
The meanings and implications of gestures in English and Uzbek

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Annotation *Phraseological units that verbalize nonverbal behavior transform bodily action – gesture, facial expression, posture, and gaze – into culturally stabilized meaning. Their contrastive study is important for linguoculturology because similar movements may be interpreted through different social norms, and these interpretations become conventionalized in the idiomatic layer of a language. This article compares English and Uzbek phraseological units denoting nonverbal actions and reconstructs their cultural scripts through a scenario-based lens, focusing on (a) the bodily form, (b) pragmatic intention, and (c) socially expected interpretation. Uzbek phraseographic evidence (dictionary fixation and semantic explanations) is examined alongside selected studies addressing paralinguistics, professional communication, and multimodal discourse. The analysis shows that both languages share a strong preference for face-, head-, and hand-centered imagery, but they differ in the pragmatic “center of gravity”: Uzbek units more often index relational ethics (respect, propriety, responsibility), while English units more often foreground individual stance (skepticism, distance, emotional control). These divergences are especially salient in translation, where literal equivalence may preserve bodily form but fail to activate the intended cultural script.*

Keywords *Phraseology, linguoculturology, nonverbal communication, kinesics, somatic phraseology, English, Uzbek*

Значения и подтекст жестов в английском и узбекском языках

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Аннотация *В статье анализируются лингвокультурные особенности фразеологических единиц, номинирующих невербальные действия, на материале английского и узбекского языков. Исследование направлено на реконструкцию культурно обусловленных сценариев значений, возникающих в результате языковой фиксации телесных движений как устойчивых образных форм. Особое внимание уделено сопоставлению семантики телесных форм, прагматических намерений и социальных интерпретаций, закреплённых в фразеологическом слое языков. Показано, что, несмотря на общие источники образности (движения лица, головы и рук), английские и узбекские фразеологизмы различаются по доминирующему культурному смыслу: в английском языке устойчивые выражения чаще отражают индивидуальную позицию говорящего, в узбекском – социально-этическую оценку коммуникативного поведения. Сделан вывод о том, что перевод подобных*

единиц требует не только языковой, но и культурной реконструкции, ориентированной на сохраняемое прагматическое чтение телесных действий.

Ключевые слова *Фразеологические единицы, невербальные действия, телесная семантика, лингвокультурология, английский язык, узбекский язык, паралингвистика, культурно обусловленные значения*

Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida imo- ishoralarning ma'nosi va ta'siri

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Annotatsiya *Maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillarida noverbal harakatlarni ifodalovchi frazeologik birliklarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning maqsadi – til orqali barqarorlashtirilgan jismoniy harakatlarning madaniy kontekstda anglanishini aks ettiruvchi madaniy senariylarni qayta tiklash. Semantik shakl, ijtimoiy niyat va madaniy talqinning frazeologik qatlamda uyg'unligi kontrastiv tahlil qilinadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, yuz, bosh va qo'l harakatlari kabi umumiy obraz manbalari mavjud bo'lsa-da, ingliz frazeologizmlari ko'proq shaxsiy mavqe va kayfiyatni ifodalaydi, uzbek tilida esa ko'pincha munosabat va axloqiy baho markazlashgan. Fraseologik birliklarni tarjima qilish tilshunoslikdan tashqari, madaniy pragmatik interpretatsiyani ham hisobga olgan holda amalga oshirilishi lozimligi ta'kidlanadi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Frazeologik birliklar, noverbal harakatlar, jismoniy semantika, lingvokulturologiya, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, para-lingvistika, madaniyatga xos ma'nolar*

Human communication is multimodal: meaning is distributed across words, prosody, gaze, facial expression, gesture, and posture (Kendon, 2004). Facial displays are systematically tied to emotion and social judgment, even when they are strategically controlled (Ekman & Friesen, 1971). Languages reflect this multimodality not only through descriptive vocabulary but also through stable expressions that name "recognizable" bodily acts and attach conventional interpretations to them. In phraseology, the body becomes a culturally readable sign, and the phraseological unit functions as a compressed interpretation of that sign.

From a linguoculturological viewpoint, phraseology is among the most culture-saturated layers of vocabulary because phraseological meaning is frequently based on imagery, evaluation, and scenario knowledge (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2005). Uzbek phraseographic tradition formulates this explicitly in the academic Uzbek phraseological dictionary, where phraseologisms are treated as figurative units refined in linguistic consciousness and connected to national values and communicative functions.

In this analysis, nonverbal-action phraseologisms are understood as stable expressions that either denote a bodily act as a

communicative move (wink, bow one's head, fold one's hands) or extend the bodily act into an evaluative social meaning (indifference, restraint, irritation). Their semantics is "embodied" because it is anchored in visible movement, yet it is "linguocultural" because the movement is interpreted through locally shared scripts of interaction (Sharifian, 2017; Kovecses, 2010). Analytically, each unit can be reconstructed as a minimal scenario that includes participants, a bodily form, a pragmatic intention, and an expected social effect.

