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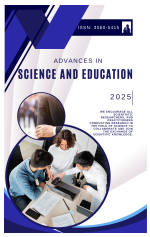

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PAPER

PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF SPEECH ACTS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH MOVIE DIALOGUES

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Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the pragmatic functions of speech acts in Uzbek and English movie dialogues, aiming to highlight cross-cultural communication patterns and nuances. By drawing upon speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975), politeness frameworks (Brown Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014), and foundational Uzbek linguistic scholarship (Nurmonov, 2002; 2009), the study systematically examines directives, expressives, and commissives in cinematic discourse. Utilizing qualitative discourse analysis and intercultural pragmatics methodology, the findings reveal that Uzbek film dialogues predominantly feature indirect strategies, deference, and honorifics to convey politeness, whereas English films favor explicit performatives, egalitarian language, and modal hedging. These results contribute to the understanding of national communicative identities, intercultural pragmatics, and the role of cinema in reflecting cultural norms.

Key words: speech acts, pragmatics, cinematic discourse, Uzbek films, English films, politeness strategies, intercultural communication

Introduction

Cinema functions as both an artistic medium and a lens through which cultural and social norms are expressed. Dialogues in films, while fictional, often reflect authentic communicative practices and provide valuable data for the study of pragmatic phenomena, including speech acts (Bednarek, 2018; Culpeper, 2021). By observing how characters request, apologize, promise, or compliment within a narrative, researchers can gain insight into the socio-pragmatic conventions of a society.

Speech act theory, initially proposed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1975), asserts that utterances inherently perform actions. The classification into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts allows analysts to explore not just what is said, but what action the speaker intends to perform. Pragmatic realization is heavily influenced by cultural values, social hierarchy, and

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politeness conventions.

In the Uzbek sociolinguistic context, communication is highly shaped by respect, collectivism, and indirectness, as highlighted by Nurmonov (2002; 2009). Conversely, English discourse is typically characterized by explicitness, individualism, and egalitarian communication styles (Hofstede, 2011). Although the pragmatics of English films has been extensively studied (Cutting, 2020; Dynel, 2011), research on Uzbek cinematic discourse remains sparse, leaving a gap in cross-cultural pragmatics scholarship.

Research Objectives

Identify the prevalent types of speech acts in Uzbek and English cinematic dialogues.

Compare the pragmatic strategies, including politeness markers, across the two linguistic cultures.

Examine how cultural norms and values are reflected in cinematic speech acts.

Literature Review

The foundation of the study rests upon Austin's (1962) seminal work on performative utterances and Searle's (1975) further elaboration, which categorizes speech acts into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. This theoretical framework has guided subsequent research in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and intercultural communication.

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the universality of politeness strategies, highlighting methods to mitigate potential face-threatening acts. Leech (2014) expanded this by integrating moral, social, and relational dimensions of politeness into pragmatic analysis. Yule (1996) and Cutting (2020) emphasized the interplay between context, social hierarchy, and indirectness, illustrating how pragmatic phenomena are culturally bounded. Cinematic and media discourse has been explored by Bednarek (2018) and Culpeper (2021), who demonstrated that film dialogues, while scripted, mimic real-life interactional patterns. Dynel (2011) focused on the role of humor, irony, and implicature in enhancing narrative authenticity and pragmatic richness.

Uzbek linguistic scholarship by Nurmonov (2002; 2009) provides foundational insights into structural and communicative principles, emphasizing indirectness, hierarchical respect, and the use of honorifics. These features are critical when analyzing Uzbek cinematic dialogue, particularly in relation to politeness and face-management strategies.

Prior studies indicate a stark contrast between high-context communication (Uzbek) and low-context communication (English), suggesting that film dialogues can serve as a practical reflection of cultural communication patterns (Hofstede, 2011). This underscores the necessity of comparative research in speech act pragmatics across different cinematic cultures.

Speech Act Type	Uzbek Films (%)	English Films (%)	Observed Pragmatic Feature
Directives	38	34	Indirect requests in Uzbek; modalized in English
Expressives	26	30	Formulaic expressions in Uzbek; emotionally explicit in English
Commissives	18	20	Mitigated promises vs. performative ones
Representatives	12	10	Context-sensitive vs. explicit narration
Declarations	6	6	Present mainly in institutional or formal scenes

Methodology

Research Design The study adopts a qualitative, comparative research design, employing discourse analysis to examine authentic film dialogues for pragmatic features. This approach allows for the identification of speech act types, directness levels, politeness markers, and culturally motivated strategies. Corpus Selection Eight films were purposefully selected to represent diverse genres and cultural contexts:

Uzbek films: Sarvinoz, Qo'shni, Shaytanat, Baxt izlab.

English films: Pride and Prejudice, The Intern, The King's Speech, Notting Hill.

Each film contributed approximately 50 dialogue segments containing identifiable speech acts, resulting in a dataset of 400 utterances (200 per language).

Analytical Framework

Speech acts were categorized according to Searle's (1975) typology:

Representatives: Statements asserting truth or providing information.

Directives: Requests, commands, or suggestions intended to elicit action.

Commissives: Promises, offers, or refusals committing the speaker to a future action.

Expressives: Utterances expressing emotions or attitudes, such as apologies or compliments.

Declarations: Statements that bring about a change in reality by their utterance.

Each utterance was further analyzed for formality, degree of directness, and the use of politeness markers. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and Leech's (2014) principles were applied to evaluate face-management and social hierarchy influences.

Reliability and Validity Two independent linguists fluent in Uzbek and English conducted coding and cross-checked classifications. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa, yielding ⊠ = 0.87, confirming strong agreement and methodological rigor.

Results

The analysis revealed the following distribution of speech acts and cross-cultural tendencies:

Uzbek films frequently utilize indirect phrasing (e.g., "Agar imkon bo'lsa... / If possible...") and employ kinship terms ("aka," "opa") as politeness markers. English films rely on modal verbs ("could," "might," "would") and hedging expressions ("perhaps," "maybe") to maintain politeness while employing explicit performatives ("I promise," "I apologize") to signal clarity and equality.

Discussion

The results indicate that cultural norms heavily influence pragmatic behavior in cinematic dialogues. Uzbek film discourse reflects collectivist values and hierarchical sensitivity, favoring indirect strategies and honorifics to maintain social harmony (Hofstede, 2011). English discourse emphasizes directness, egalitarianism, and individual accountability.

These findings validate the universality of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies while highlighting culturally specific adaptations. In Uzbek dialogues, face-saving is communal and contextually sensitive, influenced by age, status, and social role, consistent with Nurmonov (2009). In both cinematic contexts, pragmatic markers also serve narrative, character-building, and artistic functions (Bednarek, 2018), demonstrating the dual role of language in entertainment and social modeling.

The study underscores the utility of cinema as a tool for cross-cultural pragmatic analysis, language teaching, and subtitling, revealing the nuanced interplay between linguistic form, cultural norms, and communicative intent.

Conclusion

This comparative study demonstrates that while Uzbek and English films share universal speech act categories, the realization of these acts varies according to cultural and linguistic conventions. Uzbek films prioritize indirectness, honorifics, and hierarchy-sensitive strategies, whereas English films employ explicit performatives, modalized politeness, and egalitarian interaction patterns.

Understanding these differences enhances intercultural communication competence, informs translation and subtitling practices, and provides a framework for pragmatic instruction in both languages. Future research may extend these findings by exploring gendered language use, genre-specific patterns, or multilingual cinematic discourse.

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