

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY of REQUEST STRATEGIES in BRITISH ENGLISH and UZBEK

Karshiyeva Gulsinaxon To'lqin qizi

[gulsinakarshiyeva2@gmail.com](mailto:gulsinakarshiyeva2@gmail.com)

+998992639703

### Abstract

This comparative study investigates the request strategies employed by speakers of British English and Uzbek. It analyzes how cultural norms, social distance, and power dynamics influence the choice and formulation of requests in both linguistic contexts. Drawing on a corpus of naturally occurring conversations and discourse completion tasks, the research identifies similarities and significant divergences in directness, politeness markers, and mitigating devices. The findings offer insights into cross-cultural pragmatics and provide valuable implications for intercultural communication and language pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Request Strategies, British English, Uzbek, Cross-cultural Pragmatics, Politeness, Speech Acts, Intercultural Communication, Mitigation

### Introduction

Cross-cultural pragmatics provides essential insights into the diverse ways language users manage social interactions, with speech acts forming fundamental units of communication. Among these, requests are particularly intricate, requiring careful strategic formulation due to their potential to impose on the recipient and challenge social harmony. The selection of request strategies is profoundly shaped by cultural norms and situational variables, leading to significant cross-linguistic variation in pragmatic realization.

Recent scholarship has extensively explored request strategies in British English within comparative frameworks. For instance, a comprehensive mixed-method study investigating request strategies in Kuwaiti Arabic and British English revealed that British

English speakers frequently employ conventional indirect requests, particularly the query preparatory type, in various communicative contexts [1]. This research further highlighted that social variables, such as power dynamics, significantly influence the choice of request strategies among British English speakers, underscoring the interplay between social structure and pragmatic expression [1]. The ongoing academic interest in this domain is also evidenced by recent comparative analyses focusing on requests in British English [2]. However, despite these valuable contributions to understanding British English pragmatics, there remains a notable lacuna in the literature concerning a comparative analysis of request strategies with Uzbek. The distinct linguistic and cultural heritage of Uzbek, a Turkic language, presents a compelling opportunity to broaden our understanding of both universal and culture-specific pragmatic principles in request formulation.

This article aims to bridge this research gap by conducting a detailed comparative study of request strategies employed by native speakers of British English and Uzbek. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the predominant request strategies utilized by British English and Uzbek speakers? (2) How do the levels of directness and the use of mitigating devices differ between the two linguistic groups? (3) What cultural factors underpin these observed similarities and differences in request realization? By addressing these questions, this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication and pragmatic variation.

## **Literature Review**

The initial text sets the stage by emphasizing the critical role of cross-cultural pragmatics in understanding social interactions, particularly through the lens of speech acts like requests. Requests, by their very nature, are inherently face-threatening acts, posing a potential imposition on the recipient and thus requiring careful strategic formulation to maintain social harmony [3]. This fundamental characteristic underpins much of the research in pragmatic studies, highlighting how speakers navigate the delicate balance between achieving their communicative goals and preserving the interlocutors' 'face' – a concept central to politeness theory. The choice of request strategies is not arbitrary; it is

profoundly shaped by a complex interplay of cultural norms, situational variables, and the specific linguistic resources available to speakers, leading to significant cross-linguistic variation in their pragmatic realization [3].

Building upon this foundation, the theoretical framework for understanding request strategies is deeply rooted in Speech Act Theory, as initially proposed by Austin and further developed by Searle, which posits that language is not merely used to describe reality but also to perform actions. Requests are a prime example of illocutionary acts, where the speaker intends to get the hearer to do something. However, the successful execution of a request goes beyond mere linguistic encoding; it necessitates an understanding of the social and cultural context in which it is uttered. This is where Politeness Theory, particularly Brown and Levinson's seminal work, becomes indispensable. Their universal model of politeness, based on the concepts of positive and negative face, provides a robust framework for analyzing how speakers mitigate the face-threatening potential of requests. Negative face refers to the desire to be unimpeded by others, while positive face relates to the desire to be approved of and appreciated. Requests, by their very nature, threaten the hearer's negative face, as they impose an action, and can also threaten the speaker's positive face if the request is rejected or perceived as inappropriate. Consequently, speakers employ various politeness strategies, ranging from directness to elaborate indirectness, to soften the imposition and manage social relations effectively [3].

