



THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH SPEAKERS

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Abstract

This article examines the role of cultural differences in communication between Uzbek and English speakers. In intercultural communication, language is not only a means of exchanging information, but also a reflection of cultural values, social norms, politeness strategies, and national mentality. Uzbek and English speakers may experience misunderstanding not because of linguistic incompetence alone, but because they often follow different cultural rules in expressing respect, politeness, directness, agreement, disagreement, and personal attitude. The article analyzes the influence of cultural values on verbal and non-verbal communication, greeting forms, address terms, politeness strategies, direct and indirect speech, and the role of context in meaning interpretation. The findings show that successful communication between Uzbek and English speakers requires not only grammatical knowledge, but also intercultural awareness and pragmatic competence.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Uzbek speakers, English speakers, cultural differences, politeness, pragmatics, intercultural competence.

Introduction

In the modern world, communication between representatives of different cultures has become an important part of education, business, tourism, diplomacy, and academic cooperation. English is widely used as an international language, while Uzbek is the language of a society with its own historical, cultural, and social values.



When Uzbek and English speakers communicate, they do not simply use different languages; they also bring different cultural expectations into the conversation.

Culture has a strong influence on how people greet each other, express opinions, show respect, ask questions, apologize, make requests, and refuse offers. According to Hall, communication is closely connected with culture, because people interpret messages through culturally shaped contexts (Hall, 1976). Therefore, a sentence that sounds polite and normal in one culture may sound too direct, too vague, or even impolite in another culture.

The aim of this article is to analyze how cultural differences influence communication between Uzbek and English speakers. The article focuses on several important aspects: context, politeness, directness and indirectness, address forms, non-verbal behavior, and possible misunderstandings in intercultural interaction.

Many scholars have emphasized that language and culture are inseparable. Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence, arguing that language users should know not only grammar, but also how to use language appropriately in social situations (Hymes, 1974). This idea is very important for communication between Uzbek and English speakers, because correct grammar does not always guarantee successful interaction.

Hall's theory of high-context and low-context cultures is also useful for this topic. In high-context cultures, much meaning is understood from the situation, shared background knowledge, social relations, and non-verbal signals. In low-context cultures, messages are usually more explicit, direct, and verbalized (Hall, 1976). Uzbek communication often contains high-context features, because speakers may rely on indirectness, respect, shared social norms, and contextual understanding. English communication, especially in British and American contexts, often tends to be more explicit and direct.

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov explain that cultures differ according to values such as individualism, collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). These dimensions help explain why Uzbek speakers may pay more attention to age, status, family relations, and social hierarchy, while English speakers may emphasize personal opinion, individual choice, equality, and personal space.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is also relevant to this discussion. They argue that politeness is connected with the speaker's attempt to protect the listener's "face,"



that is, social self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, politeness is not expressed in the same way in all cultures. For example, Uzbek politeness may be shown through respectful address forms, indirect requests, hospitality formulas, and special expressions of blessing, while English politeness may be shown through modal verbs, softeners, and personal distance.

One of the main differences between Uzbek and English speakers is the role of context in communication. Uzbek speakers often understand meaning through the social situation, relationship between speakers, age difference, tone of voice, and cultural background. For example, when an Uzbek speaker says, “Bir choy ichib keting,” it may not only mean drinking tea; it may also express hospitality, respect, and emotional closeness. If translated directly into English as “Come and drink tea,” the deeper cultural meaning may be lost.

English speakers usually expect the message to be clear and specific. In many English-speaking contexts, people prefer direct information: time, place, purpose, and personal intention should be expressed openly. As Scollon, Scollon and Jones note, intercultural communication problems often occur when speakers interpret discourse according to their own cultural expectations rather than the speaker’s intended meaning (Scollon, Scollon & Jones, 2012). For example, an Uzbek speaker may avoid saying “no” directly in order not to hurt the listener. Instead, expressions such as “Ko‘ramiz,” “Nasib bo‘lsa,” or “Harakat qilaman” may be used. However, an English speaker may interpret such expressions as possible agreement or promise. As a result, misunderstanding may occur.

Politeness is one of the most important cultural elements in Uzbek-English communication. In Uzbek culture, respect is strongly connected with age, social status, family position, and professional role. Speakers often use polite address forms such as “siz,” “aka,” “opa,” “ustoz,” “domla,” “amaki,” and “xola.” These forms show respect and social closeness at the same time.

In English, respect is usually expressed differently. English speakers commonly use “please,” “thank you,” “excuse me,” modal verbs such as “could,” “would,” and softening expressions such as “I was wondering if...” or “Would you mind...?” For example, the Uzbek request “Ertaga hujjatlarni olib keling” may sound normal in Uzbek academic or official communication, but its direct translation “Bring the documents tomorrow” may sound too commanding in English. A more polite English version would be: “Could you please bring the documents tomorrow?” This shows



that politeness is culturally specific. Brown and Levinson state that speakers use different strategies to reduce the threat to the listener's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In Uzbek, politeness is often achieved through respect markers and indirectness; in English, it is often achieved through modal verbs, hedging, and polite formulas.

Another important difference is directness. English communication, especially in academic and professional contexts, often values clarity, precision, and direct expression. People may openly express disagreement by saying, "I do not agree," "I have a different opinion," or "This point needs more evidence." In Uzbek communication, disagreement is often expressed more carefully, especially when speaking to elders, teachers, or people of higher status. For instance, an Uzbek speaker may say, "Bu fikrni yana bir ko'rib chiqsak yaxshi bo'lardi," instead of directly saying, "This is wrong." This indirect style helps maintain harmony and respect. However, English speakers may sometimes interpret indirectness as uncertainty or lack of confidence.

