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Investigation of the Speech Act "Request" in English and Uzbek

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Annotation. This article studies the speech act "request" in Modern English and Uzbek. It also investigates expressing ways of request in the compared languages with some examples.

Key words: speech act, pragmatics, politeness, imperative, performatives.

Pragmatics has been defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in speech situations with speakers and hearers involved (Leech 1983: x). Utterance meaning is the main research object in pragmatics, whereas semantics focuses on sentence meaning. For instance, from a pragmatic point of view, a statement like *It is hot today* can be an assertion about the weather, a request to turn on the air conditioner, or some other speech act, depending on the intention of the speaker in specific situations. By contrast, from a semantic point of view, it has only a single meaning.

Numerous studies of English requests and comparison of English requests with requests in other languages have revealed that English requests are characterized by extreme restrictions on the use of the imperative and a preference for the conventionalized indirect request form *can you do that?* He noted, "When people [native speakers of English—XD] make requests, they tend to make them indirectly. They generally avoid imperatives in preference for indirect requests." Searle (1975: 64) similarly states that "ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperative sentences or explicit performatives, and we therefore seek to find indirect means to our illocutionary ends." This statement again refers specifically to English requests.

This restriction on the use of the imperative and preference for indirect requests may result from the cultural norm that America belongs to a "negative- politeness oriented" society, in which people tend not to impose on other's territory and try to minimize the imposition their speech acts make. Thus direct strategies can be perceived as impolite because they demonstrate less concern about people's negative face, while the conventional indirect forms are considered to be the most polite way of making a request, since they provide an "out" for the addressee and attend to the addressee's negative face [1,58].

In their seminal studies of the philosophy of language, Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979) introduced and advanced the study of speech acts. Austin (1962) proposed the term *performatives* to emphasize that uttering is not just conveying a proposition, but is also performing an action. Austin (1962) also divided utterances into five types based on their illocutionary force: *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behabitives* and *expositives*. Requests may belong to the category of exercitives, though this is not clearly stated in Austin's study: "An exercitive is the giving of a decision in favor of or against a certain course of action, which includes order, command, direct, etc."

Searle (1979) improved on Austin's classification of illocutionary acts and developed an alternative taxonomy of the basic categories of utterances: *assertives*, *directives*, *expressives*, *commissives* and *declaratives*. He defined directives as illocutionary acts which are intended to produce some effect through action by the hearer. Some directives are included in the competitive category, where the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal, such as *asking, demanding,* while others are intrinsically polite, such as *inviting* (Leech 1983:106). Requests belong to the competitive category of directives, which Leech termed *impositives* (Leech 1983:106) to avoid confusion with direct and indirect illocutions.

Searle (1969) hypothesized that, in speaking, one is performing speech acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on. In the process of speaking, four kinds of acts are performed: 1) *utterance acts*: uttering words; 2) *propositional acts*: referring and predicating; (3) *illocutionary acts*: stating, questioning, commanding, promising, etc. (4) *perlocutionary acts*: the consequences or effects on the actions, thoughts, or beliefs, etc. of addressees [2,292].

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In addition, Searle (1969) hypothesized that speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior and that there are constitutive rules underlying speech acts. Specific to requests, there are 4 types of rule (ibid.: 66):

Rule of propositional content: future act of the hearer;

Preparatory rule: (a) The hearer is able to do the act. The speaker believes the hearer is able to do the act. (b) It is not obvious to both the speaker and the hearer that the hearer will do the act in the normal course of events of his own accord.

Rule of sincerity: The speaker wants the hearer to do the act.

Essential rule: The request counts as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act.

