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Discursive And Pragmatic Features Of Proverbs Expressing Politeness In English And Uzbek Languages

Introduction

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the discursive and pragmatic features of proverbs expressing politeness in English and Uzbek languages. Proverbs are examined as culturally specific linguistic units that encode norms of social behavior, etiquette, and moral values. The study applies the theoretical frameworks of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Leech's principles of pragmatics, and Grice's cooperative maxims to reveal how politeness functions in proverbial discourse.

Keywords:

politeness, proverb, discourse, pragmatics, English language, Uzbek language, communication, culture, respect, comparative linguistics, speech etiquette, metaphor, cross-cultural communication, social harmony

Language serves as both a means of communication and a reflection of the cultural and moral values of a community. Proverbs, as condensed expressions of folk wisdom, are among the most representative linguistic units that encode moral norms, social etiquette, and politeness. In every culture, proverbs serve as guidelines for appropriate behavior and speech. They contain moral, ethical, and communicative principles that regulate social relations and maintain interpersonal balance. The study of politeness in proverbs allows us to understand how a given linguistic community conceptualizes respect, social distance, cooperation, and emotional restraint.

Politeness as a linguistic and pragmatic phenomenon has been discussed by numerous scholars. Brown and Levinson (1987) consider politeness a universal principle that mitigates potential face-threatening acts in communication. Leech (1983) views politeness as a system of maxims that control social

interaction by balancing interpersonal goals and social harmony. Grice (1975) emphasizes the cooperative principle, according to which interlocutors adhere to conversational maxims to achieve understanding and avoid conflict. Proverbs are a natural reflection of these principles because they convey social norms in an implicit, culturally coded manner.

In both English and Uzbek, proverbs expressing politeness play an important role in the regulation of speech conduct. English proverbs often emphasize restraint, discretion, and respect for privacy, while Uzbek proverbs stress collective harmony, modesty, and reverence for elders. Therefore, studying their discursive and pragmatic features reveals how politeness is linguistically and culturally constructed across different societies.

The main aim of this research is to examine the discursive and pragmatic properties of English and Uzbek proverbs that express politeness, to

identify their communicative functions, structural characteristics, and cultural implications. The objectives are to: (1) identify pragmatic strategies employed in politeness-related proverbs; (2) describe their discursive structures; and (3) compare the cultural values they embody. This study contributes to understanding cross-cultural pragmatics, proverb semantics, and discourse strategies of politeness.

Methods

This research is based on a comparative-discursive and pragmatic approach. The material for analysis was collected from both English and Uzbek sources, including dictionaries, folklore collections, and literary texts. The corpus includes 240 proverbs (120 from each language) that contain direct or indirect references to politeness, respect, modesty, speech restraint, or social harmony.

The analytical framework integrates elements of discourse analysis and pragmatics. Each proverb was analyzed according to three dimensions: discursive structure, pragmatic function, and cultural interpretation. The theoretical foundation of the research is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, Leech's (1983) principles of politeness, and Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. The discursive aspect focuses on how meaning is organized and conveyed through metaphor, parallelism, and ellipsis, while the pragmatic aspect addresses the communicative purpose of each proverb.

The study used qualitative content analysis to interpret the semantic and pragmatic components of proverbs. Comparative analysis was applied to identify cross-linguistic similarities and differences in the expression of politeness. The following sources were used for data collection: The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (Speake, 2008), O'zbek xalq maqollari (Karimov, 1999), and literary examples from authors such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Oybek, and Abdulla Qahhor.

Results

Pragmatic functions of politeness proverbs

The analysis revealed that proverbs in both languages perform similar pragmatic functions such as advising, warning,

complimenting, and mitigating. However, the degree of explicitness and the type of politeness strategy differ. In English, politeness-oriented proverbs tend to employ negative politeness strategies that stress non-imposition and respect for individuality. Examples include:

"Discretion is the better part of valour."

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

"Manners maketh man."

These proverbs encourage self-control, moderation, and indirectness, all of which reflect the Anglo-Saxon cultural emphasis on autonomy and privacy. In contrast, Uzbek proverbs tend to employ positive politeness strategies aimed at creating solidarity and reinforcing group harmony. Examples include:

"Kattaga hurmat, kichikka izzat."

"So'zni o'lchab ayt, odamni ranjitma."

"Yaxshi so'z jon ozig'i."

These proverbs highlight humility, kindness, and respect for social hierarchy. They encourage speakers to preserve harmony in communication and to consider the emotional well-being of others.