At the same time, Uzbek speakers may find English directness too sharp or emotionally cold. For example, the English phrase "I disagree with you" may sound normal in an academic discussion, but for some Uzbek speakers it may sound rude if it is not softened. Therefore, both sides need to understand that directness and indirectness are not signs of good or bad communication; they are culturally shaped communicative strategies.

Greeting is another area where cultural differences are clearly seen. Uzbek greetings are usually longer and more personal. People may ask about health, family, children, work, and general well-being. Expressions such as "Assalomu alaykum," "Yaxshimisiz?", "Uy ichilar yaxshimi?", "Bolalar yaxshimi?" are common. These questions show attention, warmth, and respect.

In English-speaking cultures, greetings are often shorter and less personal, especially in formal or public situations. Phrases such as "Hello," "How are you?", "Good morning," or "Nice to meet you" are common. The question "How are you?" often functions as a greeting rather than a real request for detailed information. This difference may create misunderstanding. An Uzbek speaker may think that an English greeting is too brief or cold, while an English speaker may think that Uzbek greetings are too personal or time-consuming. In fact, both forms are normal within their own cultural systems.



Non-verbal communication also plays an important role in intercultural interaction. Uzbek speakers may use gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, physical closeness, and hospitality behavior to express meaning. Respect may be shown by standing up when an elder enters the room, offering a seat, serving tea, or using a softer tone.

In English-speaking cultures, personal space is often more strongly protected. Touching, standing too close, or asking personal questions may be interpreted as uncomfortable in some contexts. Eye contact is also culturally sensitive. In English communication, eye contact may show confidence and attention. In Uzbek culture, especially in communication with elders or authority figures, too much direct eye contact may sometimes be understood as disrespectful or overly bold.

Gumperz emphasizes that speakers use contextualization cues, such as intonation, pauses, rhythm, and style, to interpret meaning in conversation (Gumperz, 1982). If these cues are interpreted differently across cultures, communication problems may arise.

Uzbek communication is strongly influenced by collectivist values, family relations, hospitality, respect for elders, and social harmony. In many situations, the speaker tries to protect group unity and avoid open conflict. English communication, particularly in Western contexts, is often influenced by individualism, personal autonomy, equality, and self-expression.

Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov argue that cultural dimensions influence people's behavior, values, and communication patterns (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). From this perspective, Uzbek speakers may prefer relationship-oriented communication, while English speakers may prefer task-oriented communication in professional settings. For example, before discussing business or academic matters, Uzbek speakers may spend time on greetings and personal conversation. English speakers may move to the main topic more quickly. This does not mean that one style is better than the other. It means that each culture has its own communicative logic. Intercultural competence requires understanding these differences and adapting communication style according to the situation.

Several common misunderstandings may occur between Uzbek and English speakers. First, indirect Uzbek expressions may be misunderstood by English speakers as unclear or uncertain. Second, English directness may be perceived by Uzbek speakers as impolite. Third, Uzbek hospitality formulas may be interpreted literally by English



speakers, while English short greetings may be interpreted as coldness by Uzbek speakers. Fourth, differences in personal space, eye contact, and address forms may create discomfort. For example, when an Uzbek speaker repeatedly offers food or tea, it is usually a sign of hospitality and respect. However, an English speaker may feel pressure if he or she has already refused. Similarly, when an English speaker uses a person's first name in a professional context, it may be normal in English culture, but Uzbek speakers may feel that status and respect are not sufficiently recognized.

These examples show that intercultural communication problems are not only linguistic, but also pragmatic and cultural. Wierzbicka notes that words and expressions reflect cultural values and ways of thinking (Wierzbicka, 1997). Therefore, learning a foreign language requires learning the cultural meanings behind words and expressions.

To improve communication between Uzbek and English speakers, several recommendations can be made. First, language learners should develop intercultural competence together with grammatical competence. They should learn not only vocabulary and grammar, but also politeness formulas, speech etiquette, cultural norms, and pragmatic meanings.

Second, Uzbek speakers should be aware that English communication may require more explicit expression of ideas, opinions, and intentions. In academic and professional contexts, it is useful to express agreement, disagreement, requests, and refusals clearly but politely.

Third, English speakers should understand that Uzbek indirectness, long greetings, and hospitality expressions are not signs of inefficiency, but important elements of respect and social harmony. They should also pay attention to age, status, and formal address in Uzbek cultural settings.

Fourth, both sides should avoid stereotypes. Cultural tendencies do not apply to every individual in the same way. People differ according to age, education, profession, personality, and personal experience. Therefore, intercultural communication should be based on patience, observation, respect, and mutual adaptation.

Conclusion

Cultural differences play a significant role in communication between Uzbek and English speakers. These differences influence greeting forms, politeness strategies, directness, address terms, non-verbal behavior, and interpretation of meaning. Uzbek



communication often emphasizes respect, social harmony, hospitality, and contextual understanding, while English communication often emphasizes clarity, individual expression, personal space, and explicitness.

The analysis shows that many misunderstandings arise not from poor language knowledge, but from different cultural expectations. Therefore, successful communication between Uzbek and English speakers requires intercultural awareness, pragmatic competence, and respect for cultural diversity. Understanding cultural differences helps speakers avoid misunderstanding and build more effective, respectful, and meaningful communication.

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