

## ЯЗЫК И КУЛЬТУРА

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### Отражение этнокультурных ценностей в коммуникативном поведении (на материале речевого акта «выражение несогласия» в узбекской лингвокультуре)

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**Аннотация.** В статье исследуется влияние культурных ценностей этноса на коммуникативное поведение. Проводится анализ способов выражения несогласия узбекскими информантами на основе теста на завершение дискурса. Подтверждается, что в процессе коммуникации представители узбекской лингвокультуры часто избегают прямого несогласия со своими оппонентами, используя такие тактики, как митигация, предоставление объяснений, внесение встречных предложений или частичное согласие. Косвенность и избегание конфликтов являют собой речевые тенденции, которые отражают узбекские культурные ценности.

**Ключевые слова:** узбекская культура, лингвопрагматика, коммуникативные стратегии, речевой акт «выражение несогласия», вежливость

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Original article

### Reflection of Cultural Values in Communicative Behavior (on the material of speech act “expression of disagreement” in Uzbek linguoculture)

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**Abstract.** This article explores the influence of cultural values of an ethnic group on communicative behavior. It analyzes the ways of expressing disagreement by Uzbek informants on the basis of the discourse completion test. The representatives of Uzbek linguoculture often avoid direct disagreement using such tactics as mitigation, providing explanations, making counteroffers or partially agreeing while redirecting. Indirectness and conflict avoidance become noticeable tendencies reflecting Uzbek cultural values.

**Keywords:** Uzbek culture, linguapragmatics, communicative strategies, speech act “expression of disagreement”, politeness

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## INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a window into culture, with linguistic patterns often reflecting underlying cultural values and norms. This relationship manifests in the pragmatics of language use, which studies how speakers utilize language to perform social actions and manage interpersonal relations. As anthropological linguist Anna Wierzbicka states, “To understand a society’s ways of speaking is to understand its assumptions about the world and human life” [Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 25].

Disagreement is a particularly salient speech act for examining cultural orientations, as it can disrupt social harmony if not mitigated properly, being, in terms of P. Brown and S. Levinson’s influential theoretical framework, a typical face-threatening act (FTA) [Brown, Levinson, 1987]. The linguistic strategies used to realize disagreement can reveal a culture’s fundamental premises and preferences.

The increase in communication between people of different nationalities led to more interest in the research into the interrelation between universal and nationally-specific features of communicative behaviour. Such research involves eliciting and analyzing empirical data concerning the ways people in different cultures interact with each other in various socio-cultural contexts, taking into consideration the social status, gender, age, degree of acquaintance, topic of conversation and other relevant variables.

One of the results of such research was the demonstration of the differences existing between collectivist and individualistic cultures revealed in the ways the underlying cultural values are reflected in the overt modes of their communicative behaviour.

The present study aims at demonstrating the correlation between core beliefs shared by the representatives of a certain linguoculture and their communicative practices. While some research has probed Uzbek communication patterns [Reeves, Madelene, 2011], in-depth pragmatic analysis of Uzbek disagreement remains an understudied area. As Uzbekistan’s role on the world stage expands, it becomes increasingly vital to understand the nuances of Uzbek communicative norms to foster effective cross-cultural interaction. This study addresses that need using empirical data from Uzbek informants to shed light on how core cultural values are enacted through disagreement strategies.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in theories from cross-cultural pragmatics and politeness research pioneered by linguists such as P. Brown, S. Levinson, S. Blum-Kulka, A. Wierzbicka and others. A key concept is the notion

of “face” – the public self-image that people strive to maintain in social interactions. Face consists of two basic desires: positive face, the need to be liked and approved of by others, and negative face, the need for autonomy and freedom from imposition [Brown, Levinson, 1987]. Certain speech acts like disagreement inherently threaten the addressee’s positive face (by implying a negative evaluation) and sometimes negative face (by impeding their action). Thus such FTAs require softening through politeness strategies to uphold social harmony. Positive politeness strategies seek to build rapport and emphasize common ground, while negative politeness uses deference, hedging and indirectness to minimize imposition [Brown, Levinson, 1987].