As noted by Searle (1969), orders and commands have the additional preparatory rule that is the speaker must be in a position of authority over the hearer. Accordingly, the essential condition for orders and commands would be that the utterance counts as an attempt to get the addressee to do the act by virtue of the authority that the speaker has over the addressee—for instance, *Show me your license*, when said by a police officer to a driver. In contrast to an order, a request is performed when the utterer of the request is acting as if he or she has no authority or power to compel compliance. The speaker is not insistent and will not be enraged by a refusal (Green 1988: 121). The differences among requests, orders and commands are also illustrated by Wierzbicka (1987) through paraphrases of the associated speech act verbs. Wierzbicka (1987), who emphasizes the importance of speech act verbs in better understanding the categories of speech acts, endeavors to distinguish the components of semantically similar speech act verbs; she identifies 37 groups of verbs in a semantic dictionary of English speech act verbs that she compiled. Her definition of requests, orders and commands is follows**:**

Request (Wierzbicka 1987: 51):

I say: I want Y to happen.

I know that Y cannot happen if someone (X) doesn't do something to cause it to happen

I say this because I want to cause X to cause Y to happen I don't want to say that X has to do it

I assume that X will understand that I have a reason to say that I want Y to happen

I assume that X will cause Y to happen

As Wierzbicka shows, in a request, the speaker does not have authority to ask the addressee to do the desired action, and the addressee does not have the obligation to do it. This distinguishes requests from other directive speech acts like *order* and *command,* which assume the speaker has authority over the addressee (ibid.: 37–39). Therefore, I assume that requests will tend to be presented differently from orders and commands Requests can be *direct (Pass me that newspaper)* or *indirect (Are you finished with that newspaper?)* There is a widespread understanding in the literature that speakers of English tend to prefer conventionally indirect requests.

Searle (1979) considers speech acts indirect when one illocutionary act is performed by way of performing another. For instance, in the utterance *It is hot today*, the secondary illocutionary act of the utterance is a statement of weather conditions; however, depending on the specific context, the primary illocutionary act might be making a request to the addressee to turn on the air conditioner. An indirect speech act is thus made when the primary illocutionary act is performed by means of articulating a secondary illocutionary act.

In indirect requests, especially in hints, the maxims of quantity and manner (in particular, the submaxims "Avoid obscurity of expression" and "Avoid ambiguity") are flouted. The explanation of how the speakers can mean more than they actually say lies, according to Grice, in *conversational implicatures.* In other words, the hearer has to "search for the specific point that was intended by the speaker but not explicitly stated" (Sifianou 1992: 16).

It is for this reason that, instead of always phrasing their speech acts in the most direct manner, speakers resort to strategies of *politeness* and add various forms of redress to reduce the imposition on the addressee's face needs (Searle 1979; Brown and Levinson 1987). Therefore, studies of requests have traditionally been connected with research on politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978; Blum-Kulka 1989).

Brown and Levinson (1987:69) identify five graded hierarchical strategies of

politeness; I will mention these briefly here because I will refer to them throughout the dissertation. The most direct strategy is *bald on record*, where means of redress are not used; this is typically the imperative

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(mood derivable form). "Conventionally indirect" strategies, which state the speech act explicitly but include means of redress, can focus on *positive politeness* (aiming at enhancing the addressee's positive face) or *negative politeness* (caring for the addressee's negative face). Speakers can also make use of *off-record* strategies such as hints, which are a form of non-conventional indirectness, or, in cases of extreme imposition, they can *not perform the FTA altogether*.

So, in order to protect the mutually vulnerable face needs and minimize the negative effect, the speaker will select the most appropriate strategy of the five mentioned above by measuring the actual situations and taking three general social variables into consideration (Brown and Levinson 1987: 74-76): the *social distance* (D) between the speaker and addressee; the *relative power* (P) of the speaker and addressee; and the *ranking of the imposition* (R). The weight of the imposition (W) is measured by the formula W= D+P+R (ibid.). So eventually the single index W becomes the motive for the selection of one of the five strategies.

As the assessment of cultural context and social variables varies cross-culturally, different societies may utilize different strategies even for the same activities. For example, there is cross-cultural variation in the preferences for orientation towards positive or negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987). It is generally stated that English reflects a negative-politeness orientation. English speakers consider keeping one's distance as the way of being polite and prefer using indirect strategies when making requests.