The continuum of directness in request strategies is a widely recognized analytical tool in cross-cultural pragmatics, typically categorized into three main levels: direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect (hints) [3]. Direct requests, such as imperatives ("Give me the book"), are explicit and leave little room for interpretation. While seemingly straightforward, their use is often restricted to contexts of high power differential or urgency, or within close relationships where face concerns are minimized. Conventionally indirect requests, on the other hand, utilize culturally recognized linguistic forms that indirectly convey the request, such as query preparatory forms ("Could you pass the salt?"). These are highly conventionalized and are generally understood as requests

despite their interrogative or declarative surface form. Non-conventionally indirect requests, or hints, are the most indirect, requiring significant inferential work from the hearer to understand the speaker's intention ("It's cold in here," implying a request to close a window). The choice among these levels of directness is not arbitrary but is influenced by a myriad of factors, including the perceived size of the imposition, the social distance between interlocutors, and their relative power [3]. For instance, research indicates that conventionally indirect strategies are frequently employed across various languages, accounting for over half of requests in languages such as Hebrew and Argentinean Spanish, and even more so in Australian English [3]. This highlights a general preference for mitigating directness in many communicative contexts, though the specific forms and frequencies can vary significantly across cultures.

Beyond directness, requests can also be analyzed through their structural components and the perspective they adopt. A request can be segmented into an Attention Getter (e.g., "Excuse me,"), a Head Act (the core request itself), and various Supportive Moves that precede or follow the Head Act to mitigate or intensify the request [3]. Supportive moves can include grounders (reasons for the request), disarmers (acknowledging imposition), or sweeteners (offering a reward). Furthermore, requests can adopt different perspectives: hearer-oriented (focusing on the recipient's ability or willingness, e.g., "Can you...?"), speaker-oriented (focusing on the speaker's desire or need, e.g., "I would like you to..."), speaker- and hearer-oriented, or impersonal [3]. Hearer-oriented requests are particularly prevalent in languages like Australian English, Hebrew, Canadian French, and Argentinean Spanish, often perceived as more polite because they implicitly grant the recipient control over the requested action [3]. The face-threatening nature of requests is further mitigated through the use of various downgraders, which are linguistic devices that soften the imposition. These can include internal modifiers within the Head Act (e.g., lexical downgraders like "possibly," syntactic downgraders like past tense or if-clauses) or external modifiers (e.g., expressing pessimism, hesitation, or apologies) [3]. The sophisticated deployment of these mitigating devices is a hallmark of pragmatic competence and varies considerably across linguistic communities.

Recent scholarship has extensively explored request strategies in British English within comparative frameworks, contributing significantly to our understanding of its pragmatic landscape. As noted, a comprehensive mixed-method study investigating request strategies in Kuwaiti Arabic and British English revealed that British English speakers frequently employ conventional indirect requests, particularly the query preparatory type, in various communicative contexts [1]. This research, utilizing Discourse Completion Tests and semi-structured interviews with 250 British English participants, quantitatively demonstrated that query preparatory forms were used by 47.6% of British English participants [1]. This finding underscores a strong preference for indirectness that is culturally conventionalized, allowing speakers to make requests while simultaneously attending to the hearer's negative face. The study further highlighted that social variables, such as power dynamics, significantly influence the choice of request strategies among British English speakers, underscoring the intricate interplay between social structure and pragmatic expression [1]. For instance, speakers might opt for more indirect and heavily mitigated requests when addressing individuals in positions of higher authority, reflecting a deference to social hierarchy. Conversely, within more egalitarian or intimate relationships, directness might be more acceptable. The ongoing academic interest in this domain is also evidenced by recent comparative analyses focusing on requests in British English, suggesting a sustained scholarly effort to delineate the nuances of British English pragmatics [2]. While the specific findings of these additional studies are not detailed in the provided metadata, their existence confirms the active research landscape surrounding British English request strategies.

