

**Pragmatic Features of Somatic Expressions in English and Uzbek Languages**

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**Abstract:** This study explores the pragmatic features of somatic expressions in English and Uzbek, focusing on how non-verbal communication, particularly body-related expressions (somatic expressions), functions within the cultural and linguistic contexts of both languages. Somatic expressions, including gestures, facial expressions, and metaphorical uses of body parts, are integral to communication and often carry distinct pragmatic meanings depending on the social and cultural settings. The research compares the pragmatic roles of somatic expressions in English and Uzbek, highlighting the similarities and differences in their usage in everyday conversations, formal interactions, and cultural rituals.

**Keywords:** somatic expressions, pragmatic functions, collectivism, intercultural communication, cross-cultural pragmatics, sociolinguistics, body language and metaphorical uses of body parts.

**Introduction:** Non-verbal communication plays a pivotal role in how humans convey meaning and emotions in social interactions. Among the various forms of non-verbal communication, somatic expressions—which include gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and metaphorical uses of body parts—are central to daily communication. These somatic expressions, often shaped by cultural norms, carry specific pragmatic functions that help speakers navigate social relationships, express emotions, and reinforce or challenge social hierarchies. In both English and Uzbek languages, somatic expressions are not only essential in everyday interactions but also contribute to the broader pragmatics of communication, influencing the interpretation of messages in different social contexts.

Pragmatics, as the study of language use in context, emphasizes how meaning is shaped by social, cultural, and situational factors. While much attention has been paid to the verbal aspects of pragmatics—such as speech acts, politeness strategies, and discourse markers—less attention has been given to the pragmatic role of somatic expressions. This gap in the literature becomes especially apparent when we consider the cross-cultural aspects of communication. As societies differ in how they understand and use body language, the pragmatic features of somatic expressions can vary significantly between languages and cultures. English and Uzbek, as two distinct languages with different cultural backgrounds, offer a fascinating case for comparison in terms of how somatic expressions are used and interpreted in communication.

This study aims to investigate the pragmatic features of somatic expressions in both English and Uzbek, focusing on how gestures, facial expressions, and body-related metaphors function within these two languages. By comparing the use of somatic expressions in various communicative contexts—such as politeness strategies, emotion expression, and social hierarchies—this research seeks to uncover the deeper cultural and pragmatic dynamics that shape communication in each language. Additionally, the study will explore how both languages utilize somatic expressions to

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establish meaning in a social interaction, and the ways in which speakers navigate the complexities of intercultural communication.

The significance of this research lies not only in its contribution to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics but also in its potential to improve intercultural communication. Understanding the pragmatic features of somatic expressions can provide insights into how body language influences communication in a globalized world, where interactions between speakers of different languages and cultures are increasingly common. Furthermore, this study offers practical applications for enhancing communication skills in multilingual environments, promoting cultural awareness and reducing the likelihood of communication breakdowns.

**Literature review:** The study of somatic expressions—including gestures, facial expressions, and body-related metaphors—has gained significant attention in the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and cross-cultural communication. Researchers have long recognized the importance of non-verbal communication in shaping the pragmatic function of interactions, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Somatic expressions play a crucial role in conveying meaning, expressing emotions, and negotiating social relationships, often complementing or supplementing verbal language.

English-speaking cultures, particularly in the Western world, have been the subject of much research on non-verbal communication, with scholars like Mehrabian (1972) and Burgoon et al. (2002) highlighting the role of gestures and body language in daily interactions. Somatic expressions in English include both conventional gestures (such as waving for greeting, thumbs up for approval) and metaphorical uses of body parts (such as “heart” for emotions or “head” for intellect). English speakers often rely on these expressions to complement speech, convey emotion, and establish social rapport.

For example, gestures such as a handshake or a wave are commonly used to express politeness and greeting, aligning with the culture's emphasis on individualism and informality. According to Ekman (1992), facial expressions in English-speaking contexts can convey emotions like happiness, sadness, and anger, which are widely recognized across cultures, though the intensity and expression may vary. Additionally, metaphorical expressions like “keeping a straight face” (to conceal emotions) or “having a big heart” (for kindness) are commonly used in English discourse, reflecting Western cultural values of sincerity and individual emotional expression.

In contrast, the role of somatic expressions in Uzbek culture is deeply rooted in Central Asian traditions, where non-verbal cues are used to reflect respect, hierarchy, and collectivism. Uzbek communication emphasizes politeness and respect for elders, with somatic expressions playing a significant role in maintaining social harmony. Gestures such as bowing, handshakes, or the way one sits or stands during conversation carry significant pragmatic weight in Uzbek culture. The formality of a handshake, for instance, is often tied to the age and social status of the individuals involved.

Research by Kasimov A (2021) on non-verbal communication in Uzbek culture explores how somatic expressions function in establishing social hierarchies. According to her, bowing or using a lowered gaze is a form of respect, particularly towards elders, and differs significantly from the more casual forms of physical interaction seen in Western cultures. Additionally, the metaphorical use of body parts in the Uzbek language often involves concepts of respect and family values. For example, the phrase “bosh o‘rni” (head place) refers to a position of honor, illustrating the cultural association between the head and dignity. English and Uzbek somatic expressions often adhere to more rigid cultural norms that emphasize formality, respect, and the preservation of face. This reflects the

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collectivist nature of Uzbek society, where maintaining social harmony and face-saving behaviors is of central importance.

