

Tangriyev Valisher Azamovich

EFL teacher at Denau Institute of
Entrepreneurship and Pedagogy

E-mail: vtangriyev@gmail.com

Tel: +998902499995

UO‘K 81'44

SOMATIC PARALINGUISTIC LACUNAE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

Abstract: *This article investigates the discrepancies in paralinguistic means (gestures, mimics, and body movements) within English and Uzbek linguacultures, with a specific focus on cultural and semantic lacunae. Drawing on comparative-experimental data, the study examines the role of non-verbal units involving body parts (somatisms) in communication, highlighting their national and universal characteristics. Through quantitative analysis, the research systematizes paralinguistic units that exist in one culture but are absent or carry radically different meanings in the other, termed as "lacunae."*

Keywords: *paralinguistics, lacuna, somatism, non-verbal communication, linguacultureme, kinetic means, display rules, power distance index (PDI).*

Tangriyev Valisher Azamovich

Denov tadbirkorlik va pedagogika

instituti Ingliz tili o‘qituvchisi

E-mail: vtangriyev@gmail.com

Tel: +998902499995

INGLIZ VA O‘ZBEK TILLARIDAGI SOMATIK PARALINGVISTIK

LAKUNALAR

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o‘zbek lingvomadaniyatlarida paralingvistik vositalar (imo-ishora, mimika va tana harakatlari) o‘rtasidagi*

nomutanosibliklar, xususan, madaniy va semantik lakunalar masalasi tadqiq etiladi. Qiyosiy-eksperimental ma'lumotlarga tayangan holda, tadqiqot tana a'zolari (somatizmlar) ishtirokidagi noverbal birliklarning muloqotdagi o'rnini o'rganadi va ularning milliy hamda umumbashariy xususiyatlarini yoritadi. Miqdoriy tahlillar yordamida muayyan bir madaniyatda mavjud bo'lib, ikkinchi tilda ekvivalenti bo'lmagan yoki tubdan farqli ma'no anglatuvchi paralingvistik birliklar "lakunalar" sifatida tizimlashtirilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: *paralingvistika, lakuna, somatizm, noverbal muloqot, lingvokulturema, kinetik vosita, namoyon bo'lish qoidalari (display rules), hokimiyat masofasi (PDI).*

Тангриев Валишер Азамович

Преподаватель английского языка в Денауском институте

предпринимательства и педагогики

E-mail: vtangriyev@gmail.com

Тел: +998902499995

СОМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ПАРАЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ЛАКУНЫ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ И УЗБЕКСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

Аннотация: *В данной статье исследуются несоответствия в паралингвистических средствах (жестах, мимике и телодвижениях) в английской и узбекской лингвокультурах с особым акцентом на культурные и семантические лакуны. На основе сравнительно-экспериментальных данных в исследовании рассматривается роль невербальных единиц, включающих части тела (соматизмов), в коммуникации, выделяются их национальные и универсальные характеристики. Посредством количественного анализа систематизируются паралингвистические единицы, которые существуют в одной культуре, но отсутствуют или имеют радикально иное значение в другой, определяемые как «лакуны».*

Ключевые слова: паралингвистика, лакуна, соматизм, невербальная коммуникация, лингвокультура, кинетические средства, правила выражения (*display rules*), индекс дистанции власти (*PDI*).

Introduction

In modern anthropocentric linguistics, the communicative process is recognized as being shaped not only by linguistic units but also by the paralinguistic means that accompany them [1, 2, 11]. As defined by the linguist A. Hojiyev, “Paralinguistics is the branch of linguistics that studies factors such as gestures, mimics, and speech situations in the process of communication” [6]. Speech is not merely a verbal act; it is a complex system where mimics, gestures, and vocal timbre enhance expressiveness and clarify intent.

During the comparative study of diverse systems like English and Uzbek, "lacunae" inevitably emerge – units that exist in one culture but are absent or functionally incompatible in the other [7, 8]. The relevance of this study lies in the fact that non-verbal mechanisms across different cultural contexts do not always align, creating barriers to effective intercultural communication and leading to "linguocultural shock" or misunderstandings.

Literature Review

The systematic study of paralinguistic means has been explored by scholars such as G.V. Kolshanskiy, T.M. Nikolayeva, and B.A. Uspenskiy [8, 12]. Kolshanskiy argues that “paralinguistic means constitute an auxiliary system of communication that fills the gaps in verbal communication” [8]. In Uzbek linguistics, foundational research has been conducted by A. Nurmonov, M. Saidxonov, Sh. Iskandarova, and M. Kurbanov [9, 13, 14]. Furthermore, the theoretical framework for lacunae in the Uzbek context was extensively developed in the research of N.R. Ismatullayeva [7].

Research Methodology

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research designs alongside analysis, synthesis, and comparative-typological

methods. The research was conducted in two main phases to identify both objective and polar lacunae.

First, to identify culture-specific paralinguisms (objective lacunae) that exist in one culture but are physically or semantically absent in the other, qualitative observational methods were applied. This involved the continuous observation of authentic communicative situations, cross-cultural interactions, and the analysis of literary texts and visual media in both English and Uzbek linguacultures.

