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A comparative pragmatic analysis of complaint and apology speech acts in english and russian

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Abstract. *This article explores the pragmatics of two key interpersonal speech acts complaints and apologies in English and Russian. Drawing on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic perspectives, it examines how speakers of the two languages formulate expressions of dissatisfaction and repair social harmony. Although complaints and apologies share similar communicative intentions across cultures, the linguistic strategies used to perform them differ significantly due to cultural values, politeness norms, and communicative traditions. English speakers tend to prioritize indirectness, mitigation, and face-saving strategies, whereas Russian speakers often rely on more direct formulations that reflect expectations of sincerity and clarity. Through authentic examples, comparative observations, and analysis of typical patterns, the study demonstrates how these differences contribute to potential miscommunication in intercultural settings. The findings have implications for cross-cultural pragmatics, communication studies, and language pedagogy.*

Keywords: *complaints, apologies, pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, politeness, pragmalinguistics, sociopragmatics.*

Сравнительный прагматический анализ речевых актов жалобы и извинения в английском и русском языках

Аннотация. *В этой статье рассматривается прагматика двух ключевых межличностных речевых актов жалоб и извинений в английском и русском языках. Опираясь на прагматический и социоприматический подходы, исследование анализирует, как носители этих двух языков формулируют выражения недовольства и восстанавливают социальную гармонию. Хотя жалобы и извинения имеют схожие коммуникативные цели в разных культурах,*

лингвистические стратегии их реализации существенно различаются из-за культурных ценностей, норм вежливости и коммуникативных традиций. Англоязычные говорящие, как правило, отдают предпочтение косвенности, смягчению и стратегиям сохранения лица, тогда как русскоязычные чаще используют более прямые формулировки, отражающие ожидания искренности и ясности. На основе аутентичных примеров, сравнительных наблюдений и анализа типичных моделей исследование показывает, как эти различия могут приводить к недопониманию в межкультурной коммуникации. Полученные результаты имеют важное значение для исследований межкультурной прагматики, коммуникации и методики преподавания языка.

Ключевые слова: жалоба, извинения, прагматика, межкультурная коммуникация, вежливость, прагмалингвистика, социопрагматика

Ingliz va rus tillarida shikoyat va uzr so‘rash nutq aktlarining qiyosiy pragmatik tahlili

Annotation. *This article explores the pragmatics of two key interpersonal speech acts complaints and apologies in English and Russian. Drawing on pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic perspectives, it examines how speakers of the two languages formulate expressions of dissatisfaction and repair social harmony. Although complaints and apologies share similar communicative intentions across cultures, the linguistic strategies used to perform them differ significantly due to cultural values, politeness norms, and communicative traditions. English speakers tend to prioritize indirectness, mitigation, and face-saving strategies, whereas Russian speakers often rely on more direct formulations that reflect expectations of sincerity and clarity. Through authentic examples, comparative observations, and analysis of typical patterns, the study demonstrates how these differences contribute to potential miscommunication in intercultural settings. The findings have implications for cross-cultural pragmatics, communication studies, and language pedagogy.*

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INTRODUCTION

Speech acts constitute the foundation of human communication, allowing speakers not only to convey information but also to manage relationships, negotiate social norms, and express intentions that shape the social world. Among these, complaints and apologies are particularly important because they directly involve interpersonal tensions. A complaint, by its nature, risks threatening the hearer's face, while an apology often serves as a remedy for such a threat or for an offense previously committed. Understanding how different languages encode these acts offers insight into cultural values and communicative expectations [1,8].

English and Russian provide an especially rich field for comparison. English, influenced by Anglo-Saxon norms of politeness, individualism, and face-saving, tends toward indirect or mitigated formulations. Russian, shaped by cultural expectations of sincerity, emotional expressiveness, and contextual politeness, frequently uses more direct expressions that may seem blunt to outsiders but are perceived as honest and socially appropriate by native speakers [5]. Both languages exhibit complex patterns of strategy choice depending on social distance, relative power, and situational urgency.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative methodology grounded in pragmatic theory. The analysis draws on authentic examples from film dialogues, online communication, and naturally occurring speech in English and Russian. The speech acts are examined through the dual lens of pragmalinguistics, which considers the linguistic forms used to perform the acts, and sociopragmatics, which considers how cultural norms influence speakers' choices [6,2].

