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THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN SHAPING SPEECH ACTS: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract

This study investigates the cross-cultural pragmatic contrasts in speech acts used in English and Uzbek languages. In this paper, the ways of sociocultural values in English-speaking contexts and collectivism in Uzbek society shaping spoken language through exploring demands, apologies, compliments, refusals, and expressions of gratitude. Based on theories of pragmatics and intercultural reationships, this comparative study emphasizes the significance of understanding **social rules** of language and knowing how to use the **correct words or grammar** to express intentions in language teaching and intercultural competence development.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, speech acts, English, Uzbek, politeness, intercultural competence, pragmatics, sociopragmatics.

Introduction

Pragmatic competence is an ability to use effective language in context which is important for interaction among different cultures and nations. In multilingual nations and international situations, confusion occurs both from language error and communication breakdown (Thomas, 1983). This article evaluate the pragmatic norms of English and Uzbek, determining main speech acts to in investigate how culture forms social communication. Theoretical Framework rely on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Searle's (1976) classification of speech acts, and Leech's (1983) politeness maxims. It also focuses on the importance of sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistics (Kasper, 1992) to contrast between social norms and Verbal expression.

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Speech Acts in English and Uzbek

- **Requests**. In English language, indirect strategies are used to express politeness, such as "Could you possibly…?" or "Would you mind…?" (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989), while Uzbek speakers ask directly based on situation, intercultural communication, or honorifics, e.g., "Yordam bera olasizmi?" (Can you help?) or "Iltimos, o'ting."

Aspect	English	Uzbek
Common Structures	Modal verbs and hedging: • Could you possibly…? • Would you mind…?	Direct questions or polite imperatives: • Yordam bera olasizmi? • Iltimos, o'ting.
Politeness Device	Use of modal verbs, softeners, conditionals	Use of honorifics, respectful tone, or "iltimos" (please)
Pragmatic Function	Avoid imposition, maintain social harmony	Show respect or familiarity depending on situation
Cultural Influence	Individualism → Emphasis on personal autonomy and non-imposition	Collectivism & hierarchy → Emphasis on respect, clarity, and social roles

This table compares how requests are expressed in English and Uzbek languages, exploring linguistic strategies, examples, and cultural influences. It emphasizes the differences in politeness conventions and sociopragmatic norms between the two languages.

- **Apologies**. Apologies in English are fixed, often including an explicit acknowledgment of fault: "I'm sorry for…" or "I apologize for…". Uzbek apologies often trust in collective politeness and modesty, e.g., "Kechirasiz," "Uzr so'rayman," and may include a explanatio or an apology to remain cooperation (Rustamova, 2020).

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Aspect	English	Uzbek
Common Structures	• *I'm sorry for…* • *I apologize for…* • *Please forgive me…*	• *Kechirasiz* • *Uzr so'rayman* • *Kechiring, bilmay qoldim*
Acknowledgment of Fault	Explicit: Accepting blame directly	Implicit or softened, often explained through context
Cultural Influence	Emphasis on personal responsibility and individual sincerity (low-context)	Emphasis on social harmony, indirectness, and saving face (high-context)
Pragmatic Function	Restores relationship by admitting error and asking forgiveness	Maintains cooperation, expresses respect, prevents loss of face

- **Compliments**. English usually includes compliments of appearance or accomplishments: "You look amazing today!" Uzbek culture contains reflections of compliments: "Rahmat, lekin siz ha latofatlisiz" (Thank you, but you see beautifully). Such acknowledgments help avoid appearing arrogant (Herbert, 1989).

Aspect	English	Uzbek
Common Structures	• *You look amazing today!* • *Great job!* • *That's impressive!*	• *Rahmat, lekin siz ham chiroyli ko'rinyapsiz* • *Yaxshi aytdingiz, rahmat*
Response to Compliment	Usually a simple "Thank you"	Often a modest response or mutual compliment: "Rahmat, lekin siz ham…"
Cultural Influence	Focus on individual recognition (low-context, individualistic culture)	Focus on humility and social harmony (high-context, collectivist culture)
Pragmatic Function	Express praise, boost confidence, strengthen relationships	Maintain modesty, avoid showing off, preserve group equality
Softening Strategy	Sometimes hedged: "I don't usually say this, but…"	Compliment often softened by shifting focus or giving joint credit

- **Refusals.** In English, people often soften refusals by using phrases like "I'd love to, but…". In contrast, Uzbek speakers usually refuse more indirectly, using polite excuses or expressions of regret, such as "Kechirasiz, ilojim

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yo'q edi" ("Sorry, I had no choice"). These strategies help avoid offending others, especially in relationships with a power difference or among close social groups (Kurbanov, 2018).

Hedging Expression	Use
Maybe / Perhaps	To show uncertainty
It seems / appears	To soften judgment
I think / I believe	To express opinion carefully
Could / Might	To avoid sounding too sure

- **Expressions of Gratitude**. While both languages show thanks, and the expression "Thank you very much" is used frequently. In Uzbek, gratitude may be expressed through actions 1 or reciprocal offers: "Rahmat, sizga omad tilayman" (Thank you, I wish you success). This reflects cultural reciprocity norms (Turanov, 2015).

Aspect	English	Uzbek
Common Structures	• Thank you • Thank you very much • I appreciate it	• Rahmat • Katta rahmat • Rahmat, sizga omad tilayman
Extended Gratitude	Thanks a lot, I really appreciate it.	Rahmat, sog' bo'ling. Katta rahmat, sizga baxt tilayman.
Cultural Influence	Gratitude is often verbal and self-contained	Gratitude is often action-oriented or reciprocated with a wish
Pragmatic Function	Acknowledges help or kindness; maintains politeness	Reinforces social harmony and mutual respect

- **Discussion**. These speech acts display social and cultural values. English-speaking countries emphasize personal freedom, causing explicit and symmetrical interaction. In Uzbek culture, community and hierarchy is emphasized, which promotes implication and respect. Teachers and learners should know these contrasts to support intercultural comprehension.

- **Implications**. Consequence in Language Teaching Incorporating pragmatic instruction in language education is important. Through the use

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of authentic materials, role-plays, and contrastive analysis, language learners can comprehend speech act differences (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Knowing cross-cultural pragmatics enhances learners' commuticative skills and keeps from pragmatic failure.

Conclusion

The comparison of speech acts in English and Uzbek clearly demonstrates that cultural norms profoundly influence how language is used in social interaction. These differences are not limited to vocabulary or grammar, but extend to **pragmatic choices** how meaning is conveyed through tone, politeness strategies, and contextual appropriateness. For example, the way people apologize, give compliments, express gratitude, or make requests often reflects deeply embedded values such as **individualism** in English-speaking cultures and **collectivism, modesty, or hierarchy** in Uzbek society. Such variations underline the necessity of incorporating **pragmatic competence** into second language learning. Learners must not only master the grammatical structures of a language but also understand the **social rules** and **cultural motivations** behind those structures. Simply translating words or phrases without awareness of cultural context can lead to **misunderstandings, pragmatic failures,** or even unintentionally rude or inappropriate behavior. Therefore, developing the ability to interpret not just *what* is said but also *how*, *why*, and *in what context* it is said is essential for successful communication. Integrating intercultural pragmatics into language education will empower learners to navigate real-life interactions more naturally and respectfully, thus enhancing both **linguistic fluency** and **cross-cultural understanding.**

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