Second, to provide empirical grounding for polar gestures—movements present in both cultures but with potentially conflicting evaluations—a quantitative comparative-experimental analysis was conducted. This involved 55 Uzbek and 43 native English speakers. Respondents evaluated 8 culturally significant polar gestures using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive). The survey results were analyzed using Arithmetic Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) [10] to determine the statistical significance of intercultural discrepancies.

Results and Discussion

Paralinguisms Specific to English Culture. The research reveals significant discrepancies in the semantic fields of somatic paralinguisms. English paralinguistic means tend to be pragmatic-functional, often used to manage communication or express irony. In contrast, Uzbek paralinguisms are predominantly emotional-expressive and social-hierarchical, specializing in the expression of respect, regret, or social distance.

These gestures reflect the open, pragmatic, and low-context communication style prevalent in Western cultures [4]. However, they are either not physically performed in Uzbek communication or are entirely alien to its mentality:

Tapping the nose – in British culture, this signifies a secret agreement, "*keep it between us,*" or "*you've guessed right.*" In Uzbek culture, this meaning is typically conveyed through verbal means, *a wink, or placing a finger on the lips ("sh-sh-sh")*, making it an objective lacuna for the Uzbek somatic system. In the English literary context, this gesture is actively used to illustrate a secret or hidden understanding. For

example: *"Let me take this to my husband. He regrets being unable to see you personally, but has instructed me in his wishes. That'll be fine, said Kuikin quickly. Vertir looked at him and tapped his nose"* [15].

Air quotes – forming quotation marks in the air with two fingers explicitly indicates irony, skepticism, or that a word is not used in its literal sense. The Uzbek national kinetic system lacks the habit of drawing symbols in the air; irony is conveyed much more subtly through vocal intonation or a smirk.

Kissing one's fingertips ("Chef's kiss") – in Western cultures, this is a symbol of high praise, perfection (bellissimo), or supreme culinary delight. This kinetic movement is virtually non-existent in Uzbek culture, where praise is expressed through the thumbs-up or verbal blessings. Furthermore, *touching something to the eyes or kissing it is strictly reserved for sacred items* (such as bread or the Quran). In English media, this gesture frequently depicts extreme satisfaction and high appreciation, as seen in the following excerpt: *"Most people come away kissing their fingertips - and wondering how soon they can afford to return"* [16].

Polishing one's fingernails (on clothes) – this gesture signifies utter indifference, dismissiveness, or extreme self-satisfaction in English culture. In Uzbek, this specific movement is absent and is typically replaced by pursing the lips or scratching the back of the neck.

Rolling eyes – widely used by English speakers to express blatant disregard, annoyance, or exasperation. In the high-context, respect-driven Uzbek culture, displaying such overt non-verbal dissatisfaction directly at an interlocutor is severely condemned, particularly in the presence of elders.

Paralinguisms Specific to Uzbek Culture. These movements are deeply rooted in the national mentality, social hierarchy, and collectivism [5]. They are often absent or misunderstood in English communication.

Rubbing/Scratching the stomach (qornini qashimoq) – in informal Uzbek communication, this can signify indifference, irresponsibility, or a state of

confusion/lack of understanding. English culture lacks a specific paralinguistic unit involving the stomach for these meanings, relying instead on shrugging. In Uzbek literature, this paralinguism is frequently used to express a careless attitude or evaluating someone with indifference. For instance, in S. Nurov's work: "*Brigadir qornini silab, Nusratbekning rang-ro'yi, kiyim-boshiga razm soldi*" (*The foreman rubbed his stomach and carelessly looked at Nusratbek's complexion and clothes*) [17].

Twisting/pulling the ear – denotes severe reprimand through physical discipline by elders or parents. In Western cultures, touching someone's ear borders on physical violation, and reprimands are typically verbal or signified by finger wagging. In contrast, Uzbek writers utilize this somatic punishment to show strict discipline and superiority. As vividly depicted in T. Malik's novel *Shaytanat*: "*Ammo sinf rahbarining omburday qo'llari qulog'ini burab, joyidan jildirmay qo'ydi*" (*But the class teacher's plier-like hands twisted his ear and did not let him move*) [18].

Slapping/punching the knee – expresses severe frustration, deep regret (*attang*), anger, or sharp disapproval. The English kinetic system lacks such negative emotional gestures involving the knee (slapping the knee is typically reserved for extreme laughter, i.e., a "knee-slapper").

Biting the finger (or grabbing one's collar) – dignifies deep regret from an unexpected situation, astonishment, shock, or repentance (*tavba qildim*). English speakers do not bite their fingers to express regret (often using a "facepalm" instead); in English, nail or finger biting is almost exclusively associated with stress and nervousness.

Two-handed handshake – demonstrates the acknowledgment of the interlocutor's status (especially elders), deep respect, and humility. English culture dictates a one-handed handshake, which serves as a symbol of equality.

Placing a hand on the chest – a sacred ritual of greeting, gratitude, reverence, and acknowledgment of social subordination in Uzbek culture. In Western daily

communication, this gesture is virtually absent, generally reserved for taking an oath or during a national anthem.

