

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A PRAGMATIC COMPARISON OF UZBEK AND BRITISH BUSINESS DISCOURSE

Yangibayeva B. Ye.

Assistant teacher, Nukus State Technical University

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## Abstract

This article investigates the pragmatic dimensions of intercultural communication in business contexts, comparing Uzbek and British discourse practices. It examines how cultural values shape speech acts, politeness strategies, and nonverbal communication in professional settings. The collectivist and hierarchical nature of Uzbek business communication contrasts with the individualistic and egalitarian norms of British discourse. Drawing on insights from Uzbek scholars like U. Kh. Khamidov and N. M. Makhmudova, as well as foreign scholars such as S. C. Levinson and P. Brown, and providing numerous examples, this study underscores the importance of cultural competence in cross-cultural business interactions.

**Keywords:** pragmatics, intercultural communication, Uzbek business culture, British business culture, politeness strategies, speech acts, nonverbal communication, cross-cultural competence.

## Introduction

Pragmatics, a subfield of linguistics, explores how context influences language use and interpretation in communication [1, p. 27]. In business settings, pragmatic competence is vital for navigating cultural differences that affect negotiation, collaboration, and relationship-building. This article compares the pragmatic features of Uzbek and British business discourse, highlighting how cultural norms shape communication strategies. Uzbek culture, rooted in collectivism, hierarchy, and hospitality, contrasts with British culture, which emphasizes individualism, egalitarianism, and formal politeness. The study integrates the work of Uzbek scholars, such as U. Kh. Khamidov, who examined lingo-cultural aspects of Uzbek professional communication [2, p. 15], and N. M. Makhmudova, who analyzed pragmatic elements in Uzbek oral traditions [3, p. 28], alongside foreign scholars like S. C. Levinson, who developed foundational theories of pragmatics [1, p. 27].

## Pragmatic Features of Uzbek Business Discourse

Uzbek business communication reflects cultural values of collectivism, respect for authority, and relationship-building. Indirect speech acts are prevalent, as directness may be perceived as confrontational. For example, a manager might say, "Agar vaqt topsangiz, bu loyihani ko'rib chiqsangiz yaxshi bo'lardi" ("If you find time, it would be good to review this project"), instead of "Review this project" [2, p. 18]. This indirectness aligns with the cultural norm of preserving harmony [4, p. 8].

Hospitality is integral to business interactions. Meetings often begin with tea and small talk about family or health, signaling respect and trust. For instance, an Uzbek host might say, "Avval choy ichamiz, keyin ish haqida gaplashamiz" ("Let's have tea first, then discuss business") [3, p. 32]. Such practices prioritize relationships over immediate task focus.

Nonverbal cues, such as deferential gestures (e.g., a slight bow or hand-over-heart greeting), reinforce respect, particularly toward senior colleagues [4, p. 10]. Makhmudova notes that these gestures carry pragmatic weight, softening verbal directives or enhancing

politeness [3, p. 30]. For example, when presenting a proposal, an Uzbek employee might lower their gaze to show deference to a superior.

### **Pragmatic Features of British Business Discourse**

British business discourse is characterized by formal politeness, clarity, and efficiency, reflecting cultural values of individualism and egalitarianism. Speech acts are softened with modal verbs or hedging. For example, a British manager might say, "Could you possibly finalize the report by Friday?" rather than "Finalize the report by Friday" [5, p. 61]. This reflects "negative politeness," which minimizes imposition on the listener [5, p. 62].

British professionals value brevity and directness in content, though wrapped in polite forms. Meetings follow structured agendas with minimal personal conversation. For instance, a British colleague might open a meeting with, "Let's get started with the project updates," signaling a task-oriented approach [6, p. 45]. Humor, often dry or self-deprecating, is used to diffuse tension. A phrase like "Well, that went swimmingly, didn't it?" after a challenging meeting relies on irony to maintain rapport [6, p. 48].

Nonverbal communication is restrained. Eye contact conveys confidence, but excessive gestures are avoided. A firm handshake is standard, but physical proximity is minimized to respect personal space [5, p. 65]. Expressive gestures, common in Uzbek contexts, may be perceived as unprofessional.

