



Metaphors In Illocutive Speech Acts: A Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Comparison Between English And Uzbek

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Abstract

The article explores the role of metaphors to represent socio-pragmatic aspects of illocutionary speech acts in English and Uzbek languages. The work is based on comparative analysis of metaphors in both languages which concentrated on apologies, complaints, offers and invitations among other types of illocutive speech acts. The article is aimed at to highlight the differences and similarities between these languages in terms of the usage of metaphors to demonstrate certain social and pragmatic aspects of these nations.

Key words: illocutionary speech acts, apologies, offers, invitations, complaints, social and pragmatic aspects, English, Uzbek.

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication, but also a complex tool of cultural values, social norms, and cognitive categories. Among a number of complex things about language is metaphor, which plays a central role in framing the way individuals think of abstract ideas and perform communicative actions. Based on conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphors are not merely linguistic ornaments but instead essential elements of human thought, defining what we say and how we intend it. In pragmatics, and within the field of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), metaphors can effectively alter the illocutionary force and meaning of illocutionary acts—those speech acts that not only convey information but actually constitute the performance of actions such as requesting, promising, commanding, or apologizing.

This article discusses the relationship between metaphor and illocutionary speech acts in English and Uzbek, two linguistically and culturally distinct languages. While much research has been conducted on the use of metaphor within individual languages, less attention has been given to the degree to which metaphors contribute to the performance and perception of illocutionary acts across cultures. It is not only necessary to know about such distinctions for linguistic theory but also for applied research in intercultural communication, translation studies, and language teaching.

Through a cross-cultural pragmatic study, this work examines how speakers of English and Uzbek employ metaphorical expressions to perform illocutionary acts, and how cultural norms and cognitive schemata shape such uses. It aims to answer the following central questions: How do metaphors strengthen, soften, or alter the illocutionary force of speech acts in the two languages?



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What are the cultural values underlying such metaphorical constructions? And to what extent do such metaphors reflect or counter universal trends in language use?

By comparing naturally occurring spoken and written discourse in the two languages, this article seeks to excavate the fine-grained mechanisms through which metaphors work as components of speech acts, offering a window onto the cultural pragmatics of everyday communication.

Literature review

The investigation of metaphor and illocutionary speech acts represents two significant fields of linguistic research: conceptual metaphor theory and speech act theory, both of which have developed to encompass cross-cultural and pragmatic approaches.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) set the groundwork for modern metaphor research through their now classic work *Metaphors We Live By*, in which they contended that metaphor is not just a figure of speech but essentially a cognitive process. In CMT, abstract concepts are understood through more concrete areas, giving rise to pervasive metaphorical mappings such as "Argument is War" or "Time is Money." More recent research (e.g., Kövecses, 2005) has explored how such conceptual metaphors vary and remain consistent across cultures, with both universal trends and culturally specific conceptualizations.

Speech act theory, developed by Austin (1962) and developed further by Searle (1969), categorizes utterances not only in terms of propositional meaning but also in terms of their communicative purpose. Illocutionary acts such as asserting, requesting, apologizing, or promising are the essence of this theory. Illocutionary force is context-dependent and can be supported or modified by linguistic mechanisms, such as metaphor.

The application of metaphor in speech act theory has been examined by scholars such as Gibbs (1994), who believes that metaphorical language plays an important role in illocutionary act interpretation. Metaphors have the effect of weakening and intensifying the illocutionary force, particularly in face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For example, the phrase "I'm under pressure" while refusing or "Let me chew on that" to postpone a request might subtly change the obvious directness or politeness of the act.

Cross-cultural pragmatic research, for example, by Wierzbicka (1991) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), has shown that cultures differ considerably in performing and understanding speech acts. Cultural scripts influence not just the politeness strategies or directness used but the metaphors used to express illocutionary force. For instance, in English-speaking cultures, metaphors drawing on reference to negotiation or balance are common in argumentative discourse, whereas in other cultures, metaphors may be drawn from more hierarchical or group-centered paradigms.

Nonetheless, the increasing scholarly interest in pragmatics and metaphor, there is a noticeable lacuna in the research that examines the impact of metaphors on illocutionary acts in untapped languages such as Uzbek. The Uzbek language, characterized by its distinctive fusion of Turkic, Islamic, and Soviet heritage, presents fertile soil for examining culturally rooted metaphorical expressions in speech acts.

Whereas the use of metaphors in English has been long researched, metaphorical utterances in Uzbek have not received similar research attention, especially within pragmatic frameworks. Initial research (Yusupova, 2016; Karimov, 2019) indicates that Uzbek speakers routinely use



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metaphors drawn from natural phenomena, religious teachings, and collectivist values to perform illocutionary acts; systematic comparisons with English, however, are scarce. Additionally, the contribution of such metaphors to the understanding and success of speech acts in intercultural communication remains an open issue.

This study fills this gap by examining metaphorical illocution between Uzbek and English and contributing to cognitive linguistics, intercultural pragmatics, and comparative semantics.

