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FACE-SAVING STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK SPEECH ACTS: A CROSS-CULTURAL PRAGMALINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. Communication is not limited to the exchange of information; it also involves maintaining interpersonal relationships and protecting participants' social dignity. One of the central concepts in pragmalinguistics is face-saving, which refers to the linguistic and pragmatic strategies speakers use to preserve their own and others' social image during interaction. Since speech acts are strongly influenced by cultural norms, face-saving strategies differ considerably across languages and cultures. This study investigates face-saving strategies in English and Uzbek speech acts from a cross-cultural pragmalinguistic perspective. The research aims to identify similarities and differences in the realization of politeness strategies in everyday communication and to explain how cultural values shape speakers' pragmatic choices. A qualitative comparative approach was employed to analyze authentic examples selected from literary texts, conversational discourse, and digital communication. The findings indicate that English speakers frequently employ indirectness, hedging devices, and explicit politeness markers to minimize threats to the interlocutor's face. Uzbek speakers, however, tend to rely on honorific expressions, modesty, indirect refusals, and culturally appropriate forms of respect. These differences reflect broader cultural orientations toward individualism and collectivism. The findings contribute to cross-cultural pragmatics, intercultural communication, translation studies, and foreign language education by highlighting the importance of pragmatic competence in successful communication.

Keywords: pragmalinguistics, face-saving, politeness, speech acts, cross-cultural communication, English, Uzbek, pragmatics.

Introduction

Language serves not only as a means of transmitting information but also as a powerful instrument for establishing and maintaining social relationships. Every communicative act involves interpersonal considerations that influence how speakers formulate their utterances. For this reason, pragmatics has become one of the most dynamic branches of modern linguistics, examining language use within specific social and cultural contexts.

Among the central issues of pragmatics, politeness and face-saving have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Speakers constantly attempt to avoid threatening the social image of both themselves and their interlocutors. Such communicative behavior is realized through a variety of linguistic strategies, including indirectness, mitigation, hedging, honorific expressions, and other politeness devices. These strategies vary considerably across cultures because





communicative norms are shaped by historical traditions, social values, and cultural expectations.

English and Uzbek belong to different linguistic families and represent distinct cultural traditions. English-speaking societies are generally characterized by relatively individualistic communicative values, where personal autonomy and direct yet polite interaction are appreciated. In contrast, Uzbek communicative culture places greater emphasis on respect, collectivism, hierarchy, and interpersonal harmony. Consequently, speakers of the two languages often employ different face-saving strategies even when performing identical speech acts.

The objective of this research is to compare face-saving strategies in English and Uzbek speech acts from a pragmalinguistic perspective. Special attention is paid to requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, and expressions of gratitude, as these speech acts frequently involve potential threats to face. The study also explores how cultural values influence pragmatic choices and how awareness of such differences may improve intercultural communication.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to investigate face-saving strategies in English and Uzbek speech acts. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth interpretation of pragmatic meaning within its cultural context. Rather than measuring the frequency of linguistic forms statistically, the study focuses on explaining how speakers achieve politeness and maintain interpersonal harmony through language.

The research data consist of authentic examples collected from English and Uzbek literary works, conversational interactions, educational settings, and online communication. The examples were selected because they represent naturally occurring speech in everyday contexts where face-threatening acts frequently arise. The analysis focuses on five common speech acts: requests, refusals, apologies, compliments, and expressions of gratitude.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods. Each example was examined according to the following criteria:

1. the communicative situation;
2. the relationship between interlocutors;
3. the type of face-threatening act;
4. the linguistic strategy used to reduce the threat;
5. the cultural motivation underlying the speaker's choice.

The interpretation is based primarily on the theoretical frameworks proposed by Goffman, Brown and Levinson, and Leech, whose models remain fundamental in contemporary pragmalinguistic research. Their theories make it possible to explain not only what speakers say but also why they choose particular linguistic forms in specific communicative situations.

Results and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that speakers of English and Uzbek share the common communicative goal of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations.





However, the linguistic realization of face-saving strategies differs because of the cultural values embedded in each society.

Face-saving in Requests

Requests are among the most common face-threatening acts because they impose on the hearer's freedom of action. English speakers usually soften requests through indirectness and modal verbs.

Example 1 (English):

"Could you possibly help me with this report?"

Instead of using a direct imperative, the speaker minimizes imposition through the modal verb *could* and the hedge *possibly*. Such expressions reduce pressure on the hearer and demonstrate respect for personal autonomy.