When it comes to Russian, Renate Ratmajer (2003) has shown with many examples of behavior that Russian culture reflects a positive-politeness orientation, such as constantly being interested in other people, showing concern, and tending to be involved in other people's life. In a society with a positive-politeness orientation, people consider showing involvement as a way of being polite; this contrasts with the negative–politeness orientation.

A review of the literature indicates that little work has been done on requests in English and Uzbek. To my knowledge, the only scholars who have done research on English and Uzbek, Russian request strategies are Bernard Comrie and Margaret Mills.

In his chapter on "Interrogativity", Bernard Comrie briefly examines the pragmatics of Russian interrogatives. He points out that, in making indirect requests in the form of questions, Russians and Americans have a different semantic focus and use different linguistic forms. Russians tend in form to question the addressee's intention, while Americans tend in form to question the addressee's ability or desire. As illustrated it (1–2), Russian questions usually utilize negative forms, while English questions often are in positive forms.

Вы <u>не откроете</u> окно?
Will you not open the window?
Derazani ochib qo'yolmaysizmi?
<u>Can</u> you <u>hold</u> the door open for me?
Eshikni ochiq holda ushlab tura olasizmi?

Mills (1991, 1992, 1993) devotes three articles to Russian requests. In her 1991 article, based on over 250 interrogatives collected in natural speech environments, Mills examined pragmatic strategies with interrogatives in colloquial Russian. She claims that in colloquial Russian the combination of the negative particle plus the future perfective, as in (3), has become the "most polite conventionalized request in Russian" (ibid.: 68) and the most neutral polite requests for Russian speakers in any situation, formal or informal [3,147].

Вы не одолжите мне 10 доллоров?
Will you not lend me 10 dollars?
Menga 10 dollor qarz berib tura olmaysizmi?

In her 1992 article, Mills confirms that all the sentence types found in standard English indirect request formulas, as identified by Searle (1979), have counterparts in Russian data except for sentences conveying the speaker's wish that the addressee would do the act—for instance, Я бы хотела, чтобы вы открыли окно ('I would like you to open the window, please'), which Mills considers a less representative example for indirect requests in Russian. She emphasizes the difference in the syntactic structures of requests in Russian and English and points out, in particular, that syntactic strategies vary significantly in making indirect requests in Russian and English. For example, the use of the negative particle in colloquial Russian (5) is equivalent to a positive construction in English (4).

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<u>Can</u> you <u>lend</u> me $10 for lunch?

Menga tushlik uchun $10 berib tur?

Вы <u>не можете</u> одолжить мне десять доллоров?

Can you lend me $10?

In Mill's 1992 study, 15 Muscovites were asked to evaluate the appropriateness and politeness of 16 sentences that formed a continuum between imperatives and interrogatives. In this way, Mills confirms the conclusion of her 1991 article that the schema *operator + negation + future finite verb* is the most neutral polite request in colloquial Russian, i.e., a sentence concerning the hearer doing or intending to perform the act, as in (6).

Вы не подвезёте меня домой? Will you drive me home?

In her 1993 article, based on 34 Russian and 46 English speech samples of a request for a ride collected in natural speech situations, Mills recognizes that Russian and English belong to two separate speech cultures and calls on scholars to take underlying cultural factors as well as syntactic and semantic variables into consideration when "charting the route of the request schema from the speaker's intended illocution to the hearer's perception in the speech exchange" (ibid.: 100). Mills indicates that the speech act continuum contains a variety of syntactic structures for this particular request. Her data confirm that, when making requests, Russians favor imperatives, as in (7), and indirect requests of a particular form—sentences negatively questioning the hearer's intention to perform the act, as in (8).

Подвези меня, пожалуйста, домой. Drive me home, please.

Ты домой? Меня не подвезешь?

Meni uyga olib borib qo'ying, iltimos.

