

PRAGMALINGUISTIC PROBLEMS IN UZBEK PROSE: COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES AND IMPLICIT MEANING IN KHAYRIDDIN SULTONOV'S NOVELLAS

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Abstract: *This article investigates pragmalinguistic problems manifested in Uzbek literary prose through a detailed analysis of three novellas by contemporary Uzbek writer Khayriddin Sultonov: Ko'ngil ozodadur (Freedom of the Heart), Yozning yolg'iz yodgori (The Lone Memory of Summer), and Saodat sohili (The Shore of Happiness). Drawing on speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975), and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), the study examines how indirect speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and face-threatening strategies function as primary vehicles of meaning-making in Sultonov's narrative discourse. Particular attention is given to the communicative behaviour of key characters, whose utterances frequently operate at the level of implicitness – conveying ideological, psychological, and ethical content beyond the literal propositional meaning. The findings suggest that Sultonov systematically exploits pragmatic indeterminacy to construct psychologically dense characters and to encode socially sensitive themes within the conventions of post-Soviet Uzbek literary fiction. The article contributes to ongoing debates in Uzbek pragmalinguistics and opens new avenues for the stylistic analysis of Central Asian literary texts.*

Keywords: *pragmalinguistics; speech act theory; indirect speech acts; implicature; presupposition; Uzbek prose; Khayriddin Sultonov; communicative strategies; politeness theory; literary pragmatics*

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of pragmatics and literary discourse has emerged as a productive field of inquiry within linguistics, offering systematic tools for understanding how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and interpreted in fictional texts (Pilkington, 2000; Culpeper, 2001). In the context of Uzbek literary studies, however, pragmalinguistic approaches to prose fiction remain underexplored, with most existing scholarship privileging stylistic or ideological analyses (Mahmudov, 2013; Safarov, 2008). This article addresses this gap by applying a pragmalinguistic framework to the novellas of Khayriddin Sultonov, one of the most significant figures of contemporary Uzbek literature.

Sultonov's prose is distinguished by its narrative economy and psychological depth. His characters rarely articulate their inner states directly; instead, meaning is conveyed through ellipsis, implication, and strategic non-disclosure. This characteristic makes his texts particularly fertile for pragmalinguistic analysis. The three novellas selected for this study – Ko'ngil ozodadur, Yozning yolg'iz yodgori, and Saodat sohili – together constitute a representative sample of Sultonov's mature narrative style and engage with themes of freedom, loss, moral responsibility, and social constraint.

The central research questions guiding this study are: (1) What pragmalinguistic mechanisms – speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and face strategies – predominate in Sultonov's narrative discourse? (2) How do these mechanisms contribute to the construction of character psychology and ideological meaning? (3) What do these findings reveal about broader trends in Uzbek literary pragmatics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmalinguistics, as a discipline, concerns itself with the relationship between linguistic form and communicative function in context (Leech, 1983; Verschueren, 1999). Its application to literary texts was systematically developed in the field of literary pragmatics, which treats fictional discourse as a site of complex illocutionary and perlocutionary operations (Pratt, 1977; Fludernik, 1993). Key theoretical resources for this study include speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), the Cooperative Principle and conversational implicature (Grice, 1975), and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Within Uzbek linguistics, pragmalinguistics has developed primarily in dialogue with Russian and Western theoretical traditions (Safarov, 2008; Yuldosheva, 2019). Safarov's foundational monograph *Pragmalingvistika* (2008) systematised the field's core concepts and remains the primary theoretical reference for Uzbek researchers. More recently, scholars such as Mahmudov (2013) and Nurmonov (2012) have extended pragmalinguistic inquiry to include discourse-level phenomena such as dialogism, speech genre, and communicative implication in Uzbek literary texts.

Despite this growing body of work, the application of pragmalinguistic methods to specific Uzbek novelistic texts – particularly those of the post-Soviet period – remains limited. Existing studies of Sultonov's prose have focused primarily on his thematic preoccupations and narrative technique (Normatov, 2005) rather than on the communicative structures that underlie them. This study seeks to fill that lacuna.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, text-immanent approach to pragmalinguistic analysis. The primary data consist of dialogue sequences and interior monologue passages selected from the three target novellas. Selection criteria prioritised passages exhibiting high communicative complexity – that is, sequences in which

literal and implicational meaning diverge significantly, or in which face-threatening and face-saving strategies are demonstrably operative.

Each selected passage is subjected to multi-layered analysis: (1) illocutionary act identification following Searle's (1969) taxonomy; (2) Gricean implicature analysis, with attention to maxim exploitation and flouting; (3) presuppositional analysis, examining the propositional content taken for granted by speakers; and (4) politeness analysis, applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-threat calculus to evaluate strategic choices of directness, indirectness, and silence.

Where relevant, findings are contextualised with reference to Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism and to Uzbek pragmalinguistic scholarship (Safarov, 2008; Mahmudov, 2013), in order to situate the analysis within both universal and culture-specific frameworks.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Indirect Speech Acts and Illocutionary Divergence

One of the most consistent pragmalinguistic features of Sulstonov's prose is the systematic deployment of indirect speech acts – utterances in which the performed illocutionary act differs from the act conventionally associated with the syntactic form employed (Searle, 1975). This divergence between form and function creates interpretive complexity that the reader, like the interlocutor within the narrative, must actively resolve.

A representative example is found in *Saodat sohili*, in the exchange between G'ulom and Eshmuhamedov domla. When the domla remarks, "Bu ish oson emas" (This matter is not easy), the interrogative implicature is clear: the remark functions not as a simple assertion but as an indirect refusal, a face-saving mechanism through which the character declines commitment without directly uttering a negative speech act. The perlocutionary effect – understood by both interlocutors – is that of a socially calibrated rejection.

