IQRO JURNALI , IQRO JOURNAL, ИКРО ЖУРНАЛИ
ISSN:2181-4341| wordlyknowledge.uz/index.php/iqro
Volume 24. Issue 02. Noyabr ,2026

REQUEST STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A CONTRASTIVE PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE

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Abstract. A request can be grammatically perfect and still sound rude, overly humble or simply odd to an English speaker. Such pragmatic failure is common among Uzbek learners of English, yet English courses in Uzbekistan rarely teach requests systematically. This article compares how English and Uzbek speakers make requests, using the framework of the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Uzbek relies heavily on grammatical and lexical markers of respect, including the siz/sen distinction, polite imperatives in -ing, benefactive auxiliaries such as -ib bermoq, the softener bir, and kinship terms used as address forms. English relies more on conventional indirectness through modal questions and syntactic distancing. Four areas of likely negative transfer are identified: imperative-plus-please requests, the vocative Teacher, over-elaborate deference in e-mails, and under-use of syntactic softeners. Teaching procedures based on research on instructed pragmatics are proposed.

Keywords: pragmatics, requests, politeness, speech acts, pragmatic transfer, Uzbek, English teaching

INGLIZ VA O‘ZBEK TILLARIDA ILTIMOS STRATEGIYALARI: QIYOSIY PRAGMATIK TAHLIL VA PRAGMATIK KOMPETENSIYANI O‘QITISHGA OID XULOSALAR

Annotatsiya. Maqolada ingliz va o‘zbek tillarida iltimos nutqiy aktini ifodalash vositalari CCSARP loyihasi va Braun–Levinson xushmuomalalik nazariyasi asosida qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. O‘zbek tilida hurmat ma’nosi siz/sen zid qo‘yilishi, -ing buyruq shakli, -ib bermoq ko‘makchi fe’li, bir so‘zi va qarindoshlik atamalari orqali ifodalanishi, ingliz tilida esa modal savollar va sintaktik yumshatish vositalari ustunligi ko‘rsatiladi. Pragmatik interferensiyaning to‘rt sohasi aniqlanib, ularni o‘qitish usullari taklif etiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: pragmatika, iltimos, xushmuomalalik, nutqiy akt, pragmatik interferensiya

СТРАТЕГИИ ПРОСЬБЫ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ И УЗБЕКСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ: СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНЫЙ ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ И ВЫВОДЫ ДЛЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ

Аннотация. В статье сопоставляются средства выражения просьбы в английском и узбекском языках на основе методики CCSARP и теории вежливости Браун и Левинсона. Выделены четыре области вероятного прагматического переноса у узбекских учащихся и предложены методы обучения прагматической компетенции.

Ключевые слова: прагматика, просьба, вежливость, речевой акт, прагматический перенос

INTRODUCTION

A student writes to a visiting lecturer: Dear respected teacher! Please send me the presentation. Another student, in class, raises a hand and says: Teacher, give me a marker, please. Both sentences are grammatically correct, and by the students' own standards both are polite. Yet to an English speaker the first may sound exaggerated in its opening and abrupt in its request, and the second may sound like an order. Thomas [1] called this kind of mismatch pragmatic failure and argued that it is more damaging than grammatical error, because listeners attribute it to the speaker's character rather than to their language level.

Requests are a sensitive speech act because they impose on the hearer. Every language provides ways of reducing that imposition, but languages differ in which ways they prefer. Uzbek has a rich set of grammatical and lexical respect markers, while English relies to a large extent on indirect constructions. Learners who carry Uzbek strategies over into English can therefore be misunderstood, however good their intentions.

Uzbek-language pragmatics has been described in terms of national etiquette and speech culture, but contrastive studies of request strategies in Uzbek and English, and their consequences for teaching, are rare. This article compares request strategies in the two languages, predicts where negative pragmatic transfer is likely, and suggests ways of teaching the difference.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness theory

Brown and Levinson [2] proposed that speakers protect each other's "face": positive face, the wish to be liked and approved of, and negative face, the wish not to be imposed upon. Requests threaten the hearer's negative face. The seriousness of the threat depends on three variables: the social distance (D) between speaker and hearer, the relative power (P) of the hearer over the speaker, and the ranking of the imposition (R) in the culture. Speakers choose strategies, from direct (Give me the pen) to conventionally indirect (Could you give me the pen?) to hints (I've forgotten my pen), according to these variables. Leech [3] refined the account, arguing that politeness is a matter of giving high value to the hearer and low value to the speaker.

The CCSARP framework

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper [4] developed a coding scheme for comparing requests across languages. A request consists of a head act (the request itself) and optional modifications. Head acts range across three levels of directness: direct (imperatives, performatives, want

statements), conventionally indirect (questions about ability or willingness, suggestions), and non-conventionally indirect (hints). Modification may be internal, such as downtoners (possibly, just), past-tense or conditional distancing (I was wondering if…), and politeness markers (please); or external, through supportive moves such as grounders (reasons), preparators and disarmers (I know you're busy, but…). Across the languages in the project, English included, conventional indirectness was the most frequent strategy.

Instructed pragmatics

Kasper and Rose [5] and Bardovi-Harlig [6] showed that, without instruction, pragmatic competence develops slowly, even among learners living in the target-language community. Taguchi's [7] review of instructional studies concluded that explicit teaching of pragmatic features, combined with practice and feedback, is generally more effective than exposure alone.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a contrastive analysis. The CCSARP categories [4] were used to organise the comparison. For English, strategies were taken from the CCSARP findings and politeness research. For Uzbek, illustrative requests were constructed by the author for typical situations varying in power, distance and imposition (asking a friend for a pen, a classmate to close the door, a teacher for permission or a document), and the strategies used were classified. Predicted transfer patterns were derived from differences between the two inventories. The examples illustrate typical patterns and are not the results of an elicitation study.

