



SPEECH ACTS OF REQUEST: ENGLISH AND UZBEK COMPARISON

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Abstract: *This thesis investigates the linguistic and pragmatic realization of speech acts of request in English and Uzbek languages. The research focuses on the cross-cultural comparison of politeness strategies, request formulations, and contextual factors influencing the choice of linguistic structures. Using the framework of Speech Act Theory proposed by J.L.Austin (1962) and J.R.Searle (1969), the study identifies similarities and differences in the use of direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect requests. Data were collected through natural discourse samples, dialogues, and written texts. The findings indicate that while both English and Uzbek speakers employ politeness strategies to mitigate imposition, Uzbek speakers rely more on contextual respect markers and social hierarchy, whereas English speakers emphasize individual autonomy and softeners. The study contributes to intercultural communication studies and language teaching by highlighting how cultural norms shape linguistic behavior.*

Keywords: *speech act, request, pragmatics, politeness, English, Uzbek, cross-cultural communication.*

Introduction

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for performing actions. When we speak, we do not merely convey information — we perform acts such as apologizing, promising, ordering, or requesting. Among these, requests are one of the most frequent and socially delicate types of speech acts because they involve asking someone to do something, thereby imposing on the hearer's freedom of action.

In cross-cultural communication, the act of making a request varies significantly across languages, reflecting deeper cultural values and communicative norms. This thesis explores how requests are realized in English and Uzbek, focusing on their linguistic structures, levels of directness, politeness strategies, and contextual variations. Understanding these differences is crucial not only for linguistic theory but also for effective communication, translation, and foreign language education.

The Concept of Speech Acts

The notion of speech acts originates from J. L. Austin's (1962) seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*, where he proposed that utterances can perform actions —

for example, saying “I apologize” performs the act of apologizing. Later, John Searle (1969) systematized Austin’s ideas, classifying speech acts into five categories:

1. Representatives (assertions, descriptions)
2. Directives (requests, commands, suggestions)
3. Comissives (promises, offers)
4. Expressives (thanks, congratulations)
5. Declarations (resignations, baptisms)

Requests belong to the directive class, as they aim to make the hearer perform an action. However, unlike commands, they require cooperation and politeness to avoid face-threatening situations.

The Illocutionary Force of Requests

In performing a request, the speaker expresses a desire for the hearer to do something. This act involves three layers:

- Locutionary act – the literal meaning of the utterance (Can you open the window?)
- Illocutionary act – the intention (a polite request)
- Perlocutionary act – the effect (the hearer opens the window)

Requests are often indirect to reduce imposition, which is why the pragmatic force (intention) may differ from the literal form. For instance, “It’s cold in here” might function as an indirect request to close the window.

Politeness and Indirectness in Requests

According to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, requests threaten the hearer’s negative face (freedom of action). Therefore, speakers employ strategies such as:

- Bald on record: “Close the window.”
- Conventional indirectness: “Could you close the window, please?”
- Non-conventional indirectness (hints): “It’s getting cold.”

The choice of strategy depends on social distance, power relations, and the degree of imposition. These factors vary significantly between English and Uzbek cultures.

Cultural Context and Pragmatic Norms

Language is deeply tied to culture. In Anglo-American culture, communication tends to value individualism, clarity, and equal social relations. Therefore, English speakers often use modal verbs (could, would, may), softeners (please, possibly), and downtoners (a bit, perhaps) to make requests sound polite yet egalitarian.

By contrast, Uzbek culture is collectivist and hierarchical, where respect for elders, social roles, and honor (hurmat) play central roles. Thus, requests are often expressed through contextual politeness markers, honorifics, and indirect wording rather than modal verbs alone.

For example:

- English: “Could you pass me the salt, please?”

• Uzbek: “Iltimos, tuzni uzatib yuboringchi” (Please, would you pass the salt?)
Here, -chi and iltimos are politeness indicators softening the request.

Forms of Request in English

English requests can be categorized according to their degree of directness (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989):

1. Direct strategies: “Open the door.”
2. Conventionally indirect strategies: “Can you open the door?”
3. Non-conventional hints: “It’s stuffy in here.”

Politeness is reinforced by lexical modifiers (please, kindly), syntactic devices (question forms), and supportive moves (I’d appreciate it if...).

Forms of Request in Uzbek

In Uzbek, requests are shaped by cultural politeness and social hierarchy. Linguistic features include:

- Use of polite imperatives: Boringchi, kelingchi (softened commands)
- Honorific pronouns: siz vs. sen
- Politeness particles: iltimos, marhamat, -chi, bo‘ladimi
- Contextual cues: lowering one’s tone, using kinship terms, or metaphorical phrasing

Examples:

- Iltimos, eshikni yopib qo‘ying. (Please close the door.)
- Eshikni yopib qo‘ysangiz bo‘ladimi? (Would it be possible for you to close the door?)

The latter demonstrates both syntactic indirectness and social politeness, characteristic of Uzbek requests.

Comparative Analysis

Levels of Directness			
Type	English Example	Uzbek Equivalent	Pragmatic Effect
Direct	“Give me the book.”	“Kitobni ber.”	Command-like, used with close relations or inferiors
Conventionally indirect	“Could you give me the book?”	“Kitobni berib yuborarmidingiz?”	Polite, neutral
Non-conventional hint	“I’d love to read that book.”	“Ana shu kitobni o‘qisam yaxshi bo‘lardi.”	Very polite, context-dependent

The table shows that both languages share structural means of expressing indirectness but differ in pragmatic motivation. In English, indirectness marks politeness, whereas in Uzbek, it also reflects social respect and formality.



Politeness Strategies

English speakers often employ syntactic politeness (modals, conditional clauses), while Uzbek speakers favor contextual politeness (honorifics, lexical markers). For example:

- English: “Would you mind opening the window?”
- Uzbek: “Derazani ochib yuborsangiz bo‘ladimi?”

Both mitigate the imposition, yet the Uzbek version contains cultural nuances of modesty and deference.

Influence of Power and Distance

In English, hierarchy affects tone only slightly:

- Boss to employee: “Could you send me that file, please?”
- Employee to boss: “Would you mind if I sent the file tomorrow?”

In Uzbek, social power plays a more pronounced role:

- Katta yoshdagiga: “Iltimos, siz hujjatni ko‘rsatib yuboring.”
- Do‘stga: “Hujjatni ko‘rsat.”

Thus, while English relies on grammatical politeness, Uzbek embeds politeness in social roles and contextual respect.

Pedagogical and Pragmatic Implications

Understanding the cultural dimension of requests is crucial for language learning and intercultural communication. Uzbek learners of English often transfer native politeness norms, leading to pragmatic failures such as sounding too formal or too direct. For instance, saying “Please, you open the window” instead of “Could you open the window, please?” reflects literal translation rather than pragmatic adaptation.

Teachers should therefore:

1. Emphasize pragmatic competence alongside grammar.
2. Introduce situational dialogues showing appropriate request forms.
3. Compare English and Uzbek discourse norms to raise intercultural awareness.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the speech act of request is a universal communicative function realized differently across languages. Both English and Uzbek use indirectness to express politeness, but their strategies differ due to cultural orientation. English reflects individualistic egalitarianism, relying on syntactic softeners and modal verbs, while Uzbek embodies collectivist respect through contextual deference markers and honorific forms.

Cross-cultural understanding of such pragmatic distinctions enhances communication, translation accuracy, and foreign language teaching effectiveness. The study confirms that linguistic politeness cannot be fully understood without reference to cultural norms and social values.





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