

SPEECH ACTS ACROSS ENGLISH AND UZBEK DISCOURSES**Rokhatoy Abidova**

Associate Professor at Urgench State
University named after Abu Rayhan Biruni
roxatoy.a@urdu.uz

ABSTRACT Building on the theoretical framework of speech act theory and its application to everyday discourse, this second part of the study turns to the more institutionally constrained discourse types in which English–Uzbek intercultural communication frequently occurs: academic writing, institutional exchange and media discourse. It examines how hedging, formalized requests, mitigated criticism and depersonalized refusals characterize academic and institutional communication, and how directives, commissives and hybrid declarations shape media and digital discourse. The paper then identifies the recurrent categories of communicative error excessive formality, misinterpretation of indirectness, misconstrued refusals, awkward responses to gratitude and misunderstood phatic conventions - that arise when English and Uzbek speakers import the pragmatic conventions of their first language into the other's communicative environment. The findings indicate that intercultural communicative failure typically originates not in a deficit of vocabulary or grammar but in unconscious pragmatic transfer, and the paper concludes with implications for the teaching of intercultural pragmatic competence.

Keywords: speech acts, academic discourse, institutional discourse, media discourse, pragmatic transfer, communicative errors, intercultural pragmatic competence

Academic discourse is formal, specialized and institutionally constrained. Unlike everyday communication it accords priority to precision, objectivity and politeness realized through mitigation. Its participants operate within a community whose conventions govern not only terminology and citation practice but also the

permissible strength of claims and the acceptable modes of disagreement. The most distinctive pragmatic feature of academic discourse is hedging. Rather than advancing categorical assertions, scholars attenuate their claims by means of modal verbs, epistemic adverbs, approximators and tentative reporting verbs. In place of *“This theory is false,”* the academic writer produces *“This theory may require reconsideration”* or *“The findings suggest an alternative interpretation.”* Hedging serves a dual function. Epistemically, it calibrates the strength of a claim to the strength of the evidence supporting it. Interpersonally, it constitutes a politeness strategy: by presenting a proposition as provisional, the writer leaves open the possibility of disagreement and thereby protects the negative face of the disciplinary community whose accumulated positions the claim may unsettle. Hedging is thus simultaneously a device of epistemic modality and a device of academic politeness. Requests in academic contexts are highly formalized. A student writing to a professor is unlikely to produce *“Check my article.”* The expected formulations are *“Could you kindly review my manuscript?”* or *“I would appreciate your feedback.”* The degree of syntactic mitigation increases in proportion to the status differential between the participants.

Criticism is managed with comparable care. Direct negative evaluation risks being construed as confrontational and is therefore routinely reformulated. Scholars produce mitigated variants such as *“This study could benefit from a larger sample size”* or *“Further clarification may be necessary,”* in which the criticism is realized as a constructive suggestion and the agent responsible for the deficiency is left unspecified.

Apologies in academic discourse are formulaic and professional in register, and they characteristically dissociate the error from the individual through impersonal or third-person construction: *“We apologize for the oversight,”* *“The author regrets the omission.”*

Academic speech acts are thus defined by formality, indirectness and a distinctively institutional variety of politeness.

An additional consideration follows from the foregoing and merits explicit statement, since it bears directly on the situation of Uzbek scholars publishing in English. The rhetorical traditions in which Uzbek academic writing has developed favour assertive, categorical claim-making and impersonal construction over the graded, author-visible stance-marking characteristic of Anglophone research writing. Uzbek scholars writing in English accordingly tend to under-hedge relative to the expectations of English-language reviewers, with the consequence that appropriately confident claims may be received as overstatement. This constitutes a variety of pragmatic transfer operating at the level of written genre rather than spoken interaction, and it demonstrates that the transfer phenomena examined below are not confined to conversational exchange.

Institutional discourse encompasses communication within legal, medical, educational, governmental and administrative settings. It is structured by asymmetrical relations of power and by expectations attaching to institutionally defined roles rather than to individual personalities. Participants speak not as private persons but as occupants of positions, and the rights and obligations governing their contributions derive from those positions. Directives occur with high frequency in institutional contexts because institutional authority legitimates directness. A physician may state *“Take this medication twice daily”* without mitigation; a teacher issues *“Submit your assignment by Friday”*; administrative personnel produce *“Please complete the form.”* What would constitute an unacceptable imposition between social equals is, within the institutional frame, a routine exercise of role-based entitlement. Mitigation, where it occurs, is conventional rather than strategic — the *please* in the final example is a marker of register, not a genuine attenuation of force. Declarations are especially prominent in institutional discourse, since institutions constitute precisely those structures that confer upon designated speakers the authority to modify social reality by verbal means. *“You are admitted,”* *“The application has been approved”* and *“The defendant is acquitted”* alter the institutional status of the persons concerned. The felicity of such acts depends entirely

upon the satisfaction of the relevant conditions: the speaker must hold the requisite office, the procedure must have been correctly followed, and the formula must be uttered in the appropriate setting. Institutional refusals are formal and impersonal. In place of a bald “No,” institutions produce “*Unfortunately, your request cannot be accommodated*” or “*Due to insufficient documentation, the application has been declined.*” Two devices are characteristic here: the agent responsible for the decision is suppressed through passive or impersonal construction, and the refusal is grounded in a procedural rather than a personal rationale. The effect is to present the refusal as the outcome of rule application rather than of individual judgement, thereby depersonalizing the face threat. Comparable formulaic patterns operate in Uzbek institutional settings: “*Arizangiz rad etildi*” (‘Your application has been rejected’), “*Siz ishga qabul qilindingiz*” (‘You have been accepted for the position’), “*Hujjatlar qayta topshirilishi lozim*” (‘The documents must be resubmitted’). The passive morphology and the deontic *lozim* perform the same agent-suppressing function observable in English. Uzbek official documents additionally employ the jussive in -*sin* (*topshirilsin* ‘let it be submitted’), a form carrying strong deontic force whose register has no straightforward English counterpart. Institutional discourse thus minimizes emotional expressiveness and accords priority to clarity, legitimacy and procedural correctness.