The empirical base of the discussion is, first, Uzbek phraseographic material. The Uzbek phraseological dictionary includes 5,198 units and functions as a national reference for figurative meanings and usage patterns. One of the clearest cases where bodily form and cultural script intersect is facial movement and gaze. Consider the Uzbek unit *ko'z qisib qo'ymoq* 'to wink'. In the academic dictionary it is recorded as a stable unit, and the explanation shows that meaning is not exhausted by the physical act: the wink functions as a tacit signal – of shared understanding, collusion, familiarity, or flirtation – depending on situation (Rahmatullaev et al., 2022, 254). English *to wink* can also signal complicity or playful alignment, yet its pragmatic "range" is not identical. In contexts where Uzbek communicative norms demand more explicit distance (e.g., between younger and older interlocutors, or in formal public interaction), the wink may be socially riskier and more strongly marked than in many English-speaking contexts, which affects how the phraseological unit is interpreted and when it is pragmatically licensed.

Posture-based units show an equally informative pattern. The Uzbek phraseological unit *qo'l qovushtirib turmoq*, literally 'to stand with folded hands', is glossed with an evaluative sense of passivity: remaining inactive or failing to help while action is required (Rahmatullaev et al., 2022, 429). The negative evaluation is explicit. Yet the bodily image is

culturally complex because folding hands in front is also recognizable as an etiquette posture in deferential stances before elders or in ceremonial settings. Linguoculturologically, this creates a layered meaning: the surface posture can index respect in one interactional script, while the idiomatic interpretation criticizes passivity in another script. The phraseological unit thus activates a culturally familiar bodily form and then reorients it toward moral evaluation.

Common English expressions illustrate how bodily action becomes stance and evaluation through conventional inference: *to raise an eyebrow* signals doubt, *to shrug one's shoulders* signals non-commitment, *to bite one's lip* signals restraint, *to keep a stiff upper lip* signals-controlled emotion, *to give someone the cold shoulder* signals social distance. Uzbek has comparable descriptive resources, yet its phraseological layer often carries stronger relational and ethical evaluation: bodily acts are frequently interpreted through norms of propriety, respect, shame, and responsibility toward others. This difference does not imply that English lacks relational meanings or Uzbek lacks stance meanings; rather, it suggests that the phraseological system tends to conventionalize different "default" evaluations for bodily behavior.

Ceremonial contexts sharpen linguocultural specificity because rituals are saturated with scripted movements. Qodirova's comparison of English and Uzbek paralinguistic elements in ceremonies emphasizes that gestures, posture, facial expression, and symbolic movements index role, respect, and ritual intention, and they are interpreted through community-specific knowledge (Qodirova, 2025). Phraseological units that name, recall, or metaphorically extend such movements can therefore be read as linguistic traces of ritualized behavior. In contrastive work, this is methodologically important: if a phraseological unit is rooted in a culturally salient ceremonial script, its translation requires not only lexical substitution but also

reconstruction of the ritual meaning that motivates evaluation.

Professional communication provides another layer where nonverbal behavior becomes normatively evaluated. In a *Lingvospektr* study on English professional communication, Nosirova argues that nonverbal means (mimics, gestures, bodily movement, proxemics) affect perceived trust and communicative efficiency in professions such as teaching, medicine, journalism, and law (Nosirova, 2025). For linguoculturology, this is relevant because institutional discourse tends to standardize acceptable bodily behavior and to treat deviation as either incompetence or ethical failure. When such evaluations become repeatable, language is likely to stabilize them through recurrent formulations, and phraseology begins to act as a normative "memory" of professional interaction.

Nonverbal-action phraseologisms also enter multimodal discourse, where the interaction between verbal and bodily meaning is direct. In film, gesture and facial expression may carry information not repeated in dialogue, and translation must decide whether such information is preserved, adapted, or left implicit. Ahmedova argues that nonverbal components in film discourse constitute a crucial semantic layer and that audiovisual translation may under-interpret these cues, producing losses of meaning – especially when humor, irony, or culturally bound behavior is at stake (Ahmedova, 2025). From a linguoculturological angle, film material is valuable because it foregrounds the interpretive work that phraseological units perform: viewers infer stance and relationship from bodily actions, and idiomatic language often supplies a ready-made label for that inference.

From the translation perspective, the key question is which component carries the core meaning: the bodily form, the social evaluation, or the cultural script. If form and script align, near-literal equivalence is possible (*to bite one's*

lip ~ labini tishlamoq). If the form aligns but the script diverges, pragmatic adaptation is safer (a wink can be jocular, flirtatious, or conspiratorial depending on culture and context). If the script aligns but the form differs, an idiomatic substitute that is culturally natural may be preferable to a formally close rendering. In all three cases, the linguoculturological task is the same: to preserve the intended social reading of the body, not merely the description of movement.

The contrastive picture suggests three generalizations. First, both English and Uzbek rely heavily on face, head, and hand movements as imagery sources, reflecting interactional salience and perceptual accessibility. Second, Uzbek units tend to attach stronger relational and ethical evaluation to bodily behavior, linking nonverbal action to propriety, responsibility, and respect, while English units more often highlight individual stance – skepticism, emotional control, ironic distance – without eliminating relational meanings. Third, translation risk is highest when an expression is anchored in a culturally specific script (ritual, etiquette, hierarchy), because the bodily form can be understood cross-culturally while the evaluation is not automatically shared.

In conclusion, phraseological units denoting nonverbal actions reveal an especially transparent connection between language, body, and culture. Their meanings begin with visible movement, yet they stabilize as culturally shared interpretations of that movement. The English–Uzbek comparison shows that embodied imagery may be comparable across languages, while pragmatic licensing and cultural scripts differ systematically. For linguoculturology, such units are valuable because they make cultural norms observable in lexicalized form: the community's interpretations of gesture, posture, and gaze are not only practiced in interaction but also stored and transmitted through phraseology.

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