant markers of social hierarchy, politeness, and speaker intention. Particularly, third-person pronouns—typically used to refer to individuals or groups not present in the immediate discourse—encode nuanced layers of meaning that extend beyond syntactic function. These pronouns can subtly reflect power dynamics, gender identity, social distance, and respect within specific discourse communities. As language operates within



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culture, the ways pronouns are used and interpreted vary significantly across linguistic systems.

This study investigates the stylistic and pragmatic functions of third-person personal pronouns in five structurally distinct languages: Uzbek, English, Arabic, Persian, and Russian. These languages, representing different language families and socio-cultural matrices, demonstrate varied grammatical approaches to encoding gender, number, and social deixis. For instance, while Uzbek lacks grammatical gender in pronouns and leans toward structural neutrality, Arabic and Persian maintain binary gender marking even in abstract or divine references. English, by contrast, is undergoing a shift toward gender-neutrality in formal and inclusive communication. Russian, rich in stylistic registers, reflects both gendered and hierarchical distinctions in pronoun use.

The central aim of this research is to explore how third-person pronouns function within various discourse genres—namely literary, political, and religious texts—and to identify how they express politeness, distance, and social recognition. Particular emphasis is placed on the interplay between stylistic variation and pragmatic force. In many cases, the choice of a pronoun not only informs the reader about the grammatical subject but also signals the speaker's attitude toward the referent, level of deference, or even cultural norms of address.

To achieve this, the study employs a stylistic-pragmatic discourse analysis approach, analyzing selected texts from each language across the three genres. Through this comparative method, the research contributes to the growing body of intercultural pragmatics and translation studies by illuminating how seemingly simple linguistic items—like pronouns—carry complex socio-cultural meanings that demand careful interpretation and contextual awareness.

This work is particularly relevant in multilingual translation practices, second-language acquisition, and intercultural communication where misinterpretation of pronouns may result in unintended disrespect, ambiguity, or a failure to recognize culturally embedded values. By unveiling the pragmatic and stylistic dimensions of pronoun use, this study also aims to foster greater linguistic awareness and cultural competence among linguists, educators, and translators.



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## Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, comparative, and descriptive methodology, rooted in stylistic-pragmatic discourse analysis. The objective is to examine the multifunctional use of third-person personal pronouns in five typologically and culturally distinct languages—Uzbek, English, Arabic, Persian, and Russian—across three major discourse genres: literary, political, and religious texts. This methodological framework enables a detailed investigation of both grammatical usage and pragmatic implications in natural discourse.

**Data Selection:** Primary data consists of authentic textual excerpts drawn from:

1. **Literary works** (e.g., novels, poetry, narrative prose)
2. **Political speeches** (including parliamentary debates and public addresses)
3. **Religious texts** (Qur'anic verses, Biblical excerpts, and commentaries)

Selection criteria focused on:

1. High-frequency use of third-person pronouns.
2. Cultural and linguistic diversity of source texts.
3. Representativeness of genre-specific stylistic norms.

To ensure balance and cross-comparability, three texts per genre per language were selected (totaling 45 samples). Where necessary, parallel translations and annotated corpora were consulted to aid cross-linguistic mapping.

**Analytical Framework:** The analysis integrates two main approaches:

1. **Stylistic Analysis:** Investigates how pronouns contribute to tone, formality, and narrative perspective. This includes identifying shifts between marked and unmarked forms, such as between animate/inanimate or gendered/neutral referents.
2. **Pragmatic Discourse Analysis:** Explores the relationship between pronoun choice and speaker intention, politeness strategies, social hierarchy, and cultural deixis. This includes reference tracking, anaphora resolution, and politeness markers.

Relevant linguistic theories informing the framework include:

1. **Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987),**
2. **Levinson's Deictic System (2004),**
3. **and intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2021).**



In addition, the study draws on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics to assess how pronouns function as cohesive and interpersonal devices within texts.

**Language-Specific Considerations:** Each language is examined with attention to its:

1. **Grammatical features:** gender agreement, number, animacy.
2. **Stylistic conventions:** narrative voice, literary register.
3. **Pragmatic norms:** levels of politeness, social deixis, religious reverence.

Where applicable, corpora tools such as Sketch Engine, OpenCorpora (for Russian), and Concordance-based alignment software were used to support frequency and contextual analysis.

## Results

This section presents the findings of the stylistic-pragmatic discourse analysis of third-person personal pronouns across five languages and three genres. The results are grouped into three tables—each corresponding to a discourse genre. Key pragmatic and stylistic dimensions analyzed include gender marking, level of politeness or respect, referent clarity, and social deixis.

