

The influence of cultural norms in pragmatic interpretation in English and Uzbek: research on Speech acts and social interactions

Xulkar Izbosarova
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
khulkarizbosarova@gmail.com

Annotation. This article studies common pragmatic challenges faced by English and Uzbek languages speaker focusing on the influence of cultural norms and values on pragmatic interpretation in both languages. The research relied on a survey conducted among 94 final-year students of Uzbekistan State World Languages University majoring in English Language and Literature. The survey aimed at investigating the usage of speech acts such as expressions of gratitude, requests, offers of help, and apologies in various contexts, such as face-to-face and social media interactions. Quantitative and qualitative analysis were gathered by multiple-choice and open-ended questions created on Google Forms. Quantitative analysis revealed different patterns in pragmatic choices influenced by cultural factors, including the preference for indirect apologies (“uzur”) and expressive interjections in informal settings. The role of context, gesture use, and linguistic strategies, which were highlighted by qualitative approach, were discussed in different communicative scenarios. Moreover, the research examined how Uzbek speakers, especially youths adapt their language use on social media to convey various meanings. This study contributes to understand the need for culturally-informed approaches in language education.

Key words: pragmatics, speech acts, social media interaction, cultural norms.

Влияние культурных норм на прагматическую интерпретацию на английском и узбекском языках: исследование речевых актов и социальных взаимодействий

Хулкар Избосарова
Узбекский государственный университет мировых языков
khulkarizbosarova@gmail.com

Аннотация. В этой статье изучаются общие прагматические проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются носители английского и узбекского языков, уделяя особое внимание влиянию культурных норм и ценностей на прагматическую интерпретацию на обоих языках. Исследование основывалось на опросе, проведенном среди 94 студентов последнего курса Узбекского государственного университета мировых языков, специализирующихся на английском языке и литературе. Целью опроса было изучение использования речевых актов, таких как выражение благодарности, просьбы, предложения помощи и извинения в различных контекстах, таких как личное общение и взаимодействие в социальных сетях. Количественный и качественный анализ были собраны с помощью вопросов с множественным выбором и открытых вопросов, созданных в Google Forms. Количественный анализ выявил различные закономерности в прагматическом выборе, на который влияют культурные факторы, включая предпочтение косвенных извинений («узур») и выразительных междометий в неформальной обстановке. Роль контекста, использования жестов и языковых стратегий, которые были выделены качественным подходом, обсуждались в различных коммуникативных сценариях. Кроме того, исследование изучало, как носители узбекского языка, особенно молодежь, адаптируют свое использование языка в социальных сетях для передачи различных значений. Это исследование способствует пониманию необходимости культурно-информированных подходов в языковом образовании.

Ключевые слова: прагматика, речевые акты, взаимодействие в социальных сетях, культурные нормы.

Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida madaniy me'yorlarning pragmatik talqinga ta'siri: nutq aktlari va ijtimoiy o'zaro ta'sirlar bo'yicha tadqiqotlar.

Xulkar Izbosarova
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti
khulkarizbosarova@gmail.com

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillarida so'zlashuvchilar duch keladigan umumiy pragmatik muammolar ko'rib chiqilib, madaniy me'yorlar va qadriyatlarning har ikki tilda pragmatik talqinga ta'siriga e'tibor qaratiladi. Tadqiqot O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universitetining ingliz tili va adabiyoti ixtisosligi bo'yicha 94 nafar yakuniy kurs talabasi o'rtasida o'tkazilgan sorovga asoslandi. So'rovnomaning maqsadi, yuzma-yuz va ijtimoiy tarmoqlardagi o'zaro ta'sirlar kabi turli kontekstlarda minnatdorchilik bildirish, so'rash, yordam taklif qilish va uzr so'rash kabi nutqiy harakatlarning qo'llanilishini tekshirish edi. Tahlillar Google Formada yaratilgan ko'p tanlovli va ochiq savollar yordamida to'plangan. Miqdoriy tahlillar madaniy omillar ta'sirida pragmatik tanlovning aniq naqshlarini, jumladan, norasmiy sharoitlarda bilvosita uzr so'rash ("uzur") va ifodali so'zlashuvlarni afzal ko'rishni aniqladi. Sifatli yondashuv bilan ta'kidlangan kontekstning roli, imo-ishoralardan foydalanish va til strategiyalari turli xil aloqa stsenariylarida muhokama qilindi. Bundan tashqari, tadqiqot o'zbek tilida so'zlashuvchilar, ayniqsa, yoshlar ijtimoiy tarmoqlarda o'z tillaridan turli ma'nolarni etkazish uchun qanday moslashayotgani o'rganildi. Ushbu tadqiqot til ta'limida madaniy ma'lumotli yondashuvlar zarurligini tushunishga yordam beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: pragmatika, nutq aktlari, ijtimoiy tarmoqlarning o'zaro ta'siri, madaniy me'yorlar.

