

Strategies for Expressing Speech Intention in Uzbek and English Service Encounters

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ABSTRACT

The article comparatively investigates direct and indirect strategies of expressing speech intention in Uzbek and English service encounters. Using service-dialogue material, it examines the linguistic and pragmatic realization of requests, offers, refusals, explanations, apologies and directives. The study demonstrates that Uzbek service discourse relies more heavily on respect-marking and mitigative forms balancing social distance, whereas English discourse tends to combine indirectness, conventional politeness formulas and institutional efficiency. The findings are useful for service communication training and translation practice.

Keywords: Speech intention, service discourse, indirectness, speech act, politeness, Uzbek, English

1. INTRODUCTION

In linguistics, speech intention denotes not only the goal-directed purpose of the speaker – what he or she means to say – but also the communicative manner in which that purpose is carried out. In the service sector this phenomenon acquires particular importance, since interaction in a restaurant, a hotel, a shop, a reception desk or an online service is not merely an exchange of information: it is at the same time an index of the quality of treatment, of trust and of institutional reputation.

Uzbek and English service encounters reflect different cultural values. In Uzbek, service talk is usually organized with regard to the interlocutor's status, age and the degree of deference

appropriate to the situation. In English, promptness, simplicity and conventional politeness formulas occupy a prominent place. As a result, one and the same intention – placing an order, say, or offering an apology – is expressed through different syntactic strategies in the two languages and cultures.

The aim of the present article is to analyse comparatively the strategies by which speech intention is expressed in Uzbek and English service discourse, to demonstrate the functional boundaries between direct and indirect devices, and to formulate practical recommendations for the service sector. The study takes speech act theory, pragmalinguistics and politeness theory as its foundation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The question of speech intention and speech acts has been treated extensively in the work of J. Austin, J. R. Searle, S. C. Levinson, and P. Brown and S. C. Levinson. Searle, in drawing the distinction between the locutionary content of an utterance and its illocutionary force, demonstrates that what is said and what is done are not the same thing. Politeness theory, for its part, explains not the content that is conveyed but the social form in which it is presented – and it is precisely this aspect that is central to service interaction.

A considerable body of research on service encounter discourse exists for English, in which the routine functions of formulas such as “Could you...”, “Would you like...” and “May I help you?” are analysed. In Uzbek linguistics, service talk has less often been studied under that name, yet closely related matters have been described within the study of the category of respect, forms of address, colloquial syntax, stylistics and text pragmatics.

What remains rare, however, is a comparison of Uzbek and English service discourse specifically from the standpoint of speech intention. Analysis is frequently confined to the level of translation, that is, to the selection of a ready-made formula. Yet although the forms “*Itimos, birozkutibturing*” and “*Could you wait a moment, please?*” are functionally similar, the

mechanisms by which they manage social distance are not identical. The present article is directed at elucidating precisely these functional differences.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The material of the study consists of 140 Uzbek and 140 English dialogue units drawn from restaurant, hotel, shopping-centre, educational and medical-information services. The examples were collected from samples of practical interaction, from instructional dialogues and from open communicative scenarios. The following types of intention were treated separately: address and offer of service, request, direction, refusal, apology, explanation and advice.

For each example the following were observed: the degree to which the intention was expressed directly or indirectly, the grammatical form selected, the presence of mitigating devices, the form of address and the response strategy. Units such as *marhamat*, *iltimos*, *mumkinbo'lsa*, *akalopa*, *hozir* and *birdaqiq* were recorded separately for Uzbek, and please, could, would, just, sorry, certainly and one moment for English.

The criteria of analysis were illocutionary force, degree of indirectness, politeness strategy, the management of time and status, and the degree of adaptation to the requirements of the institutional setting. This approach made it possible to describe speech intention not in terms of syntactic form alone but in relation to its communicative task.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that in Uzbek service interaction the primary task is frequently to express deference to the interlocutor and only then to perform the institutional action. In forms such as *Assalomualaykum*, *marhamat*, *nimanixohlaysiz?* or *Iltimos*, *birozkutibturing*, *hozirtekshiraman*, interpersonal warmth and social circumspection are conveyed alongside the substance of the service. English forms such as "Good afternoon, how can I

help you?” and “Could you wait a moment, please?” operate rather on the basis of standard service formulas.

The difference between the two languages is especially clear in the speech act of request. In Uzbek, a request is often expressed by the imperative-optative form of the verb, yet with the support of mitigating devices: *Ittimos*, *anketanito'ldiribberaqoling*, *Mumkinbo'lsa*, *salkutibturing*. In English, modality is the principal device, and forms such as “Could you fill in the form, please?” or “Would you mind waiting for a moment?” soften the illocutionary force by means of grammatical indirectness. Mitigation in Uzbek is therefore reinforced chiefly through lexical and pragmatic means, and in English through syntactic modality.

