

Criteria for Identifying and Classifying Kinetic Units in Uzbek and English Languages

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comparative theoretical and pragmalinguistic analysis of kinetic units in Uzbek and English discourse systems. Kinetic units – comprising non-verbal body movements such as gestures, facial expressions, postures, and eye contact – are examined through structural, functional, and linguocultural criteria. Utilizing the foundational kinesic frameworks of R. Birdwhistell and P. Ekman & W. Friesen, the article establishes the core physical phases (preparation, stroke, retraction) required to identify discrete kinetic units. Furthermore, it classifies these units into emblems, illustrators, regulators, affect displays, and adaptors across both languages. The comparative results demonstrate that while the structural segmentation criteria remain universal, their sociopragmatic implementation differs significantly: the Uzbek kinetic system leans toward a high-context, collectivist model driven by social hierarchy and age deferment (e.g., placing a hand on the chest, gaze deflection), whereas the English system embodies a low-context, egalitarian model prioritizing individualism and directness (e.g., direct eye contact, firm handshake). The findings provide practical and theoretical insights for contrastive linguistics, non-verbal pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Kinesics, kinetic units, kineme, non-verbal communication, Uzbek language, English language, contrastive linguistics, emblems, pragmatics

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a multifaceted phenomenon that extends beyond verbal utterances to encompass a rich system of non-verbal signals. Within non-verbal linguistics and kinesics, kinetic units-discrete body movements including gestures, facial expressions, postures, and eye movements-play a vital role in encoding and transmitting pragmatic meaning during discourse. While human physiology imposes universal biomechanical limits on physical movements, the interpretation, frequency, and social function of kinetic behavior are deeply shaped by cultural values and linguistic conventions. In contrastive linguistics, comparing the non-verbal discourse systems of typologically and culturally distinct languages, such as Uzbek and English, yields important insights into intercultural communication. The Uzbek kinetic system operates largely within a high-context, collectivist framework where physical movements prominently signal social hierarchy, respect, and age deferment. Conversely, the English kinetic system reflects a low-context, individualistic cultural paradigm characterized by egalitarian interactions, directness, and clear personal boundaries.

Despite growing interest in linguoculturology, establishing systematic criteria for segmenting, identifying, and classifying kinetic units across Uzbek and English remains a crucial research need. This paper aims to establish theoretical criteria for isolating discrete kinetic units from continuous motion, categorize them using established functional taxonomies (e.g., emblems, illustrators, regulators), and analyze their sociopragmatic differences in Uzbek and English discourse.

2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In non-verbal linguistics and kinesics, kinetic units refer to minimal or structured units of body movement-such as gestures, facial expressions, postures, and eye contact-that convey communicative or pragmatic meaning during discourse. Based on structural and functional non-verbal linguistics (developed

initially by Ray Birdwhistell and expanded in comparative linguoculture):

1. **Kineme:** The smallest structural unit of non-verbal movement that carries a communicative distinction (analogous to a phoneme in spoken language).
2. **Kine/Allocon:** Specific physical variations or realizations of a kineme that do not alter its primary communicative meaning (analogous to a phone or allophone).
3. **Kinemorph/Kinetic complex:** A composite combination of kinemes forming a complete gesture or facial expression, functioning similarly to a morpheme or word.

To identify a body movement as a distinct kinetic unit in both Uzbek and English linguocultures, researchers apply three core criteria:

1. **Communicative intent (addressing function):** The movement must be directed toward an interlocutor or an external audience to transmit or regulate meaning, distinguishing it from purely physiological or involuntary actions.
2. **Form and structure (morphology):** The movement follows a structured physical pattern comprising three distinct phases: 1) preparation (beginning), 2) stroke (peak execution), and 3) retraction (end).
3. **Semantic/pragmatic value:** The unit must correlate with a specific communicative function or verbal equivalent (e.g., substitution, emphasis, or contradiction) [3].

Kinetic units in comparative Uzbek and English linguistics are classified across multiple functional and cultural dimensions:

Direct non-verbal translations for specific words or phrases
Uzbek: Placing a hand on the chest (*qo'lko'ksida*) to signal respect or greeting. **English:** A thumbs-up sign to indicate approval or agreement. Movements accompanying speech to emphasize, trace, or demonstrate meaning (e.g., pointing, spatial

hand movements). Signals used to control conversational turn-taking and flow (e.g., head nods, eye contact shifts, stepping back). Facial expressions and body postures revealing emotional states. Movement patterns relieving physical or emotional tension (e.g., touching hair, tapping feet). Independent movements performed solely by one or more body parts without external objects (e.g., waving, smiling). Movements requiring interaction with other body parts, garments, or physical objects (e.g., adjusting a headscarf, handling a cap or belt).

1. **Uzbek kinetic system:** Strongly reflects collectivism, social hierarchy, age deferment, and traditional etiquette (e.g., slight bow with hand on heart, modest gaze avoidance).
2. **English kinetic system:** Emphasizes individualism, egalitarian interaction, personal boundary maintenance, and direct visual engagement (e.g., direct eye contact, firm handshake).



Figure 1. *Comparative diagram of Uzbek and English kinetic systems*

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review on the identification and classification of kinetic units in Uzbek and English non-verbal communication

integrates theories from general non-verbal linguistics, kinesics, and comparative linguoculturology.