### **Comparative Analysis**

#### **Speech Acts**

In Uzbek business discourse, directives are often framed as suggestions to maintain group harmony. For example, a team leader might say, "Bu masalani birqalikda muhokama qilsak bo'ladimi?" ("Could we discuss this issue together?"), implying a directive to collaborate [2, p. 20]. British directives, while polite, are more explicit, e.g., "Would you mind preparing a summary for the next meeting?" [1, p. 30]. The Uzbek approach relies on context and nonverbal cues, whereas the British approach uses linguistic precision [5, p. 63].

#### **Politeness Strategies**

Uzbek politeness is hierarchical, with honorifics like "hurmatli" (respected) or "aka" (elder brother) used for superiors or clients, even in non-familial contexts [4, p. 12]. For example, an email might begin, "Hurmatli Rahimov aka" ("Respected Brother Rahimov"), signaling deference [3, p. 35]. British politeness is egalitarian, using titles like "Mr." or "Ms." or first names in informal settings. An email might start, "Dear Mr. Smith," or "Hi John," reflecting a flatter social structure [5, p. 66].

#### **Nonverbal Communication**

Uzbek nonverbal communication is expressive, with gestures like hand-over-heart or slight bows reinforcing verbal messages. During negotiations, an Uzbek professional might lean forward and nod frequently to show engagement [4, p. 14]. British nonverbal cues are subtle; excessive nodding or leaning may be seen as overly eager. A British negotiator maintains steady eye contact and minimal gestures to project professionalism [6, p. 50].

#### **Cultural Narratives**

Uzbek business discourse draws on narratives of hospitality and community, often reflected in proverbs. For example, "Birlikda ishlasak, muvaffaqiyat keladi" ("If we work together, success will come") emphasizes collaboration [3, p. 38]. British discourse incorporates narratives of fairness and efficiency, as seen in phrases like "Let's keep things moving" or "Fair enough," prioritizing progress and equity [1, p. 32].

### Practical Examples

Meeting Openings: An Uzbek meeting might begin with, “Hammangizga salom, avval choy ichamizmi?” (“Greetings to all, shall we have tea first?”), prioritizing rapport [4, p. 16]. A British meeting opens with, “Good morning, let’s review the agenda,” focusing on structure [6, p. 52].

Declining Proposals: An Uzbek professional might say, “Bu taklif juda yaxshi, lekin hozir imkoniyatimiz cheklangan” (“This proposal is great, but our resources are limited”), softening rejection [2, p. 22]. A British counterpart might say, “Thank you for the proposal, but I’m afraid it doesn’t align with our priorities,” combining politeness with clarity [5, p. 68].

Feedback: Uzbek feedback is indirect, e.g., “Ishingiz yaxshi, faqat biroz ko’proq e’tibor bersangiz” (“Your work is good, just pay a bit more attention”) [3, p. 34]. British feedback is constructive but direct, e.g., “The report is solid, but could you add more data to section two?” [6, p. 54].

### Contributions of Uzbek and Foreign Scholars

Uzbek scholars have significantly advanced the study of pragmatics in business communication. Khamidov’s research on lingo-cultural markers highlights how Uzbek proverbs and honorifics shape professional discourse [2, p. 17]. Makhmudova’s analysis of oral traditions demonstrates how storytelling and indirectness foster trust in business settings [3, p. 31]. Rakhimov’s work on nonverbal communication underscores the role of gestures in reinforcing politeness [4, p. 9]. Foreign scholars complement these insights. Levinson’s foundational work on pragmatics provides a theoretical framework for analyzing speech acts [1, p. 27], while Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory explains the strategies observed in British discourse [5, p. 61]. Wierzbicka’s cross-cultural pragmatics research further illuminates the interplay of culture and language [6, p. 45].

### Conclusion

The pragmatic comparison of Uzbek and British business discourse reveals distinct cultural influences on communication. Uzbek practices emphasize collectivism, hierarchy, and hospitality, employing indirect speech acts and expressive nonverbal cues. British discourse prioritizes individualism, egalitarianism, and efficiency, relying on formal politeness and restrained nonverbal signals. Understanding these differences enhances cross-cultural competence, essential for global business success. Future research could explore how digital communication platforms influence these pragmatic norms.

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