This pattern recurs throughout the novellas. Characters consistently use syntactic questions to perform assertions, employ assertions to issue directives, and deploy silence – the zero speech act – as a form of communicative action. Sulstonov's narrative voice rarely glosses these exchanges; instead, the pragmatic meaning is left for the reader to reconstruct, creating a hermeneutic dynamic that mirrors the actual conditions of social interaction.

Gricean Implicature and Cooperative Violations

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle posits that interlocutors in communication observe four maxims – quantity, quality, relation, and manner – unless they are deliberately flouting them to generate implicature. Sulstonov's dialogue frequently exploits such flouting as a narrative device.

In *Ko'ngil ozodadur*, the protagonist's response to a direct question about his intentions – offered in the form of an ostensibly unrelated anecdote – constitutes a

clear violation of the maxim of relation. Far from signalling communicative breakdown, this violation invites the interlocutor (and the reader) to derive a richer, inferentially complex meaning: the anecdote is an oblique answer, a metaphor for the character's interior condition that the character cannot – or will not – articulate directly.

Similarly, in *Yozning yolg'iz yodgori*, the maxim of quantity is repeatedly flouted through strategic understatement. Characters say less than the situation would conventionally require, generating implicatures that carry the emotional and ideological weight of the text. This narrative preference for reticence over disclosure is not merely a stylistic choice; it reflects a culturally embedded communicative norm in which directness is often socially costly, and obliqueness serves as a form of interpersonal protection.

Presupposition and Implied World-View

Presuppositions – the background assumptions that utterances take for granted – play a significant role in Sultonov's construction of ideological meaning. By embedding normative propositions in the presuppositional rather than the assertional layer of an utterance, a speaker can communicate evaluative content without directly asserting it, thereby reducing the communicative risk of contestation (Levinson, 1983).

In *Saodat sohili*, several key utterances presuppose a world-view in which institutional authority is morally compromised and individual freedom is constrained by social obligation. These presuppositions are never argued for; they are simply taken as given. The pragmatic effect is to normalise a particular moral framework while simultaneously sustaining the text's surface realism. The reader who shares the presupposed world-view perceives the text as psychologically true; the reader who does not is positioned as an outsider to the narrative community.

Face-Threatening Acts and Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework for face-threatening acts (FTAs) provides a productive lens for analysing the power dynamics encoded in Sultonov's dialogue. Characters at different levels of social hierarchy – teachers and students, elders and youth, officials and citizens – navigate their communicative interactions through a complex calculus of face threat and mitigation.

The interactions involving *Eshmuhamedov domla* in *Saodat sohili* are particularly rich in this regard. As a figure of educational authority, the *domla* consistently employs positive politeness strategies – appeals to shared values, solidarity-marking address forms – even when delivering face-threatening messages. This asymmetry between the warmth of the communicative surface and the severity of the underlying speech act creates an ironic distance that is central to Sultonov's characterisation of institutional power.

Conversely, subordinate characters – Gulom in particular – deploy off-record strategies and negative politeness formulae to navigate the constraints imposed by social hierarchy. Their communicative indirectness is not merely a personality trait but a structural response to the power asymmetries of the social world Sultonov depicts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this analysis suggest that pragmalinguistic indeterminacy is not an incidental feature of Sultonov's prose but a constitutive element of its literary method. By exploiting the gap between what is said and what is meant, Sultonov creates a narrative texture in which psychological truth can only be apprehended inferentially – through the reader's active reconstruction of implicature, presupposition, and illocutionary intent.

This approach places significant interpretive demands on the reader and simultaneously enacts, at the level of form, the social conditions it thematises: a society in which direct communication is risky, in which what cannot be said must be implied, and in which the most important meanings are always the unspoken ones. The pragmalinguistic complexity of the texts is thus inseparable from their ideological and ethical content.

From the perspective of Uzbek literary pragmatics, Sultonov's work represents a sophisticated engagement with the communicative possibilities of the novella form. His dialogue is neither naturalistic in the simple sense nor conventionally literary; it occupies a space between these modes, exploiting the resources of everyday pragmatic competence to achieve effects that are distinctively aesthetic. This finding aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) account of literary discourse as inherently dialogic, always constituted by the interanimation of multiple social voices.

The study also has implications for the broader development of pragmalinguistic approaches to Uzbek literature. The analytical framework applied here – combining speech act theory, implicature analysis, presupposition theory, and politeness theory – offers a replicable methodology for the study of other Uzbek literary texts, and for comparative work that situates Uzbek prose within the wider traditions of Central Asian and world literature.

CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that pragmalinguistic analysis offers substantial insights into the literary achievement of Khayriddin Sultonov's novellas. The systematic deployment of indirect speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and face strategies in his prose is not merely a formal device but a primary means by which psychological complexity, ideological meaning, and ethical ambiguity are encoded in the text.

The study contributes to three areas of scholarly inquiry: Uzbek literary pragmatics, where it extends existing frameworks to the analysis of contemporary

prose fiction; Sultonov studies, where it provides a new methodological perspective on a writer whose communicative strategies have not previously been systematically examined; and the broader field of literary pragmatics, where it offers evidence for the cross-cultural applicability of key theoretical frameworks.

Future research might extend this analysis to Sultonov's longer fiction, or undertake comparative work examining pragmalinguistic strategies across a broader range of Uzbek prose writers of the post-Soviet period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere gratitude to Professor A.B. Pardayev (Navoiy State University) for his invaluable guidance and scholarly mentorship throughout the preparation of this research.

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