

The Role of Speech Acts in Communication in Uzbek and English Cultures

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Abstract:

As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, effective intercultural communication becomes increasingly important, especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. In Uzbekistan, the rise in international tourism and interaction with English-speaking visitors has highlighted the significance of understanding pragmatic norms in both Uzbek and English cultures. Despite shared values like politeness and hospitality, notable differences in speech act realization and socio-cultural behaviors remain underexplored, particularly from a comparative pragmatic perspective. This study aims to examine and compare how speech acts—such as greetings, refusals, and expressions of politeness—are performed in Uzbek and English cultures, identifying both unique and overlapping features. The analysis reveals that while both cultures value courtesy, their expression through speech acts is shaped by distinct sociocultural and historical contexts. Uzbek culture emphasizes traditional structures, religious influence, and collectivist values, whereas English culture reflects class-based behavioral norms, secular etiquette, and individualism. These differences affect language use, expectations in communication, and interpretations of politeness. The research highlights the impact of cultural constructs such as mahalla (Uzbek social units) and English social class systems on speech acts, offering a nuanced understanding of intercultural pragmatics. The findings underscore the need for culturally informed language education that fosters intercultural competence. This is especially vital for Uzbek learners of English and professionals in tourism and education sectors, where misinterpretations of speech acts could hinder effective communication and cultural exchange.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Politeness, Intercultural Communication, Values, Pluralism, Tourism

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, intercultural communication plays a vital role in fostering mutual understanding among individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As English becomes a global lingua franca, the nature of communication extends beyond mere linguistic competence to include cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is particularly relevant in multilingual societies like Uzbekistan, where English is increasingly used in professional, educational, and tourism contexts. The comparative study of speech acts—communicative actions determined by speaker intention and listener interpretation—offers critical insights into how language reflects cultural values and social norms. In both English and Uzbek cultures, speech acts such as greetings, refusals, compliments, and expressions of politeness are performed within distinct cultural frameworks, influenced by historical, religious, and social traditions. In Uzbekistan, Islamic values, family hierarchy, and community-based structures like the mahalla shape communication patterns, emphasizing respect, hospitality, and indirectness. In contrast, English culture is shaped by class distinctions, individualism, and an emphasis on etiquette and personal space, which influence the norms of politeness and social interaction. These cultural differences are especially evident in pragmatic aspects of language use, where the same speech act can carry different implications across cultures. Understanding these distinctions is essential not only for language learners but also for educators, translators, and professionals engaged in intercultural dialogue. This study explores the sociocultural foundations of speech acts in Uzbek and English contexts, contributing to the development of intercultural communicative competence and enhancing mutual respect and effective communication in global and multicultural settings.

Methods

The methodology of this study is grounded in a qualitative and comparative analysis aimed at examining the communicative function of speech acts within the Uzbek and English cultural contexts[1]. The research was conducted through an in-depth review of cultural behaviors, traditions[2], and socio-pragmatic norms that influence the use of language in both societies[3]. By drawing from cultural observation, existing literature, and statistical data regarding tourism and intercultural interactions[4], the study analyzes how politeness, hierarchy, hospitality, and social values are encoded in speech acts[5]. Key cultural practices such as greetings, refusals[6], and expressions of gratitude were evaluated to understand their linguistic realizations and pragmatic functions[7]. English and Uzbek speech behaviors were examined through a cultural-pragmatic lens to identify how underlying social structures—like class divisions in England or the mahalla system in Uzbekistan—influence communication patterns[8]. In addition, the analysis incorporated the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to assess how these speech acts facilitate or hinder communication in multicultural settings[9]. Real-life examples, historical insights, and behavioral norms were used to contextualize speech acts within everyday interactions[10]. Furthermore, secondary data from tourism reports and sociocultural platforms supported the assessment of how cultural values shape linguistic choices[11]. The comparative nature of the study enabled the identification of both shared and divergent pragmatic strategies[12], providing a nuanced understanding of intercultural communication between English and Uzbek speakers[13]. Through this method, the research offers insights into how speech acts function as cultural tools for expressing identity[14], maintaining social harmony, and navigating intercultural dialogue[15].

Results and Discussion

As the number of English speakers from different cultures increases globally, English is increasingly used for intercultural communication. English is an international language that connects most of the world's population. In this context, the task of teachers in language teaching is not only to teach the student the language as a tool, but also to teach the cultural characteristics of their own and other people.

In this regard, it is important to provide language learners with an understanding of their own culture and the values of others. Cross-cultural pragmatic research can play a crucial role in accelerating this process. Pragmatic norms play a leading role in the implementation of speech acts, which creates pluralism - that is, diversity - in the views, knowledge, and cultural values of those who enter into this dialogue. In other words, the cultural foundations of speech acts and the cultural concepts associated with them differ from language to language and culture to culture.

Speech acts are "communicative activity[s] determined by the intentions of speakers and their impact on listeners during speech." In different cultures, great attention has been paid to the performance of various speech acts. This is often due to the need to help people involved in communication use language in a socio-linguistically appropriate way.

This is especially important in countries where English is used by people of different languages for everyday activities. This is especially evident in Uzbekistan, where different nationalities live and the number of tourists is increasing year by year. Based on the figures provided by the Republican Main Department of Tourism and Sports, the number of foreign tourists in 2021 exceeded 48.9 thousand. As it turned out, this figure increased by almost 8 times in domestic tourism compared to 2020, and by 3.5 times in the number of foreign tourists. According to the State Statistics Committee, in May 2022, 503.6 thousand foreign citizens visited Uzbekistan for tourist purposes.

