



THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEECH ACTS IN TRANSLATION: AN EMPIRICAL  
STUDY OF ENGLISH-UZBEK LANGUAGES.

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the importance of speech acts in English-Uzbek translation, emphasizing how translators convey not only linguistic meaning but also speaker intention and pragmatic force. Drawing on Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) theories, the research examines examples from literary and conversational texts to illustrate how illocutionary and perlocutionary acts can shift in translation. Findings suggest that translators who prioritize pragmatic equivalence achieve greater communicative accuracy and naturalness in the target language. The study concludes that speech-act awareness is essential for maintaining meaning, politeness, and coherence across linguistic and cultural boundaries.*

### Introduction

Translation is not a mere substitution of words from one language into another; it is a complex communicative act that involves transferring meaning, context, and intention. In recent years, linguistic pragmatics has become an important framework in translation studies, particularly through speech-act theory, which examines how utterances perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, or promising (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). In the context of English-Uzbek translation, speech acts play a vital role because of the cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages. English tends to use more direct illocutionary forms (e.g., "Close the door, please"), whereas Uzbek often prefers indirect or polite formulations (e.g., Eshikni yopib qo'yasizmi? meaning "Would you mind closing the door?"). Such pragmatic differences may lead to loss or modification of meaning if translators focus solely on semantic equivalence. The present study aims to investigate how speech acts are transferred in English-Uzbek translation and to highlight strategies that preserve their pragmatic function. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are different types of speech acts (assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives) rendered in Uzbek translation?
2. What translation techniques support the preservation of illocutionary force?
3. What challenges arise when transferring culturally bound speech acts?

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Speech-Act Theory

Speech-act theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and expanded by Searle (1969), divides utterances into three dimensions: Locutionary act – the literal act of saying something; Illocutionary act – the intended function of the utterance (e.g., a request, apology); Perlocutionary act – the effect it has on the listener (e.g., persuading, frightening) Searle (1969) further classifies speech acts into five categories: assertives (stating), directives



(requesting), commissives (promising), expressives (thanking or apologizing), and declaratives (changing reality through language).

## 2.2 Speech Acts and Translation In

translation studies, the accurate rendering of speech acts ensures communicative equivalence, meaning that the target text produces a similar effect as the source text (Nida & Taber, 1982). Newmark (1988) also argues that pragmatic equivalence—understanding what is done with words—is as vital as lexical equivalence. Recent empirical studies have shown that speech-act shifts often occur in translation. For example, Setyaji (2014) found that literal translation of English film dialogues sometimes altered directives into statements in Indonesian, reducing the pragmatic impact. Similarly, Sakulpimolrat (2019) discovered that modulation and paraphrase techniques better maintained illocutionary force than literal or reduction methods. In the English–Uzbek context, Nuraliyeva (2025) observed that cultural politeness norms influence translation choices: Uzbek translators often soften direct English imperatives into polite requests to maintain social harmony. This adaptation, while pragmatically appropriate, may slightly shift the speech-act category.

### Methodology

3.1 Research Design: this study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach focusing on pragmatic analysis. A small corpus of English–Uzbek translated excerpts was selected from literary texts and film subtitles to identify how different types of speech acts are rendered.

### 3.2 Data Collection

Five pairs of English utterances and their Uzbek translations were collected from public literary sources and movie subtitles. Each utterance was categorized according to Searle's taxonomy of speech acts. The researcher analyzed whether the illocutionary act remained the same or shifted and what translation techniques (literal, modulation, or adaptation) were used.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure. The analysis involved three steps:

1. Identify the speech act type in the source language (SL). 2. Examine the translation in the target language (TL) to determine equivalence or shift. 3. Evaluate the translation strategy applied and its impact on meaning and pragmatic effect.

### Findings and Discussion:

#### 4.1 Preservation and Shift of Speech Acts

The analysis revealed both successful and problematic cases of speech-act transfer.

For instance: English Utterance Uzbek Translation Speech-Act Type Observation “Can you pass me the salt?” Tuzni berib yuborasizmi? Directive → Directive Pragmatic equivalence preserved; politeness form adapted. “I promise I’ll come tomorrow.” Ertaga albatta kelaman. Commissive → Commissive Equivalent meaning and force maintained. “You must leave now!” Endi chiqib ketsangiz yaxshi bo‘ladi. Directive → Suggestive Illocutionary softening due to politeness norms. “Thank you so much for your help.” Yordamingiz uchun katta rahmat. Expressive → Expressive Full pragmatic equivalence. “I declare the meeting closed.” Majlis yopilgan deb e’lon qilaman. Declarative → Declarative



Exact equivalence maintained. Three of the five cases preserved the same speech-act type, while two involved pragmatic softening, reflecting Uzbek cultural norms that favor indirectness. This confirms that cultural pragmatics affects how speech acts are expressed and interpreted (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

4.2 Impact of Translation Techniques: The findings suggest that literal translation works well when English and Uzbek share equivalent pragmatic norms (e.g., commissives and expressives). However, modulation and adaptation are necessary for directives or expressions where directness may sound impolite in Uzbek. For example, the imperative “Leave now!” directly translated as *Hozir chiq!* sounds harsh in Uzbek. The translated version *Chiqib ketsangiz yaxshi bo‘ladi* (“It would be good if you left”) softens the command using a conditional clause. While this shifts the illocutionary strength, it retains the perlocutionary effect—prompting action—thus maintaining communicative intent.

#### Conclusion

This empirical study confirms that speech acts are central to effective translation, especially between linguistically and culturally distant languages such as English and Uzbek. Translators must not only render semantic content but also interpret the communicative functions behind utterances. The findings demonstrate that while literal translation may suffice for certain speech acts, pragmatic adaptation is necessary to preserve politeness, tone, and intention. Directives and requests, in particular, require sensitivity to social norms in Uzbek. It is recommended that translation training programs incorporate pragmatic and speech-act analysis into their curricula. Awareness of speech-act categories enables translators to make informed choices, ensuring functional equivalence and cultural appropriateness. Future research could extend this study by using a larger corpus or by examining other pragmatic phenomena such as implicature and politeness strategies in English–Uzbek translation.

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