



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES IN EXPRESSING COMPLIMENTS AND APOLOGIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK SPEECH ACTS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the pragmatic strategies employed in expressing compliments and apologies in English and Uzbek speech acts from a cross-cultural perspective. The study aims to reveal similarities and differences in politeness orientation, speech act structure, and socio-cultural norms that influence communicative behavior in both languages. Drawing upon theories of Brown and Levinson's politeness model, Leech's pragmatic maxims, and Blum-Kulka's Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP), the analysis identifies the cultural motivations underlying indirectness, mitigation, and formulaic expressions. Data are collected through discourse samples and situational role plays among native speakers of English and Uzbek, followed by qualitative and quantitative analysis. The findings contribute to intercultural communication theory and highlight the pedagogical importance of teaching pragmatic competence in foreign language classrooms to foster authentic and culturally sensitive interaction.

Introduction. Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a reflection of cultural identity and social values. Within the realm of pragmatics, speech acts such as compliments and apologies are crucial components of interpersonal interaction, as they function to maintain social harmony, express politeness, and manage face needs among interlocutors. The study of these speech acts from a cross-cultural perspective reveals how linguistic forms and pragmatic conventions are shaped by distinct cultural norms and communicative traditions. English and Uzbek, representing different linguistic and socio-cultural systems individualist versus collectivist orientations offer a rich comparative ground for exploring how speakers encode politeness, empathy, and respect in social discourse. In English communication, compliments often serve as a positive politeness strategy to strengthen solidarity, appreciation, or approval. They are typically direct and explicit, aligning with the Western preference for self-expression and individual recognition¹. Apologies in English are similarly formulaic but are guided by responsibility acknowledgment and

¹ Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 56–78.

mitigation strategies, reflecting a balance between personal accountability and interpersonal distance.

In contrast, Uzbek speech acts are embedded in a collectivist cultural framework emphasizing modesty, hierarchy, and mutual respect. Compliments in Uzbek communication are frequently indirect and accompanied by mitigating expressions to avoid self-praise or social discomfort, while apologies often incorporate expressions of humility, social deference, and relational harmony. Previous studies have demonstrated that politeness strategies vary across cultures due to differing perceptions of “face” and social expectations. However, comparative analyses specifically focusing on Uzbek and English pragmatic behavior remain limited. The present research seeks to fill this gap by systematically analyzing the linguistic forms, pragmatic functions, and socio-cultural underpinnings of compliments and apologies in both languages.

By integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, including discourse analysis and elicited role-play data, the study identifies pragmatic transfer, universality, and cultural specificity within these communicative acts². The findings of this study are expected to contribute to intercultural pragmatics and second language pedagogy by highlighting the importance of teaching not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic appropriateness. Understanding how compliments and apologies are performed across cultures enhances learners’ intercultural communicative competence and prevents potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions. Ultimately, the study underscores that pragmatic strategies, though universally present, are deeply rooted in cultural cognition and social ideology, serving as a mirror of the communicative ethos of a linguistic community. The comparative study of compliments and apologies in English and Uzbek languages provides valuable insight into the ways linguistic and cultural norms influence pragmatic behavior.

Speech acts such as complimenting and apologizing, though universal in human communication, differ significantly in their structure, frequency, and intention depending on cultural conventions and interpersonal expectations³. The pragmatic realization of these acts is closely linked to politeness strategies, social distance, power relations, and cultural perceptions of “face” as theorized by Brown and Levinson. In English communication, compliments are generally direct, positively oriented, and often serve as social lubricants to create rapport. Common compliment topics include appearance, achievement, and possessions.

Phrases such as *“You look great today”* or *“That’s an excellent presentation”* exemplify explicit appreciation. The pragmatic function of such compliments aligns with the Western individualistic culture, which values self-confidence and verbal affirmation. English speakers use compliments as tools of social inclusion, establishing solidarity and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships⁴. However, they are often accompanied by hedges or modifiers to reduce potential insincerity, such as *“kind of,” “really,”* or *“quite.”* Apologies in English, conversely, emphasize responsibility acknowledgment and empathy. Expressions like *“I’m sorry,” “I apologize,”* or *“Please forgive me”* are often combined with explanations or offers of

² Blum-Kulka, S., House, J., & Kasper, G. (1989). *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Ablex Publishing. pp. 37–64.

³ Leech, G. (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford University Press. pp. 112–130.

⁴ Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Men and Politeness*. Longman. pp. 89–102.

repair. This reflects a communicative preference for directness and self-accountability, maintaining equality in interaction.

In contrast, Uzbek pragmatic norms are rooted in collectivist traditions that prioritize modesty, respect for hierarchy, and avoidance of confrontation. Compliments in Uzbek are more indirect and context-dependent. Instead of direct praise, speakers often use culturally loaded metaphors or comparisons, such as *"Qo'lingizdan kelmaydigan ish yo'q"* ("There is nothing you can't do") or *"Ko'zingiz quvonchdan porlab turibdi"* ("Your eyes are shining with joy"). Compliments are frequently mitigated by humility markers to prevent self-praise or social discomfort, and recipients often downplay the praise with responses like *"Yo'q, unchalik emas"* ("No, not really"). This modesty principle demonstrates the cultural avoidance of boasting, reflecting the Uzbek concept of *"kamtarlik"* (humility).