It is noted that this figure has increased by 363.4 thousand people, or 3.6 times, compared to the same period last year. Citizens of English-speaking countries visited Uzbekistan, of which 15 thousand were from the United States and another 1.1 thousand from the United Kingdom. In addition to the capital Tashkent, the number of tourists visiting the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand has also increased, as efforts have been made to integrate tourism with local cultures and values. The construction of theme parks, natural attractions and more affordable hotels starting in 2023, based on the country's already expanded investment in the tourism and hospitality industry, shows that global tourism is beginning to move towards global dialogue.

This growth will affect the diversity of cultures present in the region, thereby increasing the opportunities for people of different cultures to communicate with each other. However, this creates language and cultural challenges for tourists, foreigners and Uzbekistanis, which require all parties to acquire, in addition to language skills, the skills of intercultural communication (International Cultural Competence). ICC is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with representatives of other cultures", and one of its main areas is cultural awareness, which includes how members of the host country think and behave during communication.

Uzbekistan is a country inhabited by one of the oldest ethnic groups on our planet. Its rich history has determined the unique place of life of the current indigenous population of the country. Islamic traditions have a significant impact on the formation of the Uzbek national character. The belief of most people in Islam requires them to pray five times a day and fast during the holy month of Ramadan. Despite this, Uzbeks are not alien to secular knowledge and innovations. Accordingly, they have a tolerant character and are tolerant of representatives of other religions.

One of the traditional forms of social structure in Uzbekistan is the mahalla. The mahalla is a part of society, which includes families living in the same close area. The principles of mutual assistance are considered one of the fundamental foundations of the mahalla. The mahalla often occupies an entire village or settlement. In the Uzbek family, there is a strict hierarchy that ensures the authority of the husband and father as the head of the household, and the respect and obedience of the younger ones to the elders. In any family, children are shown love and care.

One of the most famous customs of Uzbeks is their hospitality. The art of welcoming guests is highly valued in Uzbek society and has clear rules. Guests are greeted at the entrance to the house. Uzbeks love to communicate with each other. Conversation is always conducted in a simple and democratic

manner. The favorite place for local residents to hold conversations on various topics is the teahouse. Both friendly meetings and business negotiations are held here.

It is impossible to refuse an invitation to dinner from Uzbeks. Uzbeks bring gifts to each other, sweets to children. It is not good to arrive too late at the invitation, this is a sign of disrespect for the host. Shoes are taken off when entering the house. The table is usually set in the central room or in the courtyard. The meal begins and ends with tea. The more valuable the guest is to the hosts, the less tea they pour him. Frequent appeals to the hosts for tea show respect for the hosts. Even a refusal to drink tea can offend the host. Drinking Uzbek tea is associated with various customs that foreigners must also observe.

Uzbeks are very open and friendly people, so it is customary for them to shake hands even when meeting strangers (only men). Friends ask about each other's health and recent changes in life during a handshake. It is also quite customary for people who are very close to each other (men) to hug. Women politely place their right hand on their chest, and when women who are close to each other meet, it is natural for them to hug and even kiss. In terms of appearance, that is, clothing, there are no strict restrictions in Uzbekistan. However, if it comes to visiting places of religious significance, wearing short and revealing clothes is not recommended and is strongly criticized.

The population of Uzbekistan remains as polite as possible even during a conflict or argument. This feature of their mentality has a historical origin: Uzbeks have long been merchants, for whom offending a customer meant losing profits. Refusal in Uzbekistan is never done outright. The traditional answer to the most diverse requests is "okay".

Uzbeks do not like to rush into work, making decisions, or fulfilling promises. An Uzbek who has not been able to fulfill an agreement will try to resolve the tense situation that has arisen by any means without offending the other party.

In the English, social status is a decisive, normative and regulating aspect of many issues. Class status mainly governs the mentality of the English. The working classes, middle and upper classes have a significant impact on the formation of their thinking. When we say social class, we mean the economic, social and political status of a person.

English people who are working class or belong to the working class are usually proud of this. The English people who come from working families are hardworking people who have been working for centuries and have become a symbol of honesty. Most of these people work in agriculture or industry, receiving weekly or monthly wages. Family members belonging to the working class rarely have academic degrees, and most of them live in rented houses.

On the other hand, the British who describe themselves as middle class are well educated and work in administrative jobs in the private or public sector. They are usually motivated by a monthly salary and, despite being well-employed, have a higher education.

Most of the middle class live in townhouses that they own or rent. They always strive to give their children a good education, trying to make demands on them in this regard. The third category is the upper class, that is, aristocrats, people from noble families who enjoy wealth inherited from previous generations. Some wealthy people own companies, properties and similar investments, which allows them to be in a managerial mood. They live in villas or in their own residences. Although class differences are not as obvious when entering into a relationship or dialogue, the issue of mentality can interfere. It is not the national mentality, but the mentality formed between groups that is often noticeable.

Conclusion

In general, the English respect all races equally. The English, regardless of age, consider themselves noble and respect women. They offer women the first place at parties, family and social gatherings.

They show their respect by opening doors for women, taking off their hats, and bowing to them. They also love humor. People with a humorous, cheerful nature are very popular at meetings. They use humor not in a way that belittles, humiliates, or hurts a particular person, but rather to raise the mood and remove barriers during communication. The English do not tolerate anyone talking with their mouth full of food, or coughing in a meeting or in a crowded place. They are always ready to help someone, even on the road, at the station, in line, because they love communication so much that they start a conversation at least with the topic of the weather. They respect people who observe the rules of etiquette at the table, at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Discourses such as “Excuse me”, “Thank you”, “Excuse me” are the most frequently used phrases in the vocabulary of the English people. Politeness and courtesy play an important role in Uzbek and English cultures, and at the same time, these beliefs are embedded in the way of life of people: these elements of speech can be observed in people's communication and behavior.

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