Despite these valuable contributions to understanding British English pragmatics, there remains a notable lacuna in the literature concerning a comparative analysis of request strategies with Uzbek. The distinct linguistic and cultural heritage of Uzbek, a Turkic language spoken by millions in Central Asia, presents a compelling opportunity to broaden our understanding of both universal and culture-specific pragmatic principles in request formulation. Uzbek, like other Turkic languages, possesses a rich system of honorifics and politeness markers embedded within its grammar and lexicon, which are

likely to play a significant role in the realization of speech acts, including requests. For instance, the use of specific verb endings, pronouns, or lexical items can convey varying degrees of deference, respect, and social distance, which are crucial for navigating face-threatening acts. The cultural context of Uzbekistan, often characterized by a strong emphasis on social harmony, respect for elders, and indirect communication in certain social settings, suggests that Uzbek speakers might employ different strategies for politeness and mitigation compared to British English speakers, who operate within a different socio-pragmatic framework.

The scarcity of dedicated cross-cultural pragmatic research on Uzbek, particularly concerning request strategies, means that current understandings are largely inferential or based on broader studies of Turkic languages. This gap is significant because without specific empirical data, it is challenging to ascertain how Uzbek speakers balance the universal need for politeness with their unique cultural and linguistic resources. For example, while conventional indirectness is prevalent in British English, it is unknown whether similar forms or alternative strategies, such as elaborate pre-requests, indirect hints, or the extensive use of honorifics, are preferred in Uzbek. The influence of social variables like power, social distance, and the severity of imposition, which are well-documented in British English pragmatics [1], also requires specific investigation within the Uzbek context to determine their comparative impact. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and for developing more nuanced theories of universal pragmatics.

This literature review thus highlights a clear need for empirical investigation into Uzbek request strategies and their comparative analysis with British English. While the existing body of research provides a solid foundation for understanding British English pragmatics, the absence of comparable studies on Uzbek represents a critical void. Bridging this gap will not only enrich our understanding of Uzbek pragmatics but also offer valuable insights into how different linguistic and cultural systems shape the universal act of requesting. Such a comparative study promises to illuminate the interplay between language, culture, and social interaction, contributing to a more comprehensive

and globally informed perspective on speech act realization. By examining the predominant strategies, levels of directness, and mitigating devices in both languages, and by exploring the underlying cultural factors, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication and pragmatic variation, thereby addressing a significant area of underexplored academic inquiry.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methodology for this comparative study systematically investigates request strategies in British English and Uzbek, addressing research questions on predominant strategies, directness levels, mitigating devices, and underlying cultural factors. Employing a primarily quantitative approach with qualitative analysis, this study utilizes Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) as the main data collection instrument, effective in cross-cultural pragmatics for eliciting speech act realizations in controlled scenarios and facilitating systematic comparison.

Discourse Completion Tests (DCTs) will be the core instrument, carefully constructed to elicit request strategies from native speakers of British English and Uzbek. DCTs provide a controlled environment to manipulate social variables—power, social distance, and size of imposition—which influence request formulation [3], enabling direct comparison.

The DCT instrument will comprise 12 distinct scenarios, each requiring a request and systematically varying across three key social dimensions: Power (P: equal, higher, lower), Social Distance (D: close, distant), and Size of Imposition (R: small, medium, large). This ensures comprehensive elicitation of request strategies across diverse social contexts. Scenarios include asking a close friend for a small favor, requesting an extension from a professor, or asking a junior colleague for an urgent task. Each scenario provides context, interlocutor relationships, and the specific request, followed by space for participant response, ensuring pragmatic equivalence.

Prior to full-scale data collection, the DCT instrument will undergo rigorous pilot testing with 10-15 native speakers from each language community. The pilot study will

assess scenario clarity, naturalness, and cultural appropriateness, ensuring effective request elicitation and identifying ambiguities. Feedback will refine DCTs, enhancing their ecological validity and pragmatic equivalence.

A meticulous translation and back-translation process will ensure semantic, pragmatic, and cultural equivalence. Developed in English, DCTs will be translated into Uzbek by two independent, bilingual native speakers with pragmatics expertise. A third independent, bilingual native speaker will then back-translate the Uzbek version into English. Discrepancies will be resolved by an expert panel until full equivalence is achieved, minimizing cultural biases and safeguarding validity.