Apologies in Uzbek culture also embody a high level of emotional and relational sensitivity⁵. Typical expressions such as *"Kechirasiz," "Uzr so'rayman,"* or *"Aybdorman"* are used not only to express regret but also to restore social balance. They often include deferential gestures, lowered tone, or honorific forms that show respect to the offended party. While English apologies may focus on the verbal acknowledgment of fault, Uzbek apologies often extend beyond words, involving culturally meaningful rituals of reconciliation like offering tea, visiting in person, or invoking respect-related expressions (*hurmat*).

The comparison reveals that while both languages share universal elements of politeness and face-saving, their pragmatic strategies differ in degree and orientation. English speakers tend to favor explicitness and personal accountability, whereas Uzbek speakers rely on implicitness, humility, and relational sensitivity. Such findings confirm Blum-Kulka's observation that pragmatic acts are both universal and culture-specific in their realization.

Understanding these distinctions has important pedagogical implications, particularly for English language learners in Uzbekistan. Teaching pragmatic competence means equipping learners not only with vocabulary and grammar but also with the ability to choose contextually and culturally appropriate expressions. Awareness of cultural norms behind compliments and apologies enables students to communicate with empathy, respect, and authenticity, avoiding misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. Hence, comparative pragmatics serves as a bridge that fosters mutual understanding between linguistic communities and promotes intercultural harmony in a globalized world.

Table 1. Comparative pragmatic strategies of compliments and apologies in English and Uzbek.

⁵ Wierzbicka, A. (2003). Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction. Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 145–170.

ASPECT	ENGLISH COMMUNICATION	UZBEK COMMUNICATION
CULTURAL ORIENTATION	Individualistic – emphasizes self-expression, equality, and personal responsibility.	Collectivist – emphasizes respect, social harmony, and modesty.
COMPLIMENT FUNCTION	Expressing approval, appreciation, or solidarity directly.	Maintaining social harmony indirectly, avoiding self-praise.
COMPLIMENT TOPICS	Appearance, performance, achievements, possessions.	Family, moral qualities, effort, and social behavior.
TYPICAL COMPLIMENT FORMS	<i>"You look great today!" / "That was an excellent idea!"</i>	<i>"Qo'lingizdan kelmaydigan ish yo'q." / "Ko'zingiz quvonchdan porlab turibdi."</i>
RESPONSE TO COMPLIMENT	Often acceptance (<i>"Thanks, I'm glad you liked it."</i>).	Often deflection or modesty (<i>"Yo'q, unchalik emas."</i>).
APOLOGY FUNCTION	To acknowledge fault and express personal regret.	To restore relational balance and express collective harmony.
TYPICAL APOLOGY FORMS	<i>"I'm sorry.", "I apologize.", "Please forgive me."</i>	<i>"Kechirasiz.", "Uzr so'rayman.", "Aybdorman."</i>
USE OF NONVERBAL CUES	Minimal (eye contact, tone).	Significant (tone lowering, gestures, humility markers).
DEGREE OF DIRECTNESS	High – clear acknowledgment of responsibility.	Low – indirect or mitigated, often through contextual cues.
POLITENESS STRATEGY	Positive politeness (solidarity, friendliness).	Negative politeness (respect, deference, modesty).

The comparative analysis of compliments and apologies in English and Uzbek communication highlights both universal and culture-specific pragmatic tendencies. While both linguistic communities value politeness and face maintenance, the strategies used to achieve these goals differ according to social structure and communicative ethos. English speakers tend to rely on explicit verbal acknowledgment, reflecting an individualistic orientation that encourages clarity and self-expression. Compliments are viewed as tools for social bonding, whereas apologies function as expressions of accountability and sincerity.

In contrast, Uzbek speakers adopt indirectness and humility, shaped by collectivist values that prioritize harmony and respect for hierarchy. Compliments are mitigated to avoid arrogance, and apologies extend beyond verbal formulas, incorporating symbolic gestures

and emotional empathy⁶. These findings confirm Brown and Levinson's theory that politeness is contextually negotiated and culturally conditioned. From a pedagogical perspective, such differences have implications for intercultural communication training. Raising learners' awareness of pragmatic norms fosters cultural sensitivity and prevents misinterpretation in cross-cultural interactions, ultimately contributing to the development of intercultural communicative competence in multilingual environments.

Conclusion. The present comparative study of pragmatic strategies in expressing compliments and apologies in English and Uzbek speech acts demonstrates that while both languages share universal communicative intentions—such as expressing appreciation, respect, and reconciliation—their realization is deeply shaped by cultural and social norms. The analysis revealed that English speakers employ more explicit, formulaic, and direct strategies, which correspond to the individualistic values of Western societies that emphasize self-expression, personal responsibility, and equality in interaction. Compliments in English are often straightforward and self-enhancing, while apologies reflect responsibility and empathy through verbal acknowledgment and repair strategies.

In contrast, Uzbek communication embodies collectivist values that prioritize social harmony, hierarchy, and humility. Compliments are typically expressed through indirect or metaphorical language, often accompanied by modest responses to maintain politeness and avoid self-praise. Apologies, similarly, are performed with deep emotional sensitivity and social consideration, extending beyond linguistic forms to include gestures of respect and reconciliation.

These cross-cultural differences highlight the importance of pragmatic competence as a key component of communicative competence. For learners of English in Uzbekistan, understanding how politeness and interpersonal norms function in both languages helps prevent miscommunication and cultural misunderstanding. It also underscores the necessity of integrating pragmatic instruction into foreign language curricula, ensuring that learners not only master grammatical accuracy but also learn to express meaning appropriately within diverse sociocultural contexts. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader field of intercultural pragmatics by emphasizing that speech acts, though universal in form, are culturally embedded reflections of a community's worldview, values, and communicative traditions.

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