



WHY DOES THE SAME EXPRESSION FEEL DIFFERENT IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK? A STUDY OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL MEANING

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Abstract: Words and expressions that are presented as equivalents in bilingual dictionaries do not always create the same impression in communication. An English expression and its Uzbek equivalent may share a basic lexical meaning but differ in emotional force, politeness, social distance, respect, intimacy, and cultural association. This study examines this difference from semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic perspectives. The discussion focuses on selected English-Uzbek examples, particularly you – sen/siz, brother/sister – aka/opa, and polite request forms. The analysis shows that the difference is not usually caused by dictionary meaning alone. It arises from the interaction of lexical meaning with social relations, cultural expectations, emotional attitude, and communicative context.

Keywords: emotional meaning, social meaning, English, Uzbek, pragmatics, cultural meaning, forms of address, politeness.

Introduction. A learner may know the dictionary meaning of every word in a sentence and still misunderstand its tone. A translator may choose a formally correct equivalent, yet the translated sentence may sound colder, more intimate, more distant or even less polite than the original. This problem becomes particularly visible when English and Uzbek are compared because the two languages do not always encode interpersonal relations through the same linguistic means.

The reason lies partly in the multidimensional nature of meaning. Lexical meaning tells us what an expression denotes, but everyday communication also conveys information about the speaker's attitude, emotional state, relationship with the listener, social position, and communicative intention. Geoffrey Leech distinguishes conceptual meaning from several types of associative meaning. Of particular relevance to the present study are social meaning, which provides information about the social circumstances in which language is used and affective meaning, which communicates the speaker's feelings and attitudes [1, pp. 14–16]. Thus, two expressions may be conceptually close but socially or emotionally different.

Wierzbicka argues that words matter because languages classify and



describe human experience in culturally shaped ways; her discussion moves explicitly from the importance of words to the relationship between emotion and culture [2, pp. 24–38]. Her later comparison of Polish and Anglo-American emotional norms further demonstrates that cultures may develop different expectations concerning sincerity, interpersonal warmth, and emotional expression [2, pp. 240–271].

Goddard and Wierzbicka use the notion of cultural scripts to describe culturally shared expectations concerning how people can think, speak, feel, and behave in particular situations. Their study emphasizes that ways of speaking in different societies are connected with local cultural values and priorities [3, pp. 153–157].

A similar orientation is found in Uzbek pragmalinguistics. Sh. Safarov views pragmatic analysis as the study of how linguistic units are selected and used in communication and how their use affects participants in a communicative situation. In this approach, context is understood broadly and includes the conditions under which communication takes place [4, p. 65]. He also notes that the meaning of a speech act is enriched when speakers and listeners interpret the sentence in relation to the communicative context [4, pp. 69–70]. On this basis, the present study asks a simple but important question: why can expressions with similar dictionary meanings feel different in English and Uzbek?

Main Part. Conceptual meaning is relatively stable because it provides the basic semantic content required for communication. Social and affective meanings are more dependent on speakers, situations, and cultural conventions.

Leech defines social meaning through the social circumstances connected with an utterance. A linguistic form may indicate, among other things, geographical or social background, level of formality, status, or the relationship between speaker and hearer. [1, pp. 14–16].

The same phenomenon can be explained pragmatically. Brown and Levinson identify social distance, relative power, and the ranking of imposition as three contextual variables affecting speakers' linguistic choices [5, pp. 74–77]. Recent comparative analysis likewise notes the importance of modal mitigation and indirectness in English and of pronoun distinction and honorific resources in Uzbek [6, pp. 541–550].

You and sen/siz: the same reference, different social information. One of the clearest examples is the English pronoun **you** and the Uzbek forms **sen** and **siz**.

At the basic referential level, all three can identify the person to whom the speaker is talking. Nevertheless, the social information encoded by them is not identical. Modern English uses **you** without a grammatical distinction between



singular informal and singular respectful second-person address. Uzbek, however, regularly allows a choice between **sen** and **siz**, and this choice can contribute to the expression of familiarity, distance, respect, age relations, and the character of the interpersonal relationship.

D. Hakimov's study devoted specifically to the lexical-semantic characteristics of **siz** and **sen** draws attention to the particular importance of respect in Uzbek usage and notes that a speaker may use **siz** even toward a person considerably younger when respect is intended [7, pp. 77–79]. The broader Uzbek linguistic literature also treats the expression of respect as a distinct linguistic and communicative phenomenon. Consider:

You can sit here.

Depending on intonation and context, this sentence may be friendly, neutral, formal, or authoritative. The pronoun **you** itself does not determine the degree of respect. In Uzbek, however:

Sen bu yerga o'tirishing mumkin.

and

Siz bu yerga o'tirishingiz mumkin.

are not socially identical. The difference extends beyond singular grammatical reference. The choice between **sen** and **siz**, together with the corresponding verbal morphology, contributes to the positioning of the interlocutors in relation to one another. This means that:

English YOU → identifies the addressee

whereas in many Uzbek contexts:

SEN / SIZ → identifies the addressee + contributes information about the relationship.

The difference is therefore not merely grammatical. It belongs to social meaning. A mechanical translation of **you** requires the translator to make a decision that the English original may leave grammatically unspecified. The translator must ask who is speaking, to whom, under what conditions, and what type of relationship exists between them.

Brother/sister and aka/opa: when kinship becomes social meaning.
another important difference concerns kinship words. At the dictionary level:

aka ≈ elder brother

opa ≈ elder sister

Yet in actual Uzbek communication, **aka** and **opa** are not restricted to biological brothers and sisters. They may be used as forms of address toward people who are not relatives. In such contexts, they can signal respect, relative age, interpersonal warmth, or an attempt to establish an appropriate social relationship. Sh. Iskandarova's work on Uzbek communicative etiquette identifies such factors as the participants, communicative purpose, social



characteristics, formality of the situation, and the relationship between interlocutors as relevant to speech etiquette. Uzbek research also records the broader use of kinship terms as respectful forms of address. Consider:

Aka, yordam berib yuboring.

A word-for-word translation would produce:

Brother, please help me.

The propositional message is understandable, but the social effect may change. In Uzbek, **aka** may be an ordinary respectful form of address to an older male who is not a family member. In English, **brother** has different distributions and may suggest actual kinship, religious solidarity, strong familiarity, or a marked informal style depending on context.

The examples above show that the difference between English and Uzbek cannot be reduced to vocabulary alone. The same expression may acquire a different communicative effect because linguistic meaning operates inside a social situation.



Figure 1. The formation of actual communicative meaning.

The model also explains why pragmatic mistakes can occur even when grammar and vocabulary are technically correct. An English learner of Uzbek may select **sen** because a dictionary translates both **sen** and **siz** as you, yet the chosen form may create unintended familiarity or disrespect in a particular context. Conversely, an Uzbek speaker communicating in English may search for a direct lexical equivalent of a respectful Uzbek address form even where



English would normally encode the same relationship through title, modal structure, tone, or no explicit address term at all.

Conclusion. The comparison of English and Uzbek shows that linguistic equivalence has several levels. Two expressions may be close at the level of dictionary definition but differ considerably in actual communication. This happens because meaning is not limited to denotation. A linguistic expression can simultaneously identify an object or action, indicate a social relationship, communicate an attitude, and activate culturally familiar expectations.

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