Are you going home? Will you drive me home?

Uyga ketayapsizmi? Meni uyga olib borib qo'ya olasizmi, iltimos.

Mills (1993: 104) briefly mentions the preferred request strategy in Russian—the direct imperative. Though this may fail to minimize cost or provide an "out" to the addressee (Brown and Levinson 1989), it nevertheless is a polite request strategy in Russian. It has been noted in general that positive politeness is more fundamental than negative for Russian native speakers (Benacchio 1996: 14). Likewise, positive face and personal warmth are more important in Russian culture than in American culture. Paying attention to other people' lives and providing help are the norm in Russian culture. A similar idea is also reflected in Comrie's (1981) observations that Russians tend to stand much closer to one another when speaking than North Americans do and that it is not unusual for a Russian to touch a stranger as a means of getting attention. In Russian culture, politeness in most cases means solidarity, whereas in American culture in most cases it means preserving one's distance, not imposing on others, and respecting privacy.

Surprisingly, Mills (1993) includes hints among the favored request strategies in Russian, along with imperatives and indirect requests—. for example, (9–10):

Вы сейчас домой?

Are you on your way home?

Ты в какую сторону?

You are heading in which direction?

By contrast, according to Mills (ibid.), English prefers indirect request strategies regarding the addressee's ability to perform an action. For instance,

Can you give me a ride home today?

According to Mills (1993), requests referring to the hearer's ability and using negation, conditional particles, as in (12) are regarded by Russian informants as too polite and artificial for interaction with a colleague or a friend.

Ты не мог бы меня подвезти? Could you drive me home?

By contrast, according to Mills, such conditional sentences are the preferred forms of requests in English among friends or non-acquaintances. (13).

Could I borrow your camera the weekend?

Transference from one language to another leads to *pragmalinguistic errors* in request production by non-native American learners of Russian. American learners of Russian tend not to use the direct imperative forms in requests and have recourse to questioning the hearer's ability to perform the act, which corresponds

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to the form of indirect requests widely used in their culture. For instance, the following sentence (14) produced by an American learner of Russian (a positive construction questioning ability) is a typical example of a pragmalinguistic error:

> Ты можешь отвезти меня домой, пожалуйста? Can you drive me home, please?

In the above request, besides the inappropriate usage of a particular request strategy, the influence of first language transference is also manifested in the (over)use of "please". In Russian, it has been claimed, пожалуйста 'please' is restricted to the imperative (15).

> Дайте мне книгу, пожалуйста. Pass me the book, please.

Kitobni menga uzatib yuboring, iltimos

The few previous studies of Russian request speech acts leave an important aspect of request usage unclear. As Mills (1993) notes, Russians prefer imperatives, indirect requests concerning the hearer's intention, and hints. But how do these strategies compete? It has not been examined in detail in what situations the various requests strategies are preferred—In other words, what social variables and/or cultural variables determine the preference for one strategy over another in a given context. Mills (1993) only mentions that indirect Russian requests concerning the hearer's ability are used inappropriately when asking a friend for a ride and that the indirect requests are preferable when speakers are unacquainted and in more formal situations. However, Mills does not discuss in details the situations in which imperatives and hints tend to be preferred[3,145].

Therefore, more empirical studies of Russian requests are needed. This provides an incentive for my research. My hypothesis is that, within some social variables, one strategy is preferable to another. Indirect requests questioning the hearer's ability are mainly used in formal situations, rather than informal settings such as between friends. Hints are used when the weight of the request tends to be bigger. Imperatives and indirect requests questioning the hearer's intention are both preferred strategies not only in informal but in formal situations. However, as the imposition increases, indirect requests strategies become preferred. In conclusion, we have investigated the expressions of "request in the English, Uzbek and Russian languages. It has already mentioned the theme has not investigated thoroughly for this reason in this article we have only given some features of the topic. We hope we will try to carry on the research on the topic in the next works.

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