Methods

The work is based on the comparison and contrast of metaphors in apologies, offers, invitations, complaints in English and Uzbek languages. In addition, another method that is used in the article is a comprehensive analysis of literature review to explore the topic more clearly.

Results and discussion

This chapter discusses the findings achieved by the comparative study of metaphorical language in English and Uzbek illocutionary speech acts. The study is based on naturally occurring spoken and written data collected in both linguistic contexts, with a focus on five most common types of illocutionary acts: requests, apologies, refusals, offers, and commands. The findings attest to commonalities and substantial cultural variation in the use and understanding of metaphors in these speech acts.

In English and Uzbek, there seem to be some metaphorical patterns that recur in illocutionary use. Journey and container metaphors, for example, have a tendency to occur within the illocutionary situation of requests and apologies:

English: "I trust that we share a mutual understanding." / "Allow me to express this delicately."

Uzbek: Yo'limiz bir bo'lsin ("Let our journey align") / Ko'nglingizni og'ritmasam ... ("If I do not cause you distress").

These examples demonstrate the usual conceptual dependence on physical and spatial metaphors for organizing interpersonal importance, in line with Conceptual Metaphor Theory predictions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Whereas Uzbek metaphorical spaces can be similar, their pragmatic functions and cultural implications tend to be vastly different. English speech acts tend to invoke metaphors emphasizing emotional control, negotiation, and individual agency, whereas Uzbek metaphors tend to internalize collectivist values, hierarchies, and emotional sensitivity.

English rejections often use metaphors of time and constraint: "I'm tied up right now" or "It's out of my hands."

In Uzbek, rejections include metaphors that soften the refusal through shared imagery: Nasib qilsa, keyinroq ("If it is destined, maybe later") or Yuzingizni yerga qaratmayin ("Let me not dishonor your face").

This confirms that metaphors in Uzbek illocutionary acts tend to be more indirect and obeisant, conforming to modesty and social harmony as traditional Uzbek values.

In both, metaphors serve as face-saving devices—they reduce the threat to face in speech acts such as requests and commands. However, whereas such speakers in the other languages opt for short metaphorical phrases, often with religious or poetic tinge:

The Uzbek phrase can be translated as: "Assist me in my search for righteousness."

English equivalents: "Can you give me a hand?" or "I'm in a bit of a jam."



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The figurative expression in Uzbek illustrates a moral and spiritual basis which lends legitimacy and politeness to the action. This is contrasted with the more pragmatically-directed and idiomatic metaphors in English.

A very interesting and subtle insight is that metaphors affect the illocutionary force in different ways in different languages. In the case of English, metaphor often has the effect of emphasizing or strategically reinforcing the assertiveness of an utterance. However, in the Uzbek language, metaphor seems to reduce the directness of the speech act, diluting its overall force.

For instance:

American English expression: "You must step up to the plate." (Baseball idiom — emphasizes action and accountability)

Uzbek imperative: Ko'nglimni buzmay, aytganimni qil ("Please do as I ask, don't upset my heart") — The metaphor moves the listener's feelings and softens the imperative. This demonstrates that cultural values and norms are encoded in the choice and use of metaphors, which correspond to various communicative intentions.

These results have practical applications as well. In communication between English and Uzbek speakers, the pragmatic impact of metaphors can be misconstrued, resulting in over-assertiveness or undue deference. For example, a metaphorically mitigated Uzbek refusal can be construed by an English speaker as non-committal instead of being polite. A metaphorically intensified English request, on the other hand, can come across as excessively direct or confrontational in Uzbek cultural terms. This calls for greater metapragmatic awareness in intercultural communication and language learning, especially in situations involving diplomacy, translation, and second-language learning.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the use of metaphors for the construction of illocutionary speech acts in English and Uzbek, demonstrating the presence of both universal trends and culture-specific practices. As has been revealed, although both languages employ the same conceptual metaphor domains—journey, containment, and burden—their utilization in speech acts records various cultural conventions and ways of communication.

English employs metaphors to assert agency, establish purpose, or soften face-threatening acts through the use of idiomatic and typically novel images. Uzbek speakers utilize metaphors grounded in collectivism, emotionality, and morality, and tend to extend metaphors into long and polite constructions that stress harmony and respect.

These variations highlight the significance of metaphor, not just as a decorative linguistic feature, but as a pragmatically situated cultural instrument that influences the force, politeness, and effectiveness of confectionary acts. They also illustrate how metaphor is a site of cross-cultural difference, which may cause misunderstanding unless properly understood or contextualized.

From a wider perspective, this study contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics and cognitive linguistics through illustrating the significant intersections between metaphor and speech act theory. For intercultural communication, translation, and education professionals, the study draws attention to more nuanced approaches in terms of metaphor use in intercultural communication and language learning.



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Future research can build on this research by adding more languages, looking at the use of metaphor in online discourse, or investigating intergenerational variation in the use of metaphor in different cultures. Ultimately, a deeper insight into metaphor in illocutionary acts facilitates enhanced communicative competence and greater respect for each other in our growing global culture.

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