Introduction

Pragmatics focuses on meaning in relation to the context of speech. Pragmatic competence, the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts, is a crucial component of effective communication, especially in multilingual and multicultural settings. It involves understanding not only linguistic structures but also cultural norms that guide the interpretation of speech acts such as requests, apologies, and expressions of gratitude (Leech, 2014). To determine if something falls under pragmatics, we look at various aspects of the speech situation.

Since the need for learners to grasp the socio-pragmatic rules governing language use has been highlighted, the importance of cultural awareness in language education has gained significant attention recently (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Uzbek speakers, for instance, engaging with English, as both languages represent distinct cultural frameworks that influence communication style and pragmatic choices, navigate challenges. It is experienced especially when interpreting or performing speech acts in English, as these acts often rely on implicit cultural conventions.

The primary **objective** of this study is to provide insights into the interplay between cultural awareness, language proficiency, and pragmatic skills, how cultural norms and values influence the pragmatic interpretation of speech acts. In addition, it aims to identify common pragmatic challenges faced by Uzbek speakers, offering practical implications for language education and cross-cultural communication.

Literature review

The concept of context can vary, but it generally includes the 'relevant' aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance. Levinson (1983) defined context as any background knowledge

assumed to be shared by the speaker (s) and the listener (h) that contributes to the listener's interpretation of what the speaker means by a given utterance. To simplify, he referred to the speaker or writer as 's' and the listener or reader as 'h', following the convention of Searle (1979), Austin (1962) and others. Using 's' and 'h' does not limit pragmatics to spoken language, it applies to written communication too. Levinson considered to note a distinction made by Lyons (1977) important between a receiver (someone who receives and interprets the message) and an addressee (someone intended to receive the message). A receiver could be a bystander or eavesdropper, not necessarily the addressee. This distinction matters in our study because the analyst of pragmatic meaning acts more like a receiver, trying to make sense of discourse based on available context. However, 'h' always refers to one or more addressees or people the utterance is directed at by 's' (Levinson, 1983).

Having admitted that we should take into account various aspects of Pragmatics, we tried to learn from many linguists. As for Thomas (1983), the performance and interpretation of Speech acts can profoundly be impacted by cultural differences, leading to potential miscommunication in multilingual contexts. Moreover, he identified "pragmatic failure" as a common issue, where speakers misinterpret intentions due to unfamiliarity with the socio-pragmatic norms of another language (Thomas 1983).

Being a critical component of communication, pragmatic competence encompasses the ability to use language appropriately in various social and cultural contexts (Canale and Swain, 1980). As we are focusing to this very point, we would like to highlight claim by Kasper and Rose (2002) that pragmatic development in a second language involves understanding not just grammatical structures but also cultural conventions that dictate language use. Uzbek speakers, who often employ indirect strategies in their native language, may struggle to adapt to the more direct styles common in English.

Miscommunication in cross-cultural interactions, on the one hand, often stems from differing pragmatic conventions. Studies on pragmatic transfer have consistently shown that when using a second language, learners tend to apply the norms of their first language often resulting in unintentional pragmatic errors (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984).

Methodology

In order to find out how cultural norms and values influence pragmatic interpretation in English and Uzbek languages, to determine common pragmatic challenges faced by speaker of both languages, we tried to conduct potential correlation analysis between language proficiency levels, cultural awareness, and pragmatic interpretation skills. Our major audience were final year students of Uzbekistan State World Languages University (groups 2001-2007) who were majoring in English language and literature. We shared the link for the survey in the lecture of Comparative typology and successfully got 94 responses. Our survey relied on context analysis along with multiple choice questions and open-ended questions type.

By the survey we aimed at investigating the ways in which speech acts, including expressions of gratitude, requests for assistance, offers of help, and apologies, are employed by Uzbek speakers with the additional focus in their interactions on social media.

Data collection

While doing both quantitative and qualitative analysis, we tried to ensure that the participants are fully informed about the purpose of the survey and survey questions are culturally appropriate and sensitive.