In Uzbek, requests frequently include honorific expressions and respectful lexical items.

Example 2 (Uzbek):

"Iltimos, vaqt topsangiz, shu hujjatni ko'rib bera olasizmi?"

The request combines the politeness marker *iltimos* with the respectful conditional construction *vaqt topsangiz*, emphasizing consideration for the interlocutor's circumstances rather than simply requesting assistance.

Face-saving in Refusals

Refusing an invitation or request may threaten the positive face of the interlocutor. Consequently, both cultures employ mitigating strategies.

An English speaker often provides an explanation before refusing:

"I'd really love to come, but unfortunately I have another appointment."

The refusal begins with appreciation before introducing the negative response.

Uzbek speakers generally avoid direct refusal altogether:

"Juda xursand bo'lardim, lekin boshqa safar, albatta."

Rather than saying "No," the speaker postpones acceptance, preserving interpersonal harmony and avoiding embarrassment.

Face-saving in Apologies

Apologies restore social balance after an offence has occurred. English apologies usually contain explicit acknowledgment of responsibility.

Example:

"I'm terribly sorry. It was entirely my fault."

The speaker openly accepts responsibility and attempts to repair the relationship.

Uzbek apologies frequently include expressions of respect and requests for forgiveness.

Example:

"Kechirasiz, sizni noqulay ahvolga solib qo'ydim."

Such expressions demonstrate humility and emphasize concern for the hearer's feelings.

Face-saving in Compliments

Responses to compliments illustrate one of the clearest cultural differences.





English speakers usually accept compliments directly.

Example:

"Thank you. I'm glad you liked it."

Acceptance is interpreted as confidence rather than arrogance.

Uzbek speakers, however, often reject or downplay compliments to display modesty.

Example:

"Yo'q, unday emas, shunchaki omad kulib boqdi."

Self-deprecation functions as an important politeness strategy that reflects cultural expectations regarding humility.

Face-saving in Expressions of Gratitude

Expressions of gratitude also demonstrate different pragmatic preferences.

English:

"Thank you very much. I really appreciate your help."

Uzbek:

"Rahmat, Alloh rozi bo'lsin."

While English gratitude frequently emphasizes personal appreciation, Uzbek expressions often include religious or blessing formulas that strengthen social solidarity.

These findings are closely associated with broader cultural orientations. Individualistic cultures encourage openness, personal independence, and explicit communication. Collectivistic cultures prioritize group cohesion, interpersonal obligations, and respect for social hierarchy. Consequently, linguistic politeness reflects not only grammatical structures but also deeply rooted cultural values.

From a pedagogical perspective, these differences are particularly important for learners of English as a foreign language. Uzbek learners who transfer native pragmatic norms into English communication may unintentionally appear overly indirect or fail to recognize culturally appropriate politeness conventions. Likewise, native English speakers interacting in Uzbek may misinterpret modest responses or indirect refusals. Therefore, foreign language instruction should incorporate pragmatic competence alongside grammatical and lexical knowledge.

Conclusion

The present study has examined face-saving strategies in English and Uzbek speech acts from a cross-cultural pragmalinguistic perspective. The analysis demonstrates that although speakers of both languages share the universal need to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, the ways they achieve this goal are influenced by different cultural and communicative norms.

The findings reveal that English speakers tend to employ strategies based on individual autonomy, indirectness, and explicit expressions of politeness. Modal verbs, hedging devices, apologies, and direct acceptance of compliments are among the most common linguistic means used to reduce face-threatening effects. These strategies correspond to communication patterns in which personal independence and respect for individual boundaries are highly valued.





Uzbek speakers, in contrast, frequently rely on strategies associated with collectivistic cultural values, including respect, modesty, social hierarchy, and interpersonal solidarity. Honorific forms, indirect refusals, self-deprecating responses to compliments, and expressions of blessing or goodwill serve as important mechanisms for maintaining social harmony and protecting the interlocutor's face.

The comparative analysis confirms that face-saving behavior is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a reflection of cultural identity and social expectations. Differences between English and Uzbek pragmatic strategies may lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication if speakers lack sufficient pragmatic awareness. Therefore, developing intercultural pragmatic competence should be considered an essential component of foreign language education.

The results of this study may contribute to further research in pragmalinguistics, cross-cultural communication, translation studies, and English language teaching. A deeper understanding of culturally specific politeness strategies can help speakers communicate more effectively and appropriately in multilingual environments.

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