

A STUDY OF PRAGMALINGUISTIC INADEQUACIES IN ENGLISH–UZBEK INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

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Abstract.

Pragmalinguistic failure constitutes one of the most frequent sources of misunderstanding in intercultural communication. When speakers transfer linguistic norms and pragmatic conventions from their native language into a foreign language without sufficient awareness of contextual and cultural constraints, communication breakdowns may occur despite grammatically correct utterances. This article examines pragmalinguistic failure in English–Uzbek intercultural interaction with the study of pragmatics as a branch of linguistics, then discusses key concepts in intercultural communication, and finally analyses politeness theory and speech act theory due to pragmatic misunderstandings. Drawing on theoretical contributions by scholars such as J. L. Austin, John Searle, H. P. Grice, Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, as well as intercultural theorists including Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede, the paper argues that pragmalinguistic failure differentiates from politeness strategies, indirectness conventions, address forms, and sociocultural values. The comparative perspective highlights how culturally embedded norms in Uzbek communicative behavior may contrast with those of English, resulting in unintended pragmatic effects. The study concludes that pragmatic competence is essential for successful intercultural communication and should be systematically integrated into foreign language instruction.

Key words: pragmatics, pragmalinguistic failure, intercultural communication, politeness theory, speech acts, communicative behaviour

Introduction. Globalization has intensified contact between speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While grammatical competence is often prioritized in foreign language education, pragmatic competence—the ability to use language appropriately in context—remains underdeveloped among many learners. As a result, communication problems frequently occur not only because of incorrect syntax or vocabulary, but also because of inappropriate pragmatic choices.

In English-Uzbek communication, these difficulties often emerge in requests, apologies, compliments, refusals, and address forms. Uzbek speakers may transfer culturally specific norms of respect, hierarchy, and hospitality into English interactions, while English speakers may interpret Uzbek pragmatic strategies through their own cultural frameworks. This article explores the theoretical foundations necessary to understand pragmalinguistic failure and analyses how it manifests in English–Uzbek intercultural contexts.

Materials and methods. Pragmatics emerged in the twentieth century as a distinct field concerned with language use in context. Unlike syntax and semantics, which focuses on linguistic structures and meaning, pragmatics examines sentence structure and how meaning

is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in real communicative situations through interaction between speakers, hearers, and situational factors.

A fundamental aspect of pragmatic analysis is the role of context. Context includes the physical setting, participants, shared knowledge, cultural expectations, and prior discourse. The interpretation of an utterance depends heavily on these contextual variables. For example, a seemingly descriptive statement may function as a request or complaint depending on situational factors. Such phenomena demonstrate that pragmatic meaning is often implicit rather than explicitly encoded.

Another key contribution to pragmatics is the theory of conversational implicature, which explains how interlocutors derive implied meanings based on cooperative principles governing conversation (Grice, 1975). Speakers are generally assumed to follow conversational maxims related to quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. When these maxims appear to be violated, hearers search for additional meaning, thereby generating implicatures. Speech act theory, introduced by J. L. Austin in “How to Do Things with Words” and further developed by John Searle, emphasized that utterances perform actions such as requesting, promising, or apologizing. According to this framework, successful communication requires not only grammatical correctness but also appropriate alignment between illocutionary force and social context.

Later developments in pragmatics expanded to include deixis, implicature, presupposition, and politeness. These components collectively form pragmatic competence, a crucial element in intercultural settings. When learners apply native-language pragmatic norms in a foreign language, mismatches may occur, leading to what is termed pragmalinguistic failure.

Pragmalinguistic failure differs from sociopragmatic failure. The former refers to incorrect linguistic realization of a speech act (e.g., overly direct requests), whereas the latter concerns misunderstanding of social norms governing interaction. In English–Uzbek contexts, both types may overlap, but this paper focuses primarily on pragmalinguistic aspects.