Cultures vary in the relative importance placed on each type of face and the degree of face threat seen to be posed by particular acts. In collectivist high-context cultures like Uzbekistan’s [Merkin, 2015], where group needs are prioritized over the individual and meaning is often implied rather than explicitly stated, indirect face-saving communication and conflict avoidance tend to be the norm [Blum-Kulka et al., 1989]. Attention to face and use of indirect speech has been identified as a defining feature of many Eastern cultures [Леонтович, 2014; Воробьев и др., 2012; Сянлинь, Германова, 2021]. Thus, analyzing the linguistic strategies used to perform a face-challenging act like disagreement can reveal underlying cultural premises and interactional scripts.

## METHODOLOGY

Data was collected using an open-ended discourse completion test (DCT) [Blum-Kulka, House, Kasper, 1989], a common tool in cross-cultural pragmatics that allows gathering comparable responses to the same prompts across participants [Германова, 2021]. Native Uzbek speakers were presented 20 scenarios designed to elicit disagreement in various contexts (with interlocutors of differing power / distance relations). Respondents were asked to express disagreement either with their interlocutor’s opinion on some issue or with his / her suggestion or plans.

Some sample scenarios include:

- Your coworker suggests changing the work process, but you think the current system is more effective. Will you object? If so, what will you say?
- Your friend is going to implement a certain project. You don’t like this project. Will you object? If so, what will you say?
- Your teacher criticizes the new textbook. You liked the new textbook. Will you object? What will you tell him / her?

The scenarios encompassed professional, personal, and educational relationships to examine the impact of power dynamics and social distance on disagreement strategies. Crucially, the open-ended DCT format allows participants to respond in their own words, providing a window into authentic language use and strategic choices. A total of 20 DCT questionnaires yielding 30 responses from Uzbek speakers aged 20–35, balanced for gender (10 male, 10 female), were collected and qualitatively analyzed using P. Brown and S. Levinson's politeness theory and conversation analysis framework to identify emergent patterns. The focus was on the linguistic means used to express opposing stances, which were categorized into distinct strategies.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### Mitigating Disagreement

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that Uzbek respondents displayed a marked preference for indirect disagreement strategies. Only 20 % of responses featured direct negation or contradiction of the interlocutor's position. Far more common were evasive and mitigating maneuvers to soften the FTA:

- providing explanations / rationales (50 %)
- partially agreeing while offering a different perspective (32 %)
- suggesting alternatives / putting forward counter offers (30 %)
- expressing uncertainty (24 %)
- replying with questions (18 %)

For instance, in reply to a coworker suggesting a process change, one participant stated:

Taklifingiz uchun rahmat, lekin men hozirgi jarayonimdan mamnunman. – Спасибо за ваше предложение, но меня устраивает мой текущий процесс<sup>1</sup>.

The sentence contains a polite expression of gratitude *I thank you for your suggestion*, showing respect for the other person's input, followed by a formal register to further blunt disagreement *but I'm fine with my current process*. Rather than a bald *no*, an explanation is given to justify the eventual negative assessment of the proposed changes in the work process.

Similarly, to a friend proposing a disliked project, respondents utilized moves like:

Bu yaxshi fikr, lekin ishonchingiz komilmi? – It's a good idea, but are you sure about it?

Here token agreement prefaces the expression of doubt, a less overtly oppositional approach than simply saying:

Menga bu yoqmadi. –  
I don't like it.

Another typical tactic is using a question in response to disagreement, which facilitates a deeper understanding of the opposing viewpoint and promotes constructive dialogue, e.g.:

Siz nima uchun bunday o'ylaysiz? –  
Why do you think so?

The question format also shifts the burden back to the addressee rather than directly challenging their idea. The high proportion of explanations, partial agreements, alternatives, uncertainties and questions demonstrates the Uzbek tendency to avoid stark disagreement in favor of more oblique and cooperative stances. Speakers expend considerable effort to frame their opposition in face-sensitive and rhetorically persuasive ways. Even when speakers do ultimately express negative assessments, these are usually delayed, qualified and depersonalized. There is heavy use of implicature and reliance on the addressee to infer the speaker's true intent. The strong preference for verbal indirectness aligns with Uzbek cultural values of harmony and conflict avoidance [Reeves, Madelene, 2011]. As Leontovich notes, "In Uzbek communication, the aim is to minimize friction and confrontation. Directness is seen as rude and undesirable" [Леонтович, 2014, p. 205]. The DCT responses show this cultural script in action – Uzbek speakers consistently work to preserve the addressee's "face" while still finding ways to express opposing stances.