The examples are analyzed to identify recurring patterns in directness, mitigation, strategy choice, and the presence or absence of politeness markers. Special attention is given to how speakers in each language manage face-threatening acts, how they express regret or dissatisfaction, and how cultural expectations influence their formulation of these speech acts. The comparative approach allows for identifying shared features, language-specific tendencies, and potential areas where misunderstandings may arise.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals clear cross-linguistic contrasts in both complaints and apologies. Complaints in English tend to be indirect and are often embedded in hedging language. Speakers frequently soften the criticism through modal verbs, question forms, or polite expressions that reduce the force of the complaint [3]. For example, an English speaker might say, "I'm afraid the room hasn't been cleaned yet," or "I was wondering if there might have been a mistake with my order." The focus is not on placing blame directly but on expressing dissatisfaction in a manner that respects the hearer's face. Even when the complaint is explicit, the language remains moderated through words such as maybe, a bit, or it seems, which shift responsibility away from the hearer.

By contrast, Russian complaints are generally more direct and straightforward. A typical Russian complaint might be, "Комната всё ещё не убрана," or "Почему вы перепутали мой заказ?" Such formulations lack the hedging found in English and rely more on the clarity of the statement than on mitigating devices. Although Russian speakers can soften complaints, especially in formal contexts, mitigation is achieved through intonation or minimal polite markers rather than through syntactic or lexical hedges. Sincerity and clarity are valued over face-saving, and directness does not necessarily carry negative connotations [7].

The comparison of apologies shows equally distinct patterns. English apologies typically involve explicit expressions of regret combined with acknowledgement of responsibility. Common formulations include, "I'm really sorry about the delay," or "I apologize; it was my mistake." These expressions often include intensifiers such as really, so, or very, along with compensatory strategies like offering to fix the issue: "Let me make it right for you." The structure of English apologies emphasizes the speaker's accountability and the desire to restore harmony.

Russian apologies, while also expressing regret, often take shorter and more formulaic forms. The most common expressions include "Извините" and "Простите," which may stand alone or be expanded into "Извините, я виноват" ("Sorry, I am to blame"). Unlike English, which frequently foregrounds responsibility and explanation, Russian apologies may rely on the brevity and sincerity of tone. Explanations are often offered before or after the apology but are not required as part of the act. The expression of regret is conveyed more through intonation, facial expression, and context than through elaborate verbal markers.

The comparative results highlight how cultural norms shape the pragmatics of complaints and apologies. English communicative culture places a strong emphasis on negative politeness and face-saving strategies. The indirectness observed in English complaints serves to minimize confrontation and maintain social distance [4]. This

preference for mitigation is tied to cultural values of individualism and efforts to avoid imposing one's emotions or judgments on others. In apologies, English speakers frequently frame responsibility explicitly, aligning with cultural expectations of personal accountability and politeness rituals.

Russian communicative culture operates according to a different set of norms. Directness in Russian is not necessarily impolite; instead, it may signal honesty, emotional sincerity, and genuine concern. This explains why Russian complaints are often more explicit. The clarity of the statement is seen as more socially effective than hedging, which may be interpreted as evasive or insincere. In apologies, Russian speakers rely less on formulaic intensifiers and more on the sincerity conveyed through tone and context. A brief "Извини" may be considered fully adequate, whereas English speakers might view such brevity as insufficient.

These cross-cultural differences may lead to miscommunication. English speakers may perceive Russian complaints as too direct or confrontational, even though Russian speakers intend them as neutral or sincere expressions. Conversely, Russians may interpret English indirect complaints as unclear or even hypocritical, suspecting hidden criticism behind polite forms. In apologies, English elaborateness may appear excessive or insincere to Russians, while Russian brevity may seem abrupt or inadequate to English speakers. Understanding such differences is crucial for avoiding pragmatic failures in intercultural communication.

CONCLUSION

A comparative pragmatic analysis of complaints and apologies in English and Russian reveals distinct patterns shaped by cultural expectations, linguistic traditions, and differing notions of politeness. English speakers tend to use indirectness, hedging, and explicit responsibility marking in performing these acts, reflecting a cultural preference for face-saving and personal accountability. Russian speakers, in contrast, value sincerity, clarity, and contextual politeness, which leads to more direct complaints and more concise apologies. These differences can create misunderstandings in intercultural contexts but can also enrich cross-cultural communication when properly understood. The findings underscore the importance of pragmatic awareness in language learning and intercultural competence and highlight the need for further research into how speakers navigate these speech acts in multilingual environments.

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