Discursive structures

Both English and Uzbek proverbs display a range of discursive features that reinforce their pragmatic functions. The most common are ellipsis, parallelism, and metaphorical compression. For example, the English proverb "Soft words butter no parsnips" uses metaphorical structure to express that polite words alone are not enough without action. Similarly, the Uzbek proverb "Shirin so'z ilon inidan chiqaradi" employs vivid imagery to illustrate the persuasive power of polite speech.

Antithetical parallelism is also common: "Silence is golden" in English and "Tili uzunning boshi kalta" in Uzbek both present moral contrasts to teach the value of restraint. Repetition and rhythmic structure enhance memorability, allowing proverbs to function effectively in oral discourse.

Cultural reflections

The comparative analysis demonstrates that politeness in English discourse is primarily individual-centered, while in Uzbek discourse it is socially oriented. English politeness emphasizes the avoidance of imposition and the

protection of personal autonomy. In contrast, Uzbek politeness values emotional connection, community respect, and moral humility.

For instance, the English proverb “Mind your own business” promotes self-boundaries and independence, whereas the Uzbek equivalent “Har kim o‘z o‘rnini bilsin” suggests the importance of knowing one’s social role and acting accordingly. This indicates that English culture prefers low-context, explicit politeness, while Uzbek culture practices high-context, relational politeness.

Another significant difference lies in the emotional tone. English politeness is pragmatic and reserved, whereas Uzbek politeness is expressive and moralistic. This is also evident in the stylistic composition of the proverbs: English ones are concise and rational, while Uzbek ones are metaphorical and emotionally rich.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that politeness as a communicative phenomenon is universal but its linguistic expression is culture-specific. Proverbs in both English and Uzbek languages reflect social norms that regulate human interaction, but they do so through different pragmatic mechanisms.

According to Leech (1983), politeness maximizes the hearer’s benefit and minimizes the speaker’s self-praise. In English proverbs, this principle manifests as an emphasis on restraint, tact, and discretion. For instance, “A soft answer turneth away wrath” functions as a pragmatic device to de-escalate conflict, in line with the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975). In Uzbek, a proverb with a similar function is “Yaxshi so‘z g‘azabni bosadi,” which conveys the same idea through emotional imagery and moral authority.

From a discursive point of view, proverbs act as performative speech acts. When uttered, they do not merely describe politeness but enact it. A speaker quoting a proverb adopts a socially approved communicative role and appeals to collective wisdom. As Wierzbicka (2003) notes, proverbs are culturally anchored speech acts that function as moral speech genres.

In Uzbek communication, the pragmatic force of a proverb is often stronger because it implies communal endorsement. The proverb “Kattaga hurmat, kichikka izzat” is not only an instruction but also a moral norm that ensures generational continuity. English proverbs such as “Courtesy costs nothing” or “Good manners open doors” also reinforce politeness, but they are more transactional and less moralistic.

Another key observation concerns metaphorical framing. English politeness proverbs often draw from nature, time, and behavior metaphors, whereas Uzbek ones rely on religious, familial, and emotional imagery. For instance, “Soft words butter no parsnips” (English) uses a culinary metaphor, while “Shirin so‘z ilon inidan chiqaradi” (Uzbek) uses a vivid animal image to highlight emotional persuasion.

Therefore, the difference between English and Uzbek politeness lies not in the presence or absence of politeness itself but in the discursive mode through which it is realized. English discourse privileges indirectness and individual tact; Uzbek discourse values empathy and moral alignment. These findings align with the notion of high-context versus low-context communication proposed by Hall (1976), where meaning in Uzbek speech relies on shared understanding and cultural scripts, while English discourse depends on explicit verbal cues.

Conclusion

The comparative-discursive and pragmatic analysis of English and Uzbek proverbs demonstrates that politeness is encoded through culturally specific communicative patterns. Proverbs serve as condensed moral and linguistic formulas that guide appropriate behavior and social harmony. English proverbs tend to emphasize self-restraint, discretion, and tactfulness, reflecting the individualistic and egalitarian nature of Anglo-Saxon communication. Uzbek proverbs, on the other hand, emphasize humility, emotional warmth, and respect for elders, mirroring collectivist social values and traditional respect hierarchies. Discursively, proverbs in both languages exhibit brevity, metaphor, and rhythmic structure, which enhance their pragmatic effectiveness and memorability. Pragmatically, they perform

directive, expressive, and phatic functions, promoting harmony and reducing potential conflict. The study confirms that proverbs are not static folkloric relics but active discursive tools in maintaining politeness and social order. Future research can explore the evolution of politeness in modern discourse, especially how traditional proverbs are reinterpreted in online communication, social media, and intercultural dialogue. A multimodal approach may also reveal how proverb-based politeness strategies function in visual and digital formats, contributing to a broader understanding of intercultural pragmatics.

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