### Variability by Social Factors

While indirectness was the dominant tendency overall, the degree and form of mitigation was mediated by contextual variables like power distance and social closeness. Participants were more likely to use bare, unmodified disagreement with equal-status intimates like friends (28 % of friend responses were direct) in contrast to upward communication with bosses or teachers (only 8 % of responses to higher-power addressees were direct). This aligns with politeness theory predictions that greater power differentials require more extensive face-saving strategies. Social distance also licensed more direct disagreement among distant? friends / acquaintances (25 %) as compared to nuclear family members (10 %), reflecting the special face needs and etiquette accorded to kin relationships in Uzbek culture.

An interesting gender effect was also observed, with male respondents disagreeing directly at over

<sup>1</sup> Эд. перевод наш. – И. А.

twice the rate of females (27 % vs. 13 %) across situations under analysis. Women showed a stronger tendency to use hedges, disclaimers and other distancing techniques, with forms like: “I think...”, “In my opinion...”, “It seems to me...” and “It can be said that...”. This pattern is consistent with research finding gender-based differences in politeness strategies cross-culturally [Holmes, 1995], perhaps reflecting the relatively greater social pressure on Uzbek women to conform to norms of verbal modesty and conflict avoidance.

Finally, the nature of the disagreement object also influenced realization patterns. When the prompt involved a proposed action (e.g. coworker’s process change, visiting a dispreferred restaurant) rather than an opinion or assessment (e.g. teacher’s textbook criticism, boss’s negative evaluation of colleague’s work), respondents were somewhat more willing to express direct disapproval (25 % for action-oriented prompts vs. 15 % for assessment-oriented ones). This distinction likely stems from the different face-threat level involved – while contradicting someone’s opinion challenges their judgement (positive face), blocking their intended action imposes on their autonomy (negative face). Both are FTAs in Brown and Levinson’s model, but the latter is more severe, so requires greater redress. The DCT results show Uzbeks are attuned to this contextual difference and adjust their disagreement strategies accordingly.

### CULTURAL VALUES REFLECTED IN COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOUR

The overarching preference for mitigated, indirect disagreement revealed in the DCT data can be clearly linked to foundational Uzbek cultural values and norms. As a country with ancient traditions of hospitality, mutual aid, and neighborly cohesion [Merkin, 2015; Емтыль, 2016], Uzbekistan places paramount importance on preserving social harmony and minimizing public displays of difference or conflict [Reeves, Madelene, 2011]. The linguistically indirect, emotionally restrained communication style preferred by Uzbeks has been noted by both Western and Uzbek scholars. The elaborate explanations, partial agreements, hedged alternatives and other face-saving strategies used by respondents illustrate the lengths to which Uzbek speakers will go to communicate a differing stance without causing undue offense or friction. As Ziyaeva [Ziyaeva, 2002, p. 6] explains in her ethnographic interviews with Uzbek women, “We are taught from a young age, better to stay silent than to argue... better to find points of common ground

than to insist on your own view.” The DCT responses consistently demonstrate this cultural imperative to avoid stark disagreement in favor of tactful, face-sensitive approaches. At the same time, the fact that most respondents did find ways to express opposing stances, albeit indirectly, shows that Uzbeks do value making their voice heard on important issues. As O. A. Leontovich notes, Uzbeks appreciate honest communication, but have a strong distaste for confrontation [Leontovich, 2014]. The DCT strategies like prefacing disagreement with agreement, offering alternative suggestions, and asking questions rather than stating outright criticism all enable speakers to make their differing view known in a culturally appropriate, face-respecting manner.

