

SPEECH ACTS, POLITENESS, AND DISCOURSE ORGANIZATION IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTION TEXTS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF THE WEEKLY-HOROSCOPE GENRE

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Abstract

This article presents a corpus-based lingvopragmatic study of speech acts, politeness strategies, and discourse organization in English and Uzbek weekly astrological prediction (horoscope) texts, a persuasive discourse genre that remains comparatively under-researched in contrastive pragmatics. Drawing on Austin’s and Searle’s Speech Act Theory, Brown and Levinson’s and Leech’s politeness frameworks, and Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the study analyses a purpose-built weekly-horoscope corpus (144 English texts, $\approx 15,600$ words; 157 Uzbek texts, $\approx 4,870$ words). The analysis shows that Uzbek marks the directive (advice) speech act explicitly and almost universally, through a lexicalized “Maslahat:” (“Advice:”) segment in 98.7% of texts (155 of 157), whereas English distributes directive force implicitly across the narrative, primarily through bare imperatives (≈ 73 imperative clauses across the corpus, ≈ 0.5 per text). Both languages reproduce the Barnum effect and observe Grice’s maxim of quality while systematically flouting the maxims of quantity and relation. Discourse-organizational analysis further shows that English weekly texts are structured day-by-day (temporal markers at 47.8 per 1,000 words) while Uzbek texts condense the week into one or two blocks (13.8 per 1,000 words), a difference in register confirmed by sentence-length, word-length, and lexical-diversity indicators. These findings partially confirm a speech-act hypothesis and fully confirm a genre-organization hypothesis, and carry implications for translation studies and media-literacy education.

Keywords: *lingvopragmatics; astrological discourse; speech act theory; politeness strategies; Barnum effect; discourse organization; register analysis; corpus linguistics; English-Uzbek languages; persuasive discourse.*

Introduction. Astrological prediction texts (horoscopes) have become an increasingly visible object of attention in pragmatic linguistics over the past decade. Unlike weather

forecasting, which presents verifiable, falsifiable knowledge, the horoscope genre presents itself as objective foreknowledge while remaining, in substance, deeply subjective and infinitely adaptable to the reader's situation. Alongside advertising discourse, political rhetoric, and religious sermon, the horoscope text belongs to the broader category of persuasive discourse, and nowhere is this more visible than in the way it organizes its illocutionary acts: every horoscope text must, in some form, both predict and advise, and the way a language chooses to mark – or not mark – the boundary between these two speech acts is itself a pragmatically and culturally significant choice.

Despite this, astrological prediction discourse remains comparatively under-researched in contrastive pragmatics, and virtually unexplored for the English-Uzbek language pair. The typological and cultural distance between English and Uzbek makes this pair particularly revealing for testing whether the marking of directive force, politeness, and discourse structure is governed by universal genre conventions or by language- and culture-specific communicative norms.

The aim of this study is to analyse the speech-act structure, politeness strategies, and discourse-organizational features of English and Uzbek weekly-horoscope texts, and to determine how directive force and temporal structuring are realized across the two languages. This aim is pursued through three interrelated objectives: (1) to identify and compare the speech acts and politeness strategies realized in the weekly-horoscope corpus; (2) to apply Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle to identify the genre's characteristic pattern of maxim observance and flouting; and (3) to quantify the discourse-organizational and register-level differences between the two sub-corpora.

The study tests two working hypotheses. According to the speech-act hypothesis (H3), both languages realize the same illocutionary goals – prediction (assertive) and advice (directive) – but through different structural means. According to the genre-organization hypothesis (H4), differences in the temporal-discursive structuring of the texts (day-by-day narration versus condensed summary) derive from source-specific stylistic convention and text length rather than from the language system itself.

The theoretical framework draws on Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969, 1976) Speech Act Theory, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, Forer's (1949) and Meehl's (1956) work on the Barnum effect, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, Oakes's (1998) corpus-statistical methods, Biber's (1988) register-variation framework, and Swales's (1990) genre theory. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the corpus and methods; Section 3 reports the results in three stages – speech acts and directive marking (3.1), politeness and the Cooperative Principle (3.2), and discourse organization and

register (3.3); Section 4 discusses the findings in relation to the two hypotheses; Section 5 concludes.

Materials and methods. A purpose-built comparable weekly-horoscope corpus was compiled for this study.

Weekly-horoscope corpus. The English component consists of 12 weekly issues for 12 signs (144 texts, $\approx 15,600$ words) from the general weekly-horoscope section of horoscope.com. The Uzbek component consists of 12 weekly issues for 12 signs (157 texts, $\approx 4,870$ words) from obuna.darakchi.uz. A marked length asymmetry exists between the two sub-corpora (≈ 108 words per English text versus ≈ 31 words per Uzbek text); this reflects the differing editorial conventions of the two sources (a detailed day-by-day narrative style in English versus a condensed summary-advice style in Uzbek) rather than a sampling artefact. For this reason, all quantitative comparisons reported in Section 3 are given as frequency per 1,000 words rather than as raw counts.

