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eoconf.com - from 2024



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND EDUCATION: a collection scientific works of the International scientific conference – London, England, 2026. Issue 1

Languages of publication: Uzbek, English, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish

The collection consists of scientific research of scientists, graduate students and students who took part in the International Scientific online conference «**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AND EDUCATION**». Which took place in London , 2026.

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Semantic and Pragmatic Features of Complaints in Uzbek and English: An Interpersonal Discourse Perspective

Turdieva Gulmira Akramjonovna,

Senior Lecturer of the Department of English Language Teaching Methodology,
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences.

gulmiraturdieva@gmail.com

Tukhtasinova Durdona Sayfiddinovna,

Master's student of Fergana State University

dtoxtasinova21@gmail.com

Abstract. This article explores the semantic and pragmatic realization of complaints in Uzbek and English interpersonal discourse. Complaints are face-threatening acts that reflect speakers' cultural values, social norms, and communicative strategies. By applying a discourse-pragmatic framework, the study compares how complaints are structured, mitigated, and interpreted in the two languages. The findings reveal that while English complaints tend to emphasize indirectness and individual face-saving strategies, Uzbek complaints are often shaped by collectivist values, respect for hierarchy, and culturally embedded norms of politeness. The article contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics by highlighting how semantic choices and discourse strategies reflect broader cultural models of interaction.

Keywords: complaints, interpersonal discourse, pragmatics, Uzbek language, English language, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction. Interpersonal discourse plays a crucial role in everyday communication, as it reflects how individuals negotiate meaning, relationships, and social identities. Among various speech acts, complaints are particularly significant because they involve expressing dissatisfaction, disapproval, or negative evaluation, often risking social harmony. In cross-cultural contexts, misunderstandings frequently arise due to differences in how complaints are formulated and interpreted.

This article examines the semantic and pragmatic aspects of complaints in Uzbek and English. The choice of these two languages is motivated by their distinct cultural orientations: English-speaking cultures are often described as relatively individualistic, while Uzbek culture is largely collectivist and hierarchy-oriented. By analyzing complaints as interpersonal discourse, the study aims to show how language structure and cultural norms interact in shaping communicative behavior.

2. Theoretical Background. Complaints are commonly classified as expressive speech acts that convey a speaker's negative feelings toward a situation or behavior. According to pragmatics, they are also face-threatening acts because they may damage the hearer's positive or negative face. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provides a useful framework for analyzing how speakers mitigate the threat posed by complaints.

From a semantic perspective, complaints involve evaluative language, modality, and intensifiers that encode degrees of dissatisfaction. Discourse analysis, on the





other hand, focuses on how complaints are embedded in interaction, including openings, justifications, and resolutions. Cultural pragmatics emphasizes that these features are not universal but culturally conditioned.

3. Complaints in English Interpersonal Discourse.

In English, complaints are frequently realized through indirect strategies. Speakers often soften their dissatisfaction using hedges, modal verbs, and tentative language such as “I’m not sure if this is the right time, but...” or “It seems that there might be a small problem.” Such expressions reduce the imposition on the hearer and signal politeness.

Semantically, English complaints tend to rely on understatement rather than overt criticism. The use of conditional clauses (“If you could...”, “I was wondering whether...”) allows speakers to distance themselves from direct blame. In interpersonal discourse, complaints are often preceded by positive remarks or apologies, which function as discourse markers to maintain social harmony.

Culturally, these strategies reflect the importance of individual autonomy and personal space in English-speaking societies. Maintaining equality and avoiding direct confrontation are central values, which are encoded linguistically through indirect complaint forms.

4. Complaints in Uzbek Interpersonal Discourse

Uzbek complaints, while also sensitive to politeness, display different semantic and pragmatic patterns. In many contexts, complaints may be expressed more directly, especially within close social relationships such as family or neighbors. Directness in such cases does not necessarily imply impoliteness but rather signals solidarity and shared responsibility.

Semantically, Uzbek complaints often employ explicit evaluative expressions and culturally specific lexical items that convey moral judgment. At the same time, respect for age, status, and social hierarchy strongly influences complaint strategies. When addressing elders or superiors, speakers tend to use honorific forms, indirect hints, or third-person references to avoid direct confrontation.

Discourse-wise, complaints in Uzbek are frequently embedded in narratives or moral explanations. The speaker may justify the complaint by referring to social norms, community values, or collective expectations, reflecting the collectivist orientation of Uzbek culture.

5. Comparative Discussion. The comparison of Uzbek and English complaints highlights significant cultural differences in interpersonal discourse. English complaints prioritize face-saving and individual autonomy through indirectness and mitigation. Uzbek complaints, in contrast, balance directness and politeness depending on social distance and hierarchy.

These differences can lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. For example, an English speaker may perceive Uzbek complaints as overly direct, while an Uzbek speaker may interpret English indirectness as insincerity or lack of clarity. Understanding the semantic and cultural foundations of complaints is therefore essential for effective intercultural communication.





6. Conclusion. This article has examined the semantic and pragmatic features of complaints in Uzbek and English interpersonal discourse. The analysis demonstrates that complaint strategies are deeply rooted in cultural values and social norms. By recognizing these differences, language learners and intercultural communicators can develop greater pragmatic competence and avoid potential communication breakdowns.