The greater prevalence of unvarnished disagreement in communication with equal-status friends and family members vs. in upward interaction with bosses or elders highlights another key aspect of Uzbek culture – the emphasis on hierarchy and respect for authority [Peshkova, 2009]. In Uzbekistan’s traditional family and social structure, deference to elders and superiors is expected, and open contradiction is taboo. This is reflected in the linguistic choices of DCT respondents, who took special pains to soften disagreement (often avoiding it entirely) with high-power addressees while using more direct forms with peers. The gender differences observed in disagreement strategies, with females using more hedges and other distancing language than males, may also reflect persistent cultural norms and attitudes linked to Uzbekistan’s patriarchal history. Research has identified a societal expectation for Uzbek women to embody spiritual-moral qualities like kindness, modesty and agreeableness [Peshkova, 2020]. Ziyaeva’s female respondents stress the importance of speaking “softly and sweetly” [Ziyaeva, 2002, p. 6]. These traditional femininity ideals appear to influence women’s pragmatic choices, motivating an even more indirect, deferential style compared to men. Finally, the greater willingness to bluntly disagree with proposed actions vs. opinions indicates Uzbek speakers may be more protective of negative face (autonomy) than positive face (approval). This is consistent with cultural values stressing the importance of personal honor, pride and self-determination, captured in Uzbek proverbs like “Yaxshilikni qabul qilib olish ham mahorat” (“Accepting kindness is also a skill”) [Емтыль, 2016]. Blocking someone’s freedom to make their own choice is seen as more of an imposition than merely disagreeing with their view. At a broader level, the pragmatic tendencies revealed in this data illustrate the dialectic between two competing forces in Uzbek culture – the desire for individual self-expression and the obligation to

uphold social harmony. The creativity and diversity of the linguistic strategies respondents use to finesse this tension point to the central Uzbek value of adaptability. As Ziyaeva explains, "An Uzbek knows how to adjust herself to the situation" [Ziyaeva, 2002, p. 6].

## CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of disagreement strategies in Uzbek discourse completion responses reveals clear correspondences between cultural values and pragmatic communication choices. Uzbek speakers consistently prefer indirect, mitigated means of expressing opposing stances, relying on implied meanings and face-saving maneuvers to preserve interpersonal harmony. This aligns with fundamental Uzbek cultural premises stressing social cohesion, conflict avoidance, respect for authority, and context-sensitive communication.

The findings support theoretical frameworks like politeness theory that predict greater use of negative politeness (deference, hedging, indirectness) in communication between interlocutors of asymmetric power [Brown, Levinson, 1987] and in collectivist, large power distance cultures like Uzbekistan's that prioritize relational harmony over individual expression. The gender differences observed also point to the influence of societal norms and expectations on individual language use.

By analyzing the specific linguistic forms Uzbek speakers use to perform the inherently face-threatening act of disagreement, this study concretely illustrates how cultural macrostructures are realized through everyday language choices. The

rich variety of mitigating strategies attested in the data demonstrates the sociopragmatic competence involved in formulating a polite and persuasive disagreement in Uzbek cultural context. While this study's sample is limited in size and demographic scope, it provides an empirically grounded starting point for mapping Uzbek disagreement norms and opens up avenues for further research.

Contrastive analysis of other cultural groups is needed to determine which of the observed tendencies are distinctively Uzbek vs. shared more widely. Examination of Uzbek speakers' disagreement behavior in authentic interaction (e.g. using conversation analysis of audio / video data) would be a valuable complement to the DCT approach. Future studies could also explore how Uzbek disagreement strategies may be changing among younger, urban, globally connected generations. Such research is important as Uzbekistan navigates a path between preserving cultural traditions and adapting to the demands of globalization. As Linn, Andrew et al. [Linn, Andrew et al., 2020] argues, understanding Uzbek language practices and cultural identities is key for predicting the country's social, economic, and political development.

By shedding light on how Uzbeks enact cultural values through communication, pragmatic studies like this one can contribute to more nuanced cross-cultural understanding and dialogue. The results are in conformance with current linguopragmatic theoretical frameworks, proving the relevance of collectivistic and individualistic cultures division for contrastive linguistics and demonstrating the range of the impact ethnic cultural values make on communicative behaviour.

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