Methods and classification criteria. The analysis combines four complementary methods: (a) pragmatic analysis, to establish the illocutionary orientation of each text; (b) discourse analysis, to situate the texts within their broader socio-cultural function; (c) the comparative-typological method, for the English-Uzbek comparison; and (d) quantitative-qualitative corpus analysis, to establish the relative frequency of linguistic units, reported as raw counts and as normalized frequency per 1,000 words. The six-type semantic-pragmatic typology of the Uzbek “Maslahat:” segments reported in Section 3.2 (Table 1) was developed through qualitative classification of all 151 analysable segments according to the type of conduct they recommend, following the same semantic-functional classification logic applied to the strategy typology in the companion study of the daily-horoscope sub-genre. Lexical diversity in Section 3.3 (Table 2) was measured using both the raw type-token ratio (TTR) and its standardized variant (STTR), computed over 200-word blocks to control for the corpus-size sensitivity of raw TTR (Oakes, 1998).

Speech acts and directive marking. The most striking structural finding concerns the marking of directive speech acts. In the Uzbek weekly corpus, 155 of 157 texts (98.7%) end with a separate, lexically marked segment introduced by the word “Maslahat:” (“Advice:”), typically followed by an imperative-mood verb: “Maslahat: bu hafta qarz olmang” (“Advice: do not borrow money this week”). In the English weekly corpus, by contrast, no equivalent lexical marker (“Advice:” or similar) occurs in any of the 144 texts; directive force is instead distributed, mostly through imperative verb forms, across the narrative flow of the text (approximately 73 imperative clauses were identified across the corpus, ≈ 0.5 per text): “Sign on the dotted line. Get this project going” (Scorpio); “Be patient” (Leo). Assertive (predictive) speech acts constitute the bulk of both corpora and are systematically mitigated by epistemic

hedging devices (English could, might, may; Uzbek mumkin, ehtimol). Genuine commissive speech acts – in which the speaker undertakes an obligation – do not occur explicitly in either corpus; however, high-commitment assertive forms (English will; Uzbek future-tense verb forms with an assured tone) function as implicit commissives, giving the reader a near-guarantee of a positive outcome: “This weekend will be a load of fun” (Sagittarius); “Kelayotgan haftada nihoyat sizning mehnatlaringizni e’tiborga olishadi” (“This coming week your efforts will finally be recognized”, Aries). Expressive elements (exclamations, intensifiers) occur at a nearly identical normalized frequency in both languages – 1.47 per 1,000 words in English (23 raw tokens) versus 1.44 per 1,000 words in Uzbek (7 raw tokens) – suggesting that the emotional-expressive intensity of the genre is stable across the two cultures even where sentence length, syntax and directive marking diverge sharply. Second-person reference density differs considerably in raw terms: English second-person pronouns (you, your, yours, yourself) occur 78.4 times per 1,000 words versus 31.0 times per 1,000 words for the independent Uzbek pronoun siz. This raw gap, however, must be interpreted cautiously: Uzbek is a pro-drop language in which second-person reference is very frequently carried by the verbal person-number suffix alone (-siz, -asiz, -ysiz) rather than by an independent pronoun, so the raw pronoun count understates the true density of addressee-orientation in Uzbek. Register also differs qualitatively: English you is register-neutral, whereas Uzbek systematically selects the honorific siz form (never the informal sen) throughout the corpus, encoding both social distance appropriate to mass media and a respectful, “elder-advisor” stance – itself an instance of Leech’s (1983) Tact Maxim in operation.

Politeness, the Barnum effect, and the Cooperative Principle. The Barnum effect (Forer, 1949; Meehl, 1956) – the tendency to accept generalized, universally applicable descriptions as personally accurate – is pervasive in both corpora. Typical Barnum-style statements include, in English, “The risks you assume in any situation (work, romantic, whatever) are totally worth it in the end” (Aries), where the phrase “any situation...whatever” deliberately widens applicability; and in Uzbek, “Ba’zilarning ahvoli sizdan yaxshiroq” (“Some people are better off than you”, Leo). Both corpora reproduce classic Forer themes – unused potential (“You have a great deal of unused capacity”-type statements) and the extravert-introvert duality (“You’re usually a rather sensitive being, but Monday has you thinking like a CEO”, Scorpio) – confirming that the strategy rests on a universal psychological mechanism rather than a culture-specific one.

