



PRAGMATIC FACTORS IN THE FORMATION OF MINOR SYNTACTIC UNITS: A CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDY OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of pragmatic factors – economy, politeness, emphasis, and information structure – in shaping minor syntactic units in English and Uzbek. Drawing on Grice's Cooperative Principle, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, and Halliday's information structure framework, the study demonstrates how pragmatic motivations influence syntactic choices at the sub-sentential level. Ellipsis, topicalization, emphatic syntax, and indirectness are examined comparatively across formal, informal, and literary registers.

Keywords: pragmatics, minor syntax, economy, politeness, ellipsis, emphatic syntax, information structure.

Introduction

Pragmatics examines the relationship between language users, communicative intentions, and context. In minor syntax, pragmatic factors directly influence the composition, arrangement, and selection of syntactic units. While traditional syntax focuses on grammatical well-formedness, modern pragmalinguistics investigates why speakers choose one grammatically valid construction over another (Safarov, 2008). This article examines how economy, politeness, emphasis, and register operate in English and Uzbek.

The theoretical basis for studying pragmatic factors in syntax draws from multiple traditions. Austin's (1962) speech act theory established that utterances perform actions (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts), and the syntactic form of an utterance directly affects its illocutionary force. A declarative sentence (She closed the door) performs an assertion; the same propositional content in interrogative form (Did she close the door?) performs a question; and in imperative form (Close the door!) it performs a command. These three forms represent distinct minor syntactic patterns serving distinct pragmatic functions. The choice between them is governed not by grammar but by communicative intention.

The formation of minor syntactic units is not determined solely by grammatical rules but is significantly shaped by communicative context. Speakers make choices based on economy (saying more with less), politeness



(mitigating face threats), emphasis (highlighting key information), and information flow (managing given vs. new information). These pragmatic factors operate at all levels of minor syntax: word combinations, sentence members, and simple sentences (Turniyozov, 2004).

1. The Economy Principle and Ellipsis

Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), particularly the Maxim of Quantity (make your contribution as informative as required, but not more), provides the theoretical foundation for syntactic economy. Toirova (2022) defines this as the language's tendency to eliminate words and forms that carry no new information. This principle manifests differently in English and Uzbek due to their typological properties.

In English, ellipsis operates through syntactic deletion with auxiliary retention: VP-ellipsis (John can swim, and Mary can too), sluicing (Someone called, but I don't know who), and gapping (I ate fish, and Bill steak). Compound sentences allow subject omission: Alice went to the store and bought milk. One-word answers are common: Who came? – John. These mechanisms rely on auxiliary verbs to maintain structural coherence.

The scope of English ellipsis is constrained by structural conditions that do not apply in Uzbek. English requires parallelism for ellipsis to be licensed: John likes coffee and Mary tea is acceptable because the parallel structure licenses the omission of likes. But asymmetric deletion is generally not permitted: *John likes and Mary hates coffee is marginal. Uzbek faces fewer such constraints due to the morphological richness that maintains grammatical clarity even with extensive deletion. For instance, in a dialogue context: Kim keldi? – Olim. (Who came? – Olim.) – the entire predicate keldi is recoverable and need not be repeated, whereas English requires at minimum Olim did or Olim came.

In Uzbek, ellipsis is broader due to pro-drop. Subject omission is standard: Maktabga bordim is complete because -dim encodes the subject. True Uzbek ellipsis involves predicate omission in dialogue: Qayerga? – Uyga – where ketyapsiz is recoverable. Uzbek permits asyndetic coordination: Men keldim, ular ketdi without the conjunction va. The zero copula in present tense (Bu kitob qiziq without bo'ladi/dir) represents another economy mechanism absent in English.

A culturally significant Uzbek ellipsis is pardalash (veiling): Men sizni... can pragmatically convey deep emotions through deliberate truncation. This interplay between syntax and cultural pragmatics demonstrates how minor syntactic form serves communicative function beyond literal meaning. Uzbek also permits to'ldiruvchi and even kesim ellipsis when contextually clear: Yozdingizmi? – Ha (instead of Ha, yozdim or Men yozdim).



2. Politeness and Indirectness

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory distinguishes positive and negative politeness. In English, indirectness is achieved through interrogative forms (Could you pass the salt? vs. Pass the salt), modals (You might want to reconsider), passive constructions (Mistakes were made), and hedging (I was wondering if perhaps you could...). Each level of indirectness corresponds to a different minor syntactic structure.