Stroking the head (Elders to youngsters) – a social symbol of paternalistic care, comforting, blessing, and affection. For English speakers, a stranger stroking a child's head is considered a violation of personal space and is predominantly restricted strictly to the parent-child relationship.

Following Paul Ekman's theory of "display rules," the outward manifestation of universal biological reflexes is governed by cultural norms [3]. In Uzbek culture, the mechanism for suppressing strong negative emotions in public to "save face" is highly active. For instance, "lip biting" in English primarily signals stress or nervousness, whereas in Uzbek, it often functions as a social control mechanism to restrain anger or grief in front of others.

Physically identical but semantically opposite Polar Gestures. A "polar lacuna" occurs when a gesture exists in both cultures but carries completely opposite evaluations. This is deeply tied to the Power Distance Index (PDI) and High/Low Context theories of Hofstede and Hall [4, 5].

Paralinguistic mean and evaluation criterion	Uzbek Group (N=55) M / SD	English Group (N=43) M / SD	Cultural difference indicator (p-value)
1. Putting a hand on the chest (Respect)	5.82 / 1.40	5.42 / 1.51	Significant (p < .05)
2. Bowing the head (Respect)	5.15 / 1.81	6.35 / 0.98	Very High (p < .001)
3. Handshake (Sincerity)	5.58 / 1.25	5.56 / 1.13	Not significant (ns)
4. Subtle nod (Respect)	5.89 / 1.34	5.40 / 1.29	High (p < .01)
5. Direct Eye Contact (Respect)	4.87 / 1.63	5.21 / 1.34	Significant (p < .05)
6. Kneeling (Positive/Negative*)	2.91 / 1.80	4.98 / 1.85	Very High (p < .001)
7. Crossing legs (Respect/Disrespect**)	1.78 / 1.34	3.56 / 1.58	Very High (p < .001)
8. Folding arms	4.56 / 1.54	4.30 / 1.65	Not significant (ns)

(Submission/Dominance***)			
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Table 1

Comparative analysis of the perception of paralinguistic means by Uzbek and English respondents

Notes:

- *M* – Arithmetic Mean; *SD* – Standard Deviation.
- *p* < .05 indicates that the difference is statistically significant.
- (*) Measured on a Positive/Negative scale: 1 = “Very negative”, 7 = “Very positive”.
- ()** Measured on a Respect/Disrespect scale: 1 = “Very strong disrespect”, 7 = “Strong respect”.
- ()* Measured on a Submission/Dominance scale: 1 = “Very submissive”, 7 = “Very dominant”.

Analysis of the table and culturally significant gestures reveals profound polarities in non-verbal communication (Table 1) between the two cultures:

Kneeling – a neutral-to-positive gesture for English speakers (associated with chivalric traditions, proposing marriage, prayer, loyalty, and high respect). Conversely, Uzbeks view it as a strictly negative symbol of surrender to an enemy, crushed pride, absolute defeat, and humiliation.

Crossing legs – perceived as a neutral sign of self-confidence (power pose), relaxation, and personal freedom by the English group (M=3.56). However, it is viewed as a grave sign of disrespect, impoliteness, and arrogance by the Uzbek group (M=1.78), especially in formal settings or before parents and teachers, illustrating the priority of "kinesthetic etiquette" in Uzbek upbringing.

Avoiding eye contact – in English culture, avoiding eye contact is evaluated negatively, indicating deception, insecurity, or guilt ("*shifty eyes*"), as direct eye contact is equated with sincerity. In Uzbek culture, avoiding direct eye contact with elders or

teachers is highly positive—a sign of modesty, shame (*andisha*), respect, and submission to the social hierarchy.

Bowing the head (Head down) – for English speakers, this is often associated with personal psychology, such as shame, self-pity, sorrow, or personal depression. In the Uzbek context, it signifies a social relation: submission, agreement with elders, acknowledgment of social order, and obedience.

Winking – exclusively positive in English, conveying humor, secret agreement, encouragement, or flirting. While it has positive connotations in Uzbek as well, it uniquely carries negative meanings; it is actively used to express anger, severe nervousness, or a threat (as classically depicted in Abdulla Qodiriy's novel *Mehrobdan chayon*, where the character Maxdum winks his right eye in a fit of rage). *Maxdum yana qichishdi, o'ng ko'zini qisib, bir yoqlama Anvarga qaradi. Chunki ul juda achchig'i chiqqan kezlarda kishiga shu xilda qarar edi* [19].

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that somatic paralinguistic lacunae are the result of national mentality, social hierarchy, and historical experience. While English paralinguisms are largely pragmatic, Uzbek units are specialized for maintaining social harmony and hierarchical respect. Recognizing these lacunae is essential not only for linguistic description but for avoiding intercultural friction and improving translation accuracy in a globalized world. Furthermore, integrating the findings on non-verbal lacunae into foreign language teaching curricula will significantly enhance learners' intercultural communicative competence and facilitate more natural cross-cultural interactions.

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