Politeness strategies operate on two levels. Positive politeness reinforces the reader’s self-image directly: “People regard you as a leader and a pioneer on Wednesday” (Aries); “Kelayotgan haftada nihoyat sizning mehnatlaringizni e’tiborga olishadi” (Aries, Uzbek).

Face-threat mitigation follows a recurrent formula – a negative prediction is immediately paired with a positive resolution: “On Thursday and Friday, you are misfiring right and left, conversationally speaking, but quality time with quality people over the weekend fixes that” (Gemini); “Bu haftada ba’zi xavotirli xabarlardan ko’nglingiz xijil bo’ladi. Shuning uchun kamroq ‘onlayn’ bo’ling” (Taurus). Negative politeness – respecting the reader’s autonomy – is achieved chiefly through epistemic hedging devices: a bare assertion (“you will do X”) is systematically replaced by a hedged possibility (“you could do X”), which, in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) terms, keeps the directive “off record”.

Applying Grice’s (1975) four maxims to the corpus reveals a consistent, genre-specific pattern of selective flouting. The maxim of quantity is systematically flouted: the text withholds specific information in favour of vague quantifiers (“You have a million projects to occupy yourself with”, Cancer; “Ba’zilarning ahvoli...”, Leo). The maxim of quality, by contrast, is scrupulously observed – or rather, strategically protected – through the very hedging devices analysed above: the speaker almost never asserts with full certainty, thereby pre-empting any later charge of having “lied”. The maxim of relation is flouted when the text moves from the specific weekly prediction to a general life maxim that the reader is left to apply to their own circumstances (“Hamma narsaning narxi bor”, “Everything has a price”, Libra). The maxim of manner is flouted more often in English, through long, branching, deliberately unfinished sentences (“...a skylight is a bad idea...etc.”, Scorpio), while the shorter Uzbek texts largely preserve orderly, unambiguous expression. Figurative language draws on comparable conceptual source domains in both languages – physical motion, natural phenomena, and games/transport (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) – as in English “a roller coaster of a week” (Libra) and Uzbek “asalga uchgan pashshadek talpinishadi” (“they flock to you like flies to honey”, Leo). Such idioms, however, resist literal translation: “flies” carry negative connotations in English (“fly in the ointment”), so a functional equivalent such as “like moths to a flame” better preserves the positive Uzbek connotation of attraction, illustrating that cultural-connotative, rather than purely lexical, equivalence should guide translation of such units.

Qualitative review of the 151 Uzbek “Maslahat:” segments identified six recurrent semantic-pragmatic types, summarized in Table 1.

Advice type	Approx. share	Illustrative example
Patience / not rushing	≈25%	“Do not overthink - choose what first catches your eye and live calmly.”

Caution (financial/social)	≈20%	“Do not borrow money this week. Write down all verbal agreements.”
Activity / call to act	≈20%	“Occupy yourself with something, even a simple but useful task.”
Emotional openness	≈15%	“Do not let the moment pass - express your feelings openly.”
Social boundary-setting	≈12%	“Say 'yes' to the helpless, 'no' to the cunning.”
Other / mixed	≈8%	“Make use of the opportunity.”

Table 1. Semantic-pragmatic typology of the Uzbek “Maslahat:” segments (qualitative classification, N = 151).

Nearly half of all advice segments (patience + caution, ≈45%) counsel inaction or care, while only ≈20% counsel active behaviour. This distribution is not accidental: advice to “wait” or “be careful” almost never turns out to be “wrong”, since it recommends passive conduct whose outcome is rarely checked, whereas advice to “act” carries greater falsifiability risk – a directive-level continuation of the genre’s broader low-risk epistemic strategy.

Discourse organization and register-level indicators. Discourse-organizational structure differs sharply along the temporal dimension. English weekly texts are organized day-by-day, with temporal reference markers (Monday, Tuesday...weekend) occurring 47.8 times per 1,000 words (746 raw tokens); Uzbek texts condense the week into one or two blocks (hafta boshida, hafta oxirida), with corresponding markers occurring only 13.8 times per 1,000 words (67 raw tokens). This granularity is stable across zodiac signs in English (ratio of highest to lowest sign ≈1.3x), again pointing to a source-level formulaic convention rather than sign-specific content.

Table 2 reports register-level quantitative indicators – sentence count, mean sentence and word length, and lexical diversity (type-token ratio, TTR, and its standardized variant STTR, computed over 200-word blocks; Oakes, 1998) – which together provide an independent, corpus-linguistic index of formality and narrative density (Biber, 1988).

Indicator	English	Uzbek
Total sentences	1,072	615
Mean sentence length (words)	13.84	7.89
Mean word length (characters)	4.47	7.13
Raw type-token ratio (TTR)	0.157	0.424
Standardized TTR (200-word blocks)	0.624	0.814

Table 2. Register-level quantitative indicators, weekly-horoscope corpus.