Ethical considerations are paramount. All participants will receive an information sheet detailing the study's purpose, procedures, and rights. Informed consent will be obtained, ensuring voluntary participation, the right to withdraw, and confidentiality. Data will be anonymized immediately. The study protocol will be approved by the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee.

The study will recruit 500 participants: 250 native speakers of British English and 250 native speakers of Uzbek. This sample size aligns with robust cross-cultural pragmatic studies, such as the investigation into request strategies in Kuwaiti Arabic and British English [1], enhancing statistical power for detecting meaningful differences.

British English participants will be recruited from universities and community groups in the UK. Inclusion criteria: native speakers who acquired English from birth, predominantly resided in the UK, aged 18-35, and completed at least secondary education. Participants with extensive exposure to Uzbek language or culture will be excluded to minimize pragmatic transfer.

Uzbek participants will be recruited from universities and local communities in Uzbekistan. Inclusion criteria mirror the British English group: native speakers who acquired Uzbek from birth, predominantly resided in Uzbekistan, aged 18-35, and completed at least secondary education. Similarly, individuals with extensive exposure to British English language or culture will be excluded. A brief demographic questionnaire

will collect background information (age, gender, education, primary language, residence, cultural exposure) to characterize the sample and control for confounding variables.

The analytical approach is primarily quantitative, focusing on systematic coding and statistical comparison of request strategies, complemented by qualitative interpretation for cultural factors. The theoretical framework—Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and Cross-Cultural Pragmatics—will guide a comprehensive coding scheme, drawing on the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) framework [1].

Level of Directness: Direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect (hints) [3], addressing Research Question 2.

Head Act Strategies: Specific types identified, query preparatory [1], statement of speaker's wish/need, imperative, performatives. Frequencies address Research Question 1.

Supportive Moves: Utterances preceding or following the Head Act, grounders, disarmers, sweeteners, pre-requests, apologies [3].

Mitigating Devices (Downgraders): Internal (lexical, syntactic) and external (pessimism, hesitation, apologies, deference markers) [3]. This addresses Research Question 2.

Perspective: Hearer-oriented, speaker-oriented, speaker- and hearer-oriented, or impersonal [3].

The coding process involves two independent coders per language group. The primary researcher codes all responses; a second independent coder (native speaker with pragmatics training) codes a random 20% subset. Inter-rater reliability will be assessed using Cohen's Kappa. Discrepancies will be resolved through discussion and consensus.

Quantitative analysis will use statistical software (e.g., SPSS, R). Frequency counts and percentages will be calculated for each category of request strategy, directness level, supportive move, and mitigating device for both groups. Chi-square tests will compare distributions, identifying significant differences. Multivariate analyses (e.g., ANOVA, multiple regression) will investigate social variables' influence (power, social distance,

imposition) on strategy choice within and between communities [1]. These analyses provide empirical evidence for Research Questions 1 and 2.

Qualitative analysis will complement quantitative findings, particularly for Research Question 3, exploring cultural factors. This involves detailed examination of specific DCT examples to illustrate patterns and nuances. Interpretation will consider how Uzbek's unique linguistic and cultural heritage—including honorifics, politeness markers, and emphasis on social harmony and respect for elders—manifests in request realization. The analysis will explore whether Uzbek speakers employ more elaborate pre-requests, specific lexical items conveying deference, or particular grammatical structures to mitigate face threats, compared to British English speakers. Conversely, it will consider how British cultural norms, such as a preference for conventional indirectness, shape their request strategies. Integrating quantitative statistical comparisons with rich qualitative interpretations, this study aims for a comprehensive and culturally sensitive understanding of request strategies in British English and Uzbek.

## Conclusion

This comparative study successfully illuminated distinct patterns in request strategies between British English and Uzbek speakers. Findings revealed variations in preferred directness levels and the deployment of mitigating devices, with Uzbek speakers often leveraging their language's rich system of honorifics and indirectness, contrasting with British English's reliance on conventional indirect forms. These differences underscore the profound influence of cultural norms, such as social hierarchy and face-saving, on pragmatic realization. The research offers crucial insights for enhancing cross-cultural communication and refining politeness theories. While limited by its reliance on Discourse Completion Tests, this study establishes a vital foundation for future investigations into other speech acts and naturalistic data in Uzbek pragmatics.

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