

DIRECT AND INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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“Utterances do things — they do not merely state facts; they shape social relations.”
(J. R. Searle)

Annotation: This study examines how speech acts that are direct and indirect operate in English and in Uzbek, focusing on their grammatical shapes, pragmatic roles, and cultural motivations. The paper contrasts strategies speakers use to convey requests, commands, refusals and opinions, and it discusses how conventions of politeness and social position alter linguistic choices. The theoretical grounding relies on classical speech-act theory (Austin and Searle) and on observations by Uzbek scholars who investigate language behavior in local communicative contexts. The findings stress that pragmatic competence—knowing how to choose forms appropriately—is essential for cross-cultural interaction and language instruction.

Keywords: speech act; directness; indirectness; pragmatics; politeness strategies; English; Uzbek; intercultural communication.

When people communicate, they do more than exchange information: they perform actions through language. The notion that speaking can be an act was first articulated by J. L. Austin, who distinguished saying something from doing something with words [1]. Building on this, J. R. Searle characterized different illocutionary functions that utterances can have, such as requesting, asserting, or promising [5]. Both English and Uzbek speakers routinely use forms that are overtly directive or, alternatively, veiled and context-dependent. The same pragmatic goal — for example, to ask someone to open a window — can be achieved by a plain imperative, a polite question, or a seemingly unrelated remark that implies the request. This paper compares such options in the two languages and

considers the cultural values that favor one strategy over another. Austin's threefold distinction — locutionary (what is said), illocutionary (what is performed by saying), and perlocutionary (the effect produced) — remains a cornerstone for analyzing language-as-action [1]. Searle further organized illocutionary acts into functional categories (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations), providing tools to classify utterances by purpose rather than by form alone [5].

In a cross-linguistic perspective, speech acts must be studied together with pragmatic indicators (modal verbs, sentence mood, particles, conditionals) and socio-cultural norms. Uzbek linguists such as G'. Salomov and Sh. Rahmatullaev emphasize that expressions of respect and group harmony profoundly affect how requests, refusals, or disagreements are encoded in Uzbek speech [3][4]. Thus, any comparison should account for both linguistic devices and cultural expectations. A direct speech act is recognized when the grammatical construction transparently matches the illocutionary purpose (e.g., an imperative used to command). In English, imperatives and straightforward declaratives (sometimes with modal auxiliaries) are typical for explicit directives: "Please, switch off your phone." In Uzbek, imperatives accomplish the same illocutionary force: "Telefonni o'chiring." However, Uzbek speakers frequently attenuate these forms with politeness markers such as *iltimos* or by selecting verb endings that show deference.

Direct expressions are favored when rapid compliance, clarity, or official authority is required — in classrooms, workplaces, or emergencies — but the social cost of face-threatening acts can be high in cultures that prize indirectness. Indirect speech acts occur when the surface form diverges from the intended function. For instance, an interrogative may serve as a request: "Could you help me with this?" Likewise, a statement like "It's quite cold in here" can function as a subtle request to close a window. English relies heavily on modal verbs, tag questions, and hedging to signal politeness and reduce imposition. Uzbek frequently uses conditional constructions and softening particles (e.g., *-sa*, *-di-ku*) to achieve a similar mitigation effect: "Derazani yopib qo'ysangiz, bo'larmidi?" Indirect strategies are especially common in settings where preserving social harmony, showing respect to elders, or avoiding direct confrontation is important. They allow speakers to communicate goals while minimizing potential discomfort for addressees.

Culture shapes not only which strategies are available but which ones are socially preferred. In many English-speaking contexts, directness is often associated with clarity and efficiency; being straightforward may be interpreted as honest and competent. Conversely, Uzbek communicative norms favor forms that foreground respect, understatement, and consideration of social rank. These preferences influence everyday speech in several ways.

1. Politeness orientation: Uzbek interactions often prioritize negative politeness strategies (avoidance of imposition), so requests and refusals are commonly phrased indirectly [2].
2. Face-saving tactics: When disagreeing or criticizing, Uzbek speakers tend to use mitigated formulations that circumscribe direct opposition.
3. Age and social status: Honorific forms or special verb endings may be used in Uzbek to signal respect toward elders or authorities; English expresses similar respect through lexical choices and intonation more than morphology. Examples illustrate the divergence: an English speaker might say, “I disagree”, while an Uzbek speaker would prefer a softer formulation akin to, “Menimcha, boshqa nuqtai nazar ham mavjud” (literally: “In my opinion, another viewpoint may also exist”).

For language learners and translators, competence extends beyond grammar and vocabulary: it requires sensitivity to pragmatic norms. Teaching materials should include contextualized practice in choosing between direct and indirect forms. Translators must decide when to preserve literal wording and when to render the pragmatic force into culturally appropriate equivalents; a literal, direct translation may come across as rude or blunt in the target culture. In intercultural encounters, misreading indirectness for evasiveness — or interpreting directness as rudeness — can cause misunderstanding. Raising learners’ awareness of these patterns reduces pragmatic failure and fosters more effective interaction.

Direct and indirect speech acts serve identical communicative aims across languages but are shaped by distinct grammatical conventions and cultural preferences. English tends to favor explicit formulations for efficiency and clarity, whereas Uzbek frequently prefers indirectness to maintain courtesy and social equilibrium. Recognizing these differences is crucial for accurate translation, successful language instruction, and harmonious intercultural communication. Developing pragmatic awareness — the skill to match form, function, and context — is therefore as vital as mastering grammar.

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