English sentences are nearly twice as long as Uzbek sentences (13.84 vs. 7.89 words), while Uzbek words are, on average, considerably longer (7.13 vs. 4.47 characters) – a direct reflection of the two languages’ typology: analytic English distributes grammatical meaning across separate function words, producing more, shorter words per sentence, while agglutinative Uzbek encodes grammatical meaning through chains of suffixes within a single word. The residual STTR gap (0.814 vs. 0.624), smaller and more reliable than the raw-TTR gap, is best explained by the genre convention of the English source, which repeats a relatively fixed stock of day-names, planetary references and affective vocabulary across its longer, narrative-style texts.

Discussion. The speech-act hypothesis (H3) is only partially confirmed. Both languages pursue the same illocutionary goals – prediction (assertive) and advice (directive) – but do so through markedly different structural means: Uzbek marks the directive segment explicitly and almost universally (98.7% of texts) through the lexical-typographic device “Maslahat:”, while English distributes directive force implicitly across the narrative, primarily via bare imperatives. This difference plausibly reflects editorial convention interacting with text length: the shorter Uzbek text format favours an explicit two-part division into description and advice, whereas the longer English narrative format allows directives to be woven into a continuous storyline. The genre-organization hypothesis (H4) is confirmed: the marked difference in temporal granularity – detailed day-by-day narration in English versus condensed weekly summary in Uzbek – correlates with, and is best explained by, source-specific stylistic convention and the substantial difference in mean text length (108 vs. 31 words), rather than by any grammatical property of English or Uzbek as such.

These speech-act, politeness, and discourse-organizational findings provide complementary evidence for a two-layer model of persuasive genre structure. The universal-

cognitive layer is visible in strategies grounded in general regularities of reader psychology that recur with near-identical force in both languages – the Barnum effect, positive-politeness flattery, and the selective flouting of Grice’s maxims of quantity and relation alongside strict observance of the maxim of quality. The language-specific layer is visible in the explicit lexical-typographic marking of directive force in Uzbek versus its implicit narrative embedding in English, and in the sharply different discourse-organizational granularity of the two sub-corpora. Read together with the modal-epistemic evidence reported in a companion corpus-based study of the daily-horoscope sub-genre, these findings indicate that the same two-layer architecture – a shared communicative logic realized through language- and source-specific structural means – operates consistently across both the grammatical and the discourse-organizational levels of the genre.

The findings carry practical implications. For translation studies, the analysis suggests that translators rendering Uzbek horoscope texts into English should preserve the explicit directive force of the “Maslahat:” segment through typographic means (e.g., italics or a separate paragraph), since simple narrative embedding would allow the directive illocutionary force to be “lost” in translation; figurative units likewise require cultural-connotative rather than purely lexical equivalents. For media-literacy education, the speech-act and politeness patterns identified here – together with the strategy typology developed in the companion study – offer a ready-made framework for teaching learners to recognize the linguistic manipulation devices of persuasive discourse more broadly, including advertising and motivational texts, to which the model is directly transferable given their shared position within Swales’s (1990) category of genres organized around implicit communicative purpose.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The identification of Barnum-style statements and figurative units relied on qualitative, single-analyst review rather than automated or multi-annotator methods, and would benefit from validation on a larger, annotated corpus. The pronounced length asymmetry between the English and Uzbek weekly sub-corpora (108 vs. 31 words per text) constrains the reliability of certain raw-frequency comparisons, although this was mitigated by reporting normalized frequencies throughout. Future research should extend the comparison to equally sized, multi-annotator corpora and to further language pairs (Russian-Uzbek, Turkish-Uzbek), as well as to structurally related persuasive genres such as advertising and motivational discourse, for which the present analysis of speech acts and discourse organization is proposed as a transferable methodological template.

Conclusion. This study has presented a corpus-based analysis of speech acts, politeness strategies, and discourse organization in English and Uzbek weekly astrological prediction discourse. The analysis demonstrates that the two languages pursue identical illocutionary

goals – prediction and advice – and reproduce the same underlying psychological mechanisms of persuasion (the Barnum effect, selective flouting of Grice’s maxims, positive-politeness flattery), while marking directive force and organizing discourse through markedly different, source-specific structural means: explicit lexical marking and condensed weekly summary in Uzbek versus implicit narrative embedding and detailed day-by-day structuring in English. This conclusion carries methodological significance beyond astrological discourse for contrastive lingvopragmatics generally: the same communicative intention can be realized through structurally unrelated discourse-organizational conventions. The results have direct applications in translation studies, where preserving illocutionary force across structurally different realizations is essential, and in media-literacy education aimed at training readers to recognize linguistic manipulation in persuasive discourse.

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