RESULTS

Uzbek request strategies

Uzbek speakers mark politeness in requests through several devices:

- **Pronoun and verb forms of address.** Sen (informal) and siz (formal) determine the verb ending: Eshikni yop vs Eshikni yoping ('Close the door'). The siz-imperative in -ing is polite in itself, so in Uzbek a direct imperative can be perfectly acceptable even when addressed to a teacher.
- **Honorific plural.** Respect for a third person may be shown with plural verb forms: Domla keldilar ('The teacher has come', with respect).
- **Benefactive and auxiliary verbs.** -ib bermoq ('do for someone') and -ib qo'ymoq soften and personalise the request: Yordam berib yuboring ('Please help me out').
- **Softening particles and words.** Bir ('just, a little'), -chi and -gina: Bir qarab bering-chi ('Just have a look, will you'), ozgina kuting ('wait a little').
- **Permission questions.** Kirsam maylimi? ('May I come in?'), Ruchkangizni olib tursam bo'ladimi? ('Could I borrow your pen?').
- **Conditional formulas.** Agar malol kelmasa… ('If it is not a burden…'), …qilib bersangiz ('if you would do…').
- **Address terms.** Kinship terms extended to non-relatives (aka, opa, uka, singlim) and professional titles (domla, ustoz) are used as vocatives.

English request strategies

In English, the most common strategy is conventional indirectness through modal questions: Can you…?, Could you…?, Would you mind…? Politeness increases with syntactic distancing (I

was wondering if you could…), downtoners (just, possibly) and external supportive moves (Sorry to bother you, but…). The direct imperative, even with please, is generally limited to situations of low imposition, close relationships or institutional authority. Address forms are fairly simple: first names among peers, and title plus surname (Dr Smith, Ms Brown) for teachers.

Predicted areas of transfer

Comparing the two inventories suggests four areas of likely negative transfer (Table 1).

Table 1. Predicted pragmatic transfer in requests

Area	Uzbek source	Typical learner English	More appropriate English
1. Imperative + please	Siz-imperative is polite in itself: Berib yuboring	Please give me your notes.	Could you send me your notes?
2. Teacher as address	Domla, ustoz are normal vocatives	Teacher, can I ask a question?	Excuse me, Ms Brown / Dr Karimov, …
3. Over-elaborate deference	Respect formulas in writing to superiors	Dear respected teacher! I hope you are in good health…	Dear Dr Smith, I hope you are well.
4. Few syntactic softeners	Softening is lexical (bir, -chi) and morphological (-ib bermoq)	Can you check my essay? to a lecturer one does not know	I was wondering if you could have a look at my essay.

Area 1 is probably the most frequent. Because the Uzbek siz-imperative already encodes respect, learners feel that please plus imperative is equally respectful. In English, however, please does not turn an order into a request when the imposition is high.

Area 2 concerns address. Teacher as a vocative is understood in English but sounds unusual to many speakers, and it can be perceived as childish in a university setting.

Area 3 is a reminder that transfer can make learners too polite as well as too direct. Elaborate formulas of respect and good wishes, normal in Uzbek letters to superiors, may seem formulaic or flattering in English e-mails, especially when followed by a direct request.

Area 4 reflects the location of softening. Uzbek softens through morphology and particles that have no direct English equivalents; learners therefore rely on please and lose the softening that English expresses through syntax.

DISCUSSION

Neither language is more polite than the other; they simply place politeness in different parts of the request. Uzbek learners who know English grammar well may still lack the knowledge of where English places politeness. Research on instructed pragmatics [7] suggests that this knowledge can be taught explicitly. Four procedures are suggested below.

Awareness through comparison. Students collect requests they would make in Uzbek in five situations of varying power, distance and imposition, then compare them with English requests in the same situations from textbook dialogues or film extracts. They identify where each language puts politeness: in the verb form, in a particle, in a modal question, or in a supportive move.

The P–D–R grid. Students analyse situations using Brown and Levinson's three variables and choose a request form accordingly. For example, borrowing a pen from a friend (low P, low

D, low R) allows Can I borrow your pen?; asking a lecturer for an extension (high P, high D, high R) requires I was wondering if it might be possible to… with a grounder.

Role plays with feedback. Pairs act out requests on cards that specify P, D and R. Observers note the head act and modifications using a simplified CCSARP checklist.

E-mail rewriting. Students rewrite e-mails to lecturers, focusing on the opening (title plus surname), a short supportive move and a conventionally indirect request. This addresses Areas 2, 3 and 4 together and has immediate practical value for students who correspond with international lecturers.

Two cautions are in order. First, the aim is not to replace Uzbek norms but to add English ones; students should understand that both are valid within their own communities. Second, the analysis is based on constructed examples. A discourse completion test administered to Uzbek learners and English speakers, coded with CCSARP categories, would test the predictions empirically and measure the frequency of each transfer pattern.

CONCLUSION

Uzbek speakers make polite requests through respectful verb forms, benefactive auxiliaries, softening particles, permission questions and rich address terms. English speakers rely mainly on conventionally indirect modal questions, syntactic distancing and supportive moves. These differences predict four areas of pragmatic transfer in Uzbek learners' English: imperative-plus-please requests, Teacher as an address form, over-elaborate deference in writing, and few syntactic softeners. Because pragmatic failure affects how learners are judged as people, English courses should give it systematic attention. Comparison-based awareness tasks, analysis of power, distance and imposition, role plays and e-mail rewriting offer practical ways to develop pragmatic competence.

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