1. The structural approach to non-verbal communication was established by Birdwhistell (1970), who proposed that body motion operates through structural units analogous to spoken language phonology [1]. Birdwhistell introduced foundational concepts such as the kineme (minimal distinct unit of movement) and kinemorph (complex gesture structure), establishing the framework for structural non-verbal analysis [1].
2. The functional classification of gestures and non-verbal behavior relied heavily on the taxonomy developed by Ekman & Friesen (1969), who defined the core categories of kinetic units: emblems, illustrators, regulators, affect displays, and adaptors [2]. This taxonomy remains the standard benchmark for cross-cultural non-verbal research.
3. McNeill (1992), established the structural phases of gesture production (preparation, stroke, retraction), providing clear physical criteria to segment continuous movement into discrete kinetic units.

In modern Uzbek linguistics and contrastive study of English and Uzbek non-verbal systems, several key researchers have explored the cultural and pragmatic aspects of kinesics.

4. Yusupov (2007) explores structural and semantic differences between Uzbek and English language structures, providing a framework for contrastive non-verbal communication studies [6].
5. Hashimov (2001) analyzes the functional equivalences and distinctions between gesture systems in Turkic (Uzbek) and Germanic (English) cultures [3].
6. Sattarov's (2018) academic research in educational sciences. He details specific national-cultural emblems in Uzbek discourse, such as placing the hand on the chest (*qo'lko'ksida*) as a kinetic marker of deference and greeting, contrasting it with English eye-contact and handshake conventions [5].

Table 1. *Key synthesis of literature findings*

Researcher/theory	Core focus	Application to Uzbek vs. English
R. Birdwhistell (1970)	Structural kinesics (<i>Kinemes</i>)	Provides structural criteria for segmentation.
P. Ekman & W. V. Friesen (1969)	Functional taxonomy	Classifies units into emblems, illustrators, regulators, etc.
D. McNeill (1992)	Gesture segmentation	Identifies physical phases (<i>preparation, stroke, retraction</i>).
UzbekLinguists (Hashimov, Sattarov)	Linguoculturology & Pragmatics	

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

To comparative-analytical study of kinetic units across Uzbek and English discourse systems reveals distinct structural, semantic, and sociopragmatic patterns. The analysis was conducted by segmenting non-verbal behaviors into structural phases (preparation, stroke, retraction) and mapping them against functional categories (emblems, illustrators, regulators, affect displays, and adaptors).

Both languages utilize physical segmentation criteria where continuous movement is recognized as a kinetic unit only when possessing a definitive *stroke* (peak semantic delivery). Kinetic units were analyzed along four socio-cultural axes: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, high vs. low context, and physical proxemics. The empirical comparison demonstrates fundamental distinctions in kinetic execution, density, and functional priority between Uzbek and English discourse:

Table 2.

Dimension/category	Uzbek kinetic system	English kinetic system
Primary cultural marker	Hand on chest with slight head bow (<i>Qo'liko'ksida</i>)	Firm handshake with direct eye contact
Gaze behavior (Regulators)	Modest gaze avoidance toward elders/superiors	Sustained direct eye contact to build trust/transparency
Proxemics & boundaries	Closer interpersonal distance in peer/family groups; strict hierarchical boundary	Wider personal space buffer; egalitarian distance across social levels
Dominant emblem function	Deference, respect, social hierarchy, and hospitality	Individual approval, egalitarian interaction, and clarity

Touch frequency (Haptics)	High within same-gender groups; restricted across genders	Moderate, mostly restricted to standardized greetings
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4.1. *Hierarchy vs. egalitarianism in emblems*

In Uzbek, kinetic units prominently encode age deferment and social status. Emblems like placing a hand over the heart while bowing slightly serve as non-verbal markers of politeness and social order.

In English, kinetic emblems emphasize equality and directness (e.g., thumbs-up, ok sign, firm handshake), maintaining individual boundaries regardless of age gaps.

4.2. *Regulatory gaze patterns*

In Uzbek kinetic communication, lowering or deflecting one's gaze during interactions with elders or authority figures functions as a positive regulatory unit indicating modesty (*andisha*).

In English communication, continuous gaze avoidance is frequently classified as an adaptor or sign of dishonesty, as direct eye contact serves as a primary regulator for active listening and confidence.

4.3. *Contextual dependence*

Uzbek discourse represents a high-context kinetic system where subtle head movements, hand postures, and body angles carry heavy pragmatic meanings.

English discourse leans toward a low-context system where kinetic units primarily serve as illustrators to complement or clarify explicit verbal messages.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative study of kinetic units in Uzbek and English discourse demonstrates that body movements are structured, functional, and deeply embedded in linguocultural values. While both systems utilize identical physical phases (preparation, stroke, retraction) and functional categories (emblems,

illustrators, regulators, affect displays, adaptors), they diverge significantly in pragmatic implementation:

The Uzbek kinetic system operates as a high-context, collectivist model prioritizing social hierarchy, age deferment, and traditional etiquette (e.g., placing the hand over the heart, modest gaze avoidance). In contrast, the English kinetic system functions within an egalitarian, low-context paradigm emphasizing individualism, personal space, and directness (e.g., firm handshakes, direct eye contact).

Understanding these identification and classification criteria is essential for cross-cultural communication, translation theory, and non-verbal pragmatics, helping prevent intercultural misinterpretations between Uzbek and English speakers.

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