The survey consisted of three sections: demographics, pragmatic interpretation and social media practices.

Data analysis and results

Here is the quantitative analysis presented in the form of a table:

Age Group	Percentage
18-24 years	89.4%

25-34 years	10.6%
Uzbek Language Proficiency	Percentage
Native-like	68.1%
Fluent	14.9%
English Proficiency	Percentage
Advanced	51.1%
Intermediate	25.5%
Fluent	20.2%

Table 1

According to the questions that are designed to gather insights into how Uzbek speakers engage in various speech acts in their language, considering both their cultural norms and personal experiences, the results were as follow:

Accepting or Declining Invitations	Percentage
It depends on the situation	69.1%
Directly	22.3%
Other	8.6%
Apologizing in Uzbek	Percentage
Both directly and indirectly	34.0%
Directly	35.1%
Indirectly	19.1%
Other	11.8%
Using Gestures and Body Language in Face-to-Face Interactions	Percentage
Often	34.0%
Sometimes	31.9%
Very Often	31.9%
Rarely	2.2%

Table 2

If we pay precise attention to the responses that allow to write their own options, Uzbek speakers use “*xafa bo’lmang*” and depending on additional phrases “*...hojati yo’q*” in order to **decline**. In terms of **apologizing**, most of them mentioned “*uzur*” with other apology words such as “*mendan o’tgan bo’lsa*”, “*boshqa qaytarilmaydi*”, “*bilmay qoldim*” etc. The most notable point is that for open-ended questions that ask about rejecting and about how to apologize in non-official situations, almost every response began with “*uzur*” as well. Besides, they are found to add some interjections (“*voy*”, “*oy*”...) and they let us know how they utter these interjections with writing more vowels within interjections (“*vooooy*”, “*vuuuuy*”, “*iii*”...) in order to express their excuse in a more emotive way.

In terms of **orders and demands**, there were more responses which were chosen to express directly. As most of our responders were students, it is interesting that for question about how to order and urge your listener to do something, they naturally come to the decision to address to their peers or elder people since the answers showed the verbs in the meaning of “*bajar*”, “*qil*”, “*bo’l*”, “*tezlash*”

and the phrases like “qani, davay”. Yet there are such direct non-official ways of ordering, we can see gentle and respected phrases as well.

Our next goal from the survey was to find out social media communication among youth as nowadays they spend most of their time socializing online.

Reason for posting and commenting on social media

Objective	Number of Responses
Sharing personal experiences or updates	48
Influencing opinions or attitudes	8
Expressing support or solidarity	11
Engaging in debates or discussions	6
Providing help or advice	13
Other	8

Table 3

Intention to Impact audience with Social Media Posts or Comments

Intention	Number of Responses
Persuade	3
Inform	23
Entertain	25
Educate	11
Inspire	27
Other	4

Table 4

Methods of Expressing Intentions in Social Media Posts or Comments

Method	Number of Responses
Direct statements	10
Asking questions	15
Providing explanations or elaborations	14
Using humor or sarcasm	26
Offering suggestions or recommendations	9
Using emoticons or emojis	27
Other	3

Table 5

Discussion

When we were conducting a survey, we tried to find out about the reason of more responses such as using emojis. During our short face-to-face conversation, we were able to know that every emoji has its own meaning among social media users so that they could send them more than typing utterances. Furthermore, they showed us the most used emojis, at the same time what do they mean actually.

The survey data on language use and social media interaction among Uzbek speakers provides insightful findings regarding the varied communicative practices and preferences within this linguistic community.

Conclusion

The survey results reveal understanding of how Uzbek speakers navigate different contexts and purposes in their communication practices, particularly on social media. The flexibility in language use, as indicated by the various methods of expressing intentions and the situational responses to invitations and apologies, underscores the importance of context in pragmatic communication. This aligns with the theoretical framework that meaning is not fixed but dynamically constructed based on situational factors and interlocutor relationships.

Additionally, the significant role of non-verbal communication (gestures and body language) in face-to-face interactions highlights the multimodal nature of effective communication among Uzbek speakers. The preference for using emoticons and humor on social media further emphasizes the blend of traditional and modern communicative strategies in their discourse practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that while Uzbek speakers may have high proficiency in multiple languages, their pragmatic use of language is deeply rooted in contextual and cultural nuances, which influence their interaction patterns both online and offline. This insight is valuable for understanding the complexities of bilingual or multilingual communication in a globalized context.

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