Intercultural communication refers to interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds and examines how cultural systems influence communicative behavior. Culture can be understood as a shared system of values, beliefs, norms, and symbolic practices that shape perception and interaction. Communication across cultures involves not only linguistic differences but also variations in social expectations and pragmatic conventions.

One influential approach to understanding cultural variation is the dimensional model of culture, which proposes that societies differ according to measurable value orientations such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001). These dimensions affect communication styles, including forms of address, degrees of directness, and attitudes toward hierarchy.

Another significant distinction concerns high-context and low-context communication (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures, meaning is often conveyed implicitly through shared knowledge, non-verbal cues, and situational understanding. In contrast, low-context cultures rely more heavily on explicit verbal expression. Such differences may lead to pragmatic misunderstandings when communicative expectations are not aligned.

Intercultural competence involves the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries. It requires not only linguistic proficiency but also awareness of cultural norms, empathy, adaptability, and pragmatic sensitivity. The ability to



interpret indirectness, politeness strategies, or silence appropriately is essential for successful intercultural interaction.

Results and discussion. From a pragmatic perspective, intercultural communication highlights how speech acts, conversational norms, and politeness strategies vary across cultures. These differences underscore the importance of contextual and cultural knowledge in achieving mutual understanding. Consequently, the integration of pragmatic theory into intercultural studies provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing cross-cultural interaction.

Speech act theory provides a foundational framework for understanding language as action. It proposes that utterances perform functions such as requesting, promising, apologizing, or declaring. Speech acts can be analyzed at multiple levels: the act of producing a meaningful utterance, the intended communicative force, and the effect on the hearer (Austin, 1962). Subsequent classifications distinguish categories such as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1969).

The realization of speech acts varies across languages and cultures. Directives, for instance, may be expressed through imperatives in some contexts but through indirect questions or statements in others. These variations demonstrate that illocutionary force is not always transparently encoded in grammatical form. In intercultural communication, differences in preferred strategies can lead to pragmatic failure if interlocutors interpret utterances according to their own cultural norms.

Politeness theory further develops the understanding of language as social action by addressing how individuals manage interpersonal relationships in communication. The concept of “face” refers to an individual’s public self-image and social value (Goffman, 1967). Communicative acts that challenge autonomy or approval are considered face-threatening acts.

A widely discussed model distinguishes between positive face, the desire to be appreciated and approved of, and negative face, the desire for freedom of action and non-imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers employ various strategies to mitigate threats to face, including indirectness, hedging, honorifics, and expressions of solidarity. The selection of strategies depends on social distance, relative power, and the perceived seriousness of the imposition.

Although this model has been highly influential, it has also faced criticism for assuming universality in the concept of face and for reflecting primarily Western communicative norms. Research in intercultural pragmatics suggests that politeness is culturally embedded and that norms governing appropriate behavior differ across societies. Therefore, politeness must be analyzed within specific socio-cultural contexts rather than treated as universally uniform. Generally, speech act theory and politeness theory provide essential analytical tools for examining how meaning is constructed and negotiated in interaction. When applied to intercultural contexts, these frameworks reveal the complex relationship between linguistic form, social structure, and cultural expectations.

Conclusion. Pragmalinguistic failure represents a significant challenge in English–Uzbek intercultural communication. Rooted in differences in cultural values, politeness systems, and speech act realization patterns, such failures arise when speakers transfer native pragmatic norms into a foreign language without adaptation. The theoretical contributions of scholars such as Austin, Searle, Grice, Brown and Levinson, Hall, and Hofstede provide valuable frameworks for understanding how context, culture, and face considerations shape



communicative behavior. Their insights demonstrate that successful interaction depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on sociocultural awareness.

For effective intercultural communication, language education must move beyond grammar and vocabulary to include systematic training in pragmatics. Developing learners' awareness of cross-cultural differences in politeness strategies, indirectness, and speech act conventions can reduce misunderstanding and foster mutual respect. Ultimately, pragmatic competence serves as a bridge between languages and cultures, enabling speakers of English and Uzbek to communicate not merely correctly, but appropriately and effectively.

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