Table 1. Use of Third-Person Pronouns in Literary Texts

Language	Gender Marking	Narrative Voice	Referent Clarity	Stylistic Nuance
Uzbek	No gender marking	Consistent third-person ("u")	High	Neutral to poetic depending on genre
English	Gendered (he/she/they)	Shifts between third- and omniscient narration	High	Increasing use of "they" as gender-neutral
Arabic	Gendered (هو / هي)	Classical 3rd-person	High	Elevated style; pronouns often dropped when implied
Persian	Gendered (او) but often avoided	Frequent use of proper names + zero pronoun	Moderate	Ambiguity used for poetic or ironic effect
Russian	Gendered (он / она / они)	Mixed use, especially with implicit subjects	High	Pronouns align closely with narrative tone

## Commentary:

Literary texts show flexible usage of third-person pronouns to construct narrative distance and tone. In Uzbek and Persian, structural simplicity (absence of gender)



enables poetic economy, whereas in Russian and Arabic, gendered pronouns enhance referent differentiation. English exhibits a trend toward inclusive 'they', especially in contemporary fiction.

**Table 2. Use of Third-Person Pronouns in Political Discourse**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Gender Sensitivity</b>	<b>Referential Clarity</b>	<b>Politeness Strategy</b>	<b>Social Deixis</b>
<b>Uzbek</b>	Neutral (u)	Clear when political titles used	Respect inferred through titles	Medium (implicit)
<b>English</b>	High (he/she/they)	Very high	Pronouns paired with titles (“President he...”)	High (deictic clarity)
<b>Arabic</b>	Strong binary gender	High	Repetition of titles and honorifics	Very high
<b>Persian</b>	Gendered (او) but often replaced by titles	Moderate	Indirect reference for respect	High (frequent distancing)
<b>Russian</b>	Gendered (он/она)	High	Use of patronymics, titles, and passive voice	High

**Commentary:**

In political discourse, third-person pronouns are often de-emphasized or supplemented by titles and honorifics to show respect, rank, or ideology. Arabic and Russian use pronouns within hierarchically rich structures, while Persian tends to omit pronouns in favor of distancing strategies. English relies on gendered but inclusive forms, and Uzbek maintains neutral tone, with politeness encoded in honorific nouns.



Table 3. Use of Third-Person Pronouns in Religious Texts

Language	Gender in Divine Reference	Human Referents	Stylistic Tone	Pragmatic Function
Uzbek	Neutral ("u" for both God and human)	Clear	Reverent, poetic	Inclusive, simplified respect
English	Often masculine ("He") for God; neutral for others	Clear	Formal, symbolic	Conventional, now debated
Arabic	Masculine default for Allah (هو)	Clear but contextually high deference	Qur'anic Arabic is formal	Hierarchical, symbolic
Persian	Gendered (او) used for both	Clear but stylized	Often poetic in religious prose	Deferential, metaphorical use common
Russian	Masculine ("Он") for God	Clear for others	Formal and respectful	Strong social-religious deixis

### Commentary:

Religious discourse reveals deep cultural embeddings of pronouns. In Arabic, gendered pronouns retain traditional authority. Russian and English use masculine references for God, although English is gradually shifting in inclusive theological circles. Uzbek shows no grammatical gender, yet pragmatic respect is conveyed through stylistic devices, such as repetition and elevated register. Persian retains ambiguity and stylistic flexibility with poetic nuance.

### General Observations

- Grammatical Gender:** English, Arabic, Persian, and Russian maintain gender distinctions, but Uzbek is structurally gender-neutral.
- Formality & Politeness:** Respect is more often signaled through titles, passive constructions, or zero-pronoun strategies, not always through pronouns themselves.
- Genre Variation:** Literary texts favor narrative clarity and style; political discourse emphasizes authority and social distance; religious texts focus on reverence and spiritual deixis.





4. **Stylistic Shifts:** English and Persian show shifts toward inclusive or stylistically neutral usage, while Arabic and Russian preserve more traditional gender hierarchies.

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of third-person pronouns across Uzbek, English, Arabic, Persian, and Russian in literary, political, and religious discourse reveals significant cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variation in both grammatical structure and pragmatic function.

Uzbek, as a gender-neutral language, relies on contextual and lexical cues rather than morphological gender marking. In contrast, English, Arabic, Persian, and Russian display gender-differentiated pronouns, though their stylistic and pragmatic applications differ by genre. For example, English increasingly employs gender-neutral 'they', especially in inclusive or postmodern texts, while Arabic and Russian maintain traditional masculine references, especially in political and religious contexts.

The analysis shows that pragmatic respect, social deixis, and referent clarity are often expressed not solely by pronouns, but through a range of stylistic mechanisms, such as:

1. **Title repetition** (Arabic, Russian),
2. **Zero pronoun strategies** (Persian),
3. **Poetic ambiguity** (Uzbek and Persian),
4. And **formal narrative tone** (all languages in religious genres).

Furthermore, genres play a critical role:

1. **Literary texts** emphasize aesthetic clarity and stylistic play,
2. **Political discourse** prioritizes authority and distancing,
3. **Religious language** focuses on reverence, universality, and divine deixis.

This study highlights the need for genre-sensitive and culture-aware approaches in linguistic pragmatics, particularly in translation, language teaching, and intercultural communication.



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