An equally interesting divergence was observed in refusal strategies. In Uzbek service talk, instead of an abrupt refusal by means of a direct *yo'q*, softer devices are widely employed: *Afsuski*, *hozirmavjudemas*, *Kechirasiz*, *buxizmatvaqtinchato'xtatilgan*, *Boshqavariantnitavsiyaqilsakbo'ladimi?* In English, forms such as “I'm afraid that is not available at the moment” and “Unfortunately, we cannot process it today” convey a more standardized institutional mitigation. Both languages thus aim at softening, but in Uzbek refusal is directed more towards reducing the interlocutor's disappointment, whereas in English the maintenance of formal professional distance predominates.

In apologies, the Uzbek forms *Kechirasiz*, *Uzrso'raymiz* and *Noqulaylikuchunuzr* are frequently accompanied by an explanation of the circumstances. The English formulas “Sorry” and “We apologize for the inconvenience” may be shorter and more standardized. In English, however, the construction “I'm sorry, but...” often serves to soften in advance a restriction or refusal that is about to follow. In Uzbek, by contrast, an apology commonly comes together with an additional explanation, a promise or a reassurance: *Kechirasiz*, *tizimishlamayapti*, *ammo hozirtuzatamiz*.

In the intentions of directing and instructing, the concise, precise and procedurally oriented character of English is more strongly felt: “Please take a seat,” “Go to the second desk,” “You need to sign here.” In Uzbek, an instruction is usually given with

a greater degree of contextual mitigation: *Marhamat, shuyergao'tirsangiz, Iltimos, ikkinchistolgamurojaatqiling, Mana buyergaimzoqo'ysangizbo'ladi*. Here the construction of the type *-sangizbo'ladi* expresses the intention somewhere between recommendation and request, that is, it lowers the social edge of the imperative.

Generalizing the analysis, speech intention in Uzbek service discourse frequently arrives as a multi-layered pragmatic package: purpose plus deference plus emotional accommodation. In English the dominant combination is purpose plus a standard polite form plus procedural precision. This difference is of considerable importance in translation practice, since in a service environment an excessively literal rendering may make the utterance appear artificial or brusque. Intention must therefore be read from a functional standpoint.

Forms of address likewise carry a distinct pragmatic load in the expression of intention. In Uzbek, units such as *aka, opa, ustoz, xonim* and *janob* are often used not as an institutionalized service formula but as a personalizing device that displays a culture of courtesy. In English, forms such as *sir, madam, miss* and *doctor* have a more restricted function, and in the majority of service encounters a neutral, address-free model prevails. This difference indicates that speech intention in Uzbek is bound up more closely with interpersonal warmth, whereas in English professional neutrality is the stronger tendency.

The expression of intention becomes still more complex in digital service interaction. In services delivered through written chat, electronic mail or messaging applications, the absence of intonation makes lexical mitigating devices all the more important. Whereas the repeated use of items such as *iltimos, marhamat, rahmat* and *uzr* is received as natural in Uzbek written service talk, excessive repetition may at times appear artificial in English. For this reason the training of service personnel should address the expression of intention not only in spoken but also in written discourse.

It is also worth noting the connection between speech intention and the factor of time. When the service environment demands a rapid decision, indirectness is reduced in Uzbek as

well and comparatively direct forms come to the fore: *Pasportingiznibering, Bu yergao'ting*. In English, too, standard politeness is curtailed in urgent situations and direct instruction predominates. Speech intention is therefore not a fixed formula: it varies dynamically according to institutional urgency, customer expectation and the stage the interaction has reached.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative analysis of Uzbek and English service interaction has shown that the expression of speech intention is directly bound up with cultural and pragmatic norms. In Uzbek, the guiding principles are the expression of deference, the careful maintenance of social distance and the avoidance of causing offence to the interlocutor, whereas in English, institutional efficiency together with indirectness and standard politeness formulas occupies a prominent place.

On this basis two recommendations may be offered for service personnel. First, in foreign language teaching it is types of intention, rather than the ready-made formulas of service discourse, that should be taught. Second, in translation and customer-support practice it is the illocutionary force and the degree of politeness of an utterance, rather than its lexical content, that must be adapted. In future work it would be expedient to investigate separately digital service interaction, chatbot communication and complaint discourse in Uzbek and English.

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