In Uzbek, politeness is grammaticalized in the hurmat system. The pronoun distinction (sen/siz) affects verb conjugation and entire sentence structure. Specialized minor syntactic devices include: kiritmalar such as iltimos (please), marhamat (go ahead), and honorific verb forms (-sinlar, -ingiz). Using sen instead of siz renders a sentence pragmatically unacceptable regardless of grammatical correctness. Conditional forms soften requests: Menga yordam bersangiz (If you would help me). The optative form Borgaysiz (You might go) is softer than the imperative Boring! (Go!).

The interaction between politeness and syntax extends to question formation. In English, tag questions (You're coming, aren't you?) seek confirmation while maintaining solidarity. Uzbek uses specific particles: -mi (neutral question marker), -a (seeking agreement), and shunday emasmi (isn't it so) for confirmation. Each represents a distinct minor syntactic pattern serving a specific pragmatic function.

3. Emphatic Syntax and Information Structure

Emphatic syntax involves marked constructions foregrounding specific information. English uses cleft constructions (It was John who won), pseudo-cleft (What I need is coffee), fronting (This book I really liked), do-support (I did meet him), and extraposition (It is clear that he lied). Each creates a marked pattern departing from default SVO.

In Uzbek, free word order enables pragmatic reordering: Kitobni men o'qidim (topicalized object) vs. Men kitobni o'qidim (neutral). The pre-verbal position is default focus in SOV languages. Inversiya – verb before arguments – creates emphasis: Keldi u! vs. U keldi. The particle -ku adds specificity: Kecha-ku uchratdim (specifically yesterday). The particle -chi marks contrastive topics: Kitobni-chi o'qidingizmi? (As for the book, did you read it?).

In academic writing, English heavily uses passive voice for impersonality: It is believed that..., Data were collected... Uzbek academic texts prefer third-person active or indefinite-subject constructions: Tadqiqot olib borildi, Ma'lumki... This stylistic difference shows how register conditions the pragmatic selection of minor syntactic variants.

4. Register and Digital Communication



Register conditions structural explicitness. Formal registers favor longer constructions: the document that was submitted (formal) vs. the document submitted (informal). In Uzbek, full genitive -ning is formal/academic; zero-marked forms are colloquial. Literary language permits greater syntactic freedom: inversions, archaic constructions, and ellipsis serve aesthetic purposes.

Digital communication represents a new frontier. English internet language features abbreviations (btw, imo), emoji-supplemented fragments, and hashtag constructions. Uzbek digital discourse similarly employs shortened forms, so'z-gaplar (word-sentences), and elliptic constructions as primary communicative vehicles. These contexts demonstrate that minor syntactic units – not full sentences – constitute the basic units of contemporary digital discourse, underscoring the continuing relevance of minor syntax research.

Conclusion

Pragmatic factors play a fundamental role in shaping minor syntactic units in both English and Uzbek. Economy drives ellipsis, politeness motivates indirectness, emphasis triggers word order variation, and register conditions structural explicitness. While underlying pragmatic motivations are universal, their syntactic realization differs between the analytic English and agglutinative Uzbek systems. Understanding these interfaces is essential for translation, language teaching, and cross-cultural communication.

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Contrastive focus operates differently in the two languages. English uses prosodic stress combined with syntactic structure: JOHN ate the cake (not Mary). Uzbek combines word order manipulation with particles: Jon-ku kekni yedi (It was specifically John who ate the cake). The particle -ku marks contrastive focus, a function that English achieves through intonation alone. This difference highlights how pragmatic functions can be encoded either prosodically or syntactically depending on the language's typological resources.

In Uzbek, the relatively free word order permits emphasis through simple reordering without grammatical restructuring. The default focus position in



SOV languages is immediately pre-verbal: Men KITOBNI o'qidim (I read THE BOOK, with stress on kitobni). Moving an element away from this position creates marked pragmatic effects. The sentence-initial position serves topicalization: Kitobni men o'qidim (As for the book, I read it). The post-verbal position creates afterthought or emphatic assertion: O'qidim men kitobni! (I did read the book!). Each positional variant constitutes a pragmatically distinct minor syntactic pattern.

The interaction between emphasis and word order is particularly revealing in cross-linguistic comparison. English, as an SVO language with relatively rigid word order, must employ specialized constructions to achieve emphasis: cleft sentences (It was yesterday that I met him), pseudo-cleft sentences (What I want is coffee), existential constructions (There exists a solution), and extraposition (It is important that we act now). Each of these constructions involves restructuring the basic SVO pattern to foreground a particular element, and each represents a distinct minor syntactic pattern with its own semantic contribution.