Media discourse comprises journalism, advertising, political oratory, broadcast material and digital communication. Its governing purpose is characteristically persuasion, influence and the securing of audience engagement. It is further distinguished by its addressivity: the audience is absent, mass and heterogeneous, and the illocutionary acts performed within it are therefore designed for uptake by an indeterminate recipient. Headlines frequently operate as indirect speech acts. A formulation such as “*Government Faces New Economic Challenges*” is assertive in form but is simultaneously calculated to attract attention and to frame the reader’s interpretation of the material that follows. Advertising discourse relies extensively upon directives and commissives. Expressions of the type “*Try the new*

collection,” “Discover your perfect skincare routine” and “Experience premium quality” are imperative in form yet function as persuasive invitations rather than commands; the absence of any enforceable obligation, together with the commercial frame, licenses a directness that would be face-threatening in interpersonal exchange. Political discourse draws heavily on commissives. Politicians undertake commitments of the form “We will reduce inflation” or “Our administration guarantees reform.” The felicity conditions on such commissives are notoriously difficult to enforce, and much of the interpretive labour performed by political audiences consists in assessing the sincerity condition attaching to them. Social media has generated hybrid speech acts combining features of private and public communication. Congratulatory posts, public apologies, invitations and self-directed declarations of the type “Officially graduated” or “Excited to announce my new position” address a mass audience while retaining the interpersonal register of private exchange. Formally these resemble declarations, though they lack institutional authorization; their function is closer to self-presentation than to the alteration of social reality. The brevity and multimodal character of media discourse frequently intensify illocutionary force, since visual, typographic and prosodic resources supplement the verbal channel.

Intercultural communication regularly involves pragmatic transfer, whereby speakers apply the norms of their native language to interaction conducted in a foreign one. The errors arising from such transfer are systematic rather than random and can be grouped into recurrent types.

Excessive formality. Learners may produce utterances such as “I humbly request your esteemed assistance,” which are ceremonial to the point of incongruity in ordinary English interaction. Here the learner has over-compensated, recruiting a formality register appropriate to Uzbek deferential discourse but marked as archaic or ironic in English. The pragmatic effect may be comic, or may suggest insincerity.

Misinterpretation of indirectness. An English speaker who remarks “It’s getting late” may intend to signal a wish to conclude the encounter. A listener who is

unaccustomed to this convention may process the utterance at its locutionary value as an observation about the hour, and the intended illocution will fail to secure uptake.

Refusals. Refusals are particularly susceptible to misconstruction. The Uzbek indirect refusals “*Ko’ramiz*” and “*Nasib qilsa*” are readily interpreted by English speakers as genuine expressions of possibility rather than as polite rejections. The English speaker consequently retains an expectation of eventual compliance, and the subsequent non-fulfilment is attributed to unreliability rather than recognized as the outcome originally signalled. The ritual refusal of offers characteristic of Uzbek hospitality produces the mirror-image error, with the English speaker treating a conventional decline as sincere.

Responses to gratitude. Responses to expressions of gratitude may likewise generate pragmatic awkwardness. Silence following an expression of thanks is tolerable in some communicative traditions but is experienced as uncomfortable in English interaction, where an acknowledging response is conventionally obligatory and its absence is interpretable as displeasure.

Phatic conventions. A further source of difficulty resides in the extended greeting sequences characteristic of Uzbek interaction, in which successive inquiries after health, family, work and general circumstances constitute a single conventional unit requiring no substantive answer. Rendered into English, the sequence may be received as an unexpectedly intrusive interrogation, and the individual questions may be answered at length, disrupting the interactional rhythm on both sides.

Conclusion. Speech acts constitute a critical point of intersection between language, culture and communication. Their realization varies markedly across discourse types, and that variation reflects differences in communicative purpose, participant role, institutional constraint and sociocultural expectation. Academic discourse values epistemic caution and mitigation, realized above all through hedging. Institutional discourse foregrounds authority and procedural clarity, and depersonalizes face-threatening acts through impersonal construction. Media discourse subordinates its formal choices to the objectives of persuasion and audience

engagement. Intercultural communication introduces a further order of complexity, since speech acts are embedded in cultural norms that are not consciously accessible to their users. Communicative failure typically arises not because speakers lack vocabulary or grammatical knowledge, but because they misapply pragmatic conventions of which they are unaware. The comparative material examined here indicates that English and Uzbek possess functionally comparable inventories of speech acts while differing systematically in the linguistic levels at which politeness work is performed. Uzbek distributes that work across honorific morphology, address terminology and conventionalized formulae; English concentrates it in clausal syntax. It is at this point of structural asymmetry that the most persistent transfer errors originate, and it is therefore this asymmetry that pedagogical intervention should target most directly. Language education should consequently incorporate explicit instruction in speech acts, discourse conventions and intercultural pragmatics. Such instruction is most effective when it proceeds through consciousness-raising activities, contrastive analysis of parallel situations in the two languages, discourse completion tasks and role play, rather than through the presentation of isolated formulae. The cultivation of pragmatic competence is indispensable to effective and appropriate communication in multilingual and multicultural environments, and its neglect leaves otherwise proficient speakers vulnerable to precisely those failures which proficiency is assumed to prevent.

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