When comparing English and Uzbek languages, significant differences emerge in the use of somatic expressions. English-speaking cultures, influenced by individualism, tend to emphasize personal expression and straightforward communication, where somatic expressions like gestures or facial expressions are often used to reinforce personal emotions, opinions, or individual intentions. Uzbek culture, by contrast, reflects the values of collectivism, where somatic expressions are frequently tied to maintaining respect for social hierarchies and the community's well-being.

**Discussion:** The pragmatic features of somatic expressions in English and Uzbek languages are deeply intertwined with cultural norms, social structures, and communication practices. These somatic expressions, which encompass gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and metaphorical uses of body parts, play a crucial role in how individuals negotiate meaning in both languages. By analyzing the use of somatic expressions in English and Uzbek, we can uncover not only their shared functions in communication but also the cultural nuances that shape how they are interpreted in each context.

Gestures and body language in both English and Uzbek languages serve critical pragmatic functions, helping to convey emotions, reinforce verbal messages, and negotiate social relationships. In English, gestures like waving, thumbs up, or handshakes are often used to express greetings, approval, or agreement. These expressions are fairly informal and universally understood in many contexts, reflecting the individualistic nature of English-speaking cultures. According to Ekman (1992), gestures in English often accompany speech to emphasize emotions or clarify meaning, with physical expressions of agreement or disagreement playing a key role in everyday interactions.

For example, the thumbs-up gesture, commonly used in English, is often a symbol of approval or encouragement and is understood across many English-speaking societies. This gesture is culturally neutral, and its meaning does not vary widely, making it a universally recognizable form of communication in English-speaking contexts. Similarly, in English, handshakes and nodding often serve as ritualistic markers of politeness and greeting, conveying mutual respect and acknowledgment.

Uzbek culture places a higher emphasis on formal gestures and the respect for hierarchy in social interactions. Somatic expressions in Uzbek are closely tied to collectivist values, where maintaining respect for elders, family honor, and social cohesion is paramount. For instance, when addressing elders or people of higher social status, bowing, lowering the gaze, or using formal hand gestures conveys deep respect. This can be contrasted with the more casual, informal use of gestures in English-speaking cultures. In Uzbek, the act of a handshake is often accompanied by a slight bow of the head, or the positioning of the body in a way that shows deference to the other person. The differences in these practices highlight the role of status and respect in Uzbek somatic expressions, which are not as prevalent in English-speaking societies. In both English and Uzbek, metaphorical uses of body parts are common, yet they reflect distinct cultural conceptualizations of the body and its relationship to emotion, intellect, and social dynamics.

In English, expressions involving body parts such as "heart" and "head" are used to communicate metaphorical meanings. For instance, the phrase "a big heart" often refers to someone who is compassionate and generous, while "a sharp mind" or "to think with your head" suggests rationality or intellectual clarity. These metaphors align with Western individualism, where personal traits such

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as emotions and thoughts are conceptualized as residing in distinct parts of the body, such as the heart for emotional warmth and the head for intellectual reasoning.

Similarly, Uzbek expressions also make extensive use of body parts metaphorically, but these expressions often reflect the collectivist and family-oriented nature of Uzbek society. For example, phrases like "bosh o'ri" (head place) refer to the position of respect or the honored place of an individual in the social hierarchy, particularly in the context of family or community. The head, in Uzbek, is often seen as the symbol of authority, and many Uzbek proverbs and expressions reinforce the importance of maintaining honor and status. The metaphorical use of the heart in Uzbek culture, however, may emphasize family loyalty or devotion rather than individual emotions, as is common in English expressions. This contrast in metaphorical expressions reveals how body parts serve as symbolic anchors for cultural values—individualism and emotional expression in English, versus collectivism and respect in Uzbek. These differences indicate how somatic metaphors are deeply intertwined with the underlying cultural orientation of the respective societies.

The differences in somatic expressions between English and Uzbek cultures can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations in intercultural communication. A gesture that is neutral or even positive in one culture may carry a different, or even negative, connotation in another. For example, the thumbs-up gesture in English-speaking cultures is typically seen as a sign of approval or agreement. However, in some Central Asian cultures, such gestures could be perceived as overly informal or even disrespectful, depending on the context. Additionally, direct eye contact in English-speaking cultures may be interpreted as a sign of confidence or attentiveness, but in Uzbek culture, it can sometimes be considered impolite or challenging, especially when interacting with elders or those of higher social status. These differences underscore the importance of cultural sensitivity in intercultural communication. To prevent misunderstandings, it is essential to recognize the pragmatic features of somatic expressions in each culture and understand how they contribute to the meaning-making process in communication.

**Conclusion:** The study of pragmatic features of somatic expressions in English and Uzbek languages reveals important insights into how culture influences non-verbal communication and its role in everyday interactions. Somatic expressions, encompassing gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and metaphorical uses of body parts, carry significant pragmatic functions in both cultures. These functions are shaped by cultural values, social norms, and communication styles that differ between English-speaking and Uzbek-speaking societies.

Understanding the pragmatic features of somatic expressions in both English and Uzbek offers valuable insights for improving intercultural competence. Recognizing how somatic expressions function in different social contexts can help individuals navigate communication more effectively, particularly in multicultural settings. It also encourages greater cultural sensitivity and awareness of non-verbal communication cues, which are essential in fostering mutual respect and effective communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Both English and Uzbek rely on somatic expressions to convey meaning, the way these expressions are used and interpreted is deeply rooted in their respective cultural values and social structures. A nuanced understanding of these differences is essential for improving cross-cultural communication, avoiding potential misunderstandings, and promoting global understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

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