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VERBS OF SPEECH ACTIVITY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE SYSTEM

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Abstract. Verbs of speech activity (*verba dicendi*) form one of the largest and most finely structured verb classes in any language, yet English–Uzbek contrastive descriptions of the class remain fragmentary. This study compares how the two languages organise the class as a system. A purposive sample of 43 English and 50 Uzbek verbs, drawn from explanatory dictionaries of both languages, was analysed by componential analysis of dictionary definitions, valency analysis and contrastive comparison. The verbs fall into nine semantic groups shared by both languages: general speaking, informing, asking, answering, directing, committing, evaluating, manner of speaking and interactive speech. The groups coincide, but the means of filling them differ. English distinguishes content-oriented *say* from addressee-oriented *tell* lexically, while Uzbek *aytmoq* covers both and marks the addressee with the dative case; Uzbek has a dedicated quotative verb *demoq* with no single English counterpart. Fourteen of the 50 Uzbek verbs (28%) are noun + light-verb compounds (*va'da bermoq*, *iltimos qilmoq*), against none in the English sample, and eight of the nine Uzbek interactive verbs carry the reciprocal suffix *-(i)sh*, where English relies on separate lexemes. These differences have direct consequences for bilingual lexicography: an English–Uzbek dictionary cannot pair the verbs one to one and must state valency and group membership explicitly.

Keywords: verbs of speech activity, verba dicendi, semantic field, componential analysis, valency, contrastive linguistics, lexicography, English, Uzbek.

Introduction. Speech is the central form of human activity, and every language possesses a large set of verbs that name it. These verbs have been studied under several labels: *verba dicendi*, verbs of speaking, verbs of communication, speech act verbs. The present paper uses the term *verbs of speech activity* for all verbs whose meaning contains the integral component 'to produce speech', whether they name the act itself (*speak*), its content (*say*), its purpose (*ask*, *promise*) or its manner (*whisper*).

Interest in the class grew out of speech act theory. Austin (1962) showed that verbs such as *promise* or *order* do not describe an action but perform it, and Searle (1976) reduced

illocutionary acts to five classes: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. Later work moved from acts to the verbs that name them. Verschueren (1980) and Ballmer and Brennenstuhl (1981) proposed lexical classifications, Wierzbicka (1987) described some 250 English speech act verbs in a semantic metalanguage, and Vanderveken (1990) formalised the illocutionary component of their meaning. Dirven et al. (1982) demonstrated that the four core English verbs *speak*, *talk*, *say* and *tell* each foreground a different participant of the same scene. Levin (1993) grouped English verbs of communication by their syntactic alternations, and frame semantics (Fillmore, 1982) treats them as realisations of a common communication frame. Cross-linguistic lexicalisation of communication concepts was examined by Proost (2007) for English, German and Dutch.

In Uzbek linguistics the verbs of speech were first described systematically by Qo'chqortoyev (1977), who analysed their meaning through valency. Hojiyev (1973) treated their grammatical behaviour within the general description of the Uzbek verb, and the systemic approach to the Uzbek lexicon was developed by Ne'matov and Rasulov (1995) and Mirtojiyev (2010). Pragmatic aspects of speech were studied by Safarov (2008) and Hakimov (2013).

Two gaps remain. First, the Uzbek class has been described mainly in itself, without a systematic comparison with English. Second, existing comparisons are usually limited to translation equivalents of individual verbs and do not ask how the class as a whole is organised. This study therefore addresses the following questions:

1. Into which semantic groups do verbs of speech activity fall in English and Uzbek, and do the groups coincide?
2. How do the core verbs of the two systems divide the same conceptual space?
3. Which structural means does each language prefer for building the class, and what follows for bilingual lexicography?

Materials and methods. The study is based on a purposive sample of 43 English and 50 Uzbek verbs of speech activity. English verbs and their definitions were taken from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2020), the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014) and Wierzbicka (1987). Uzbek verbs and definitions were taken from the five-volume *O'zbek tilining izohli lug'ati* (2006–2008) and the synonym dictionary of Hojiyev (1974). A verb was included if (a) the definition of at least one of its senses contains a component of speaking and (b) the verb belongs to the common, stylistically unrestricted or widely used vocabulary. Each semantic group was represented by its most frequent and typical members, so the sample illustrates the structure of the class and does not exhaust it.

Methods. Three procedures were applied in sequence.

1. *Componential analysis of dictionary definitions.* Each definition was decomposed into the integral seme 'speech' and differential semes: purpose of speaking, orientation to the addressee, manner, evaluation and reciprocity (Apresyan, 1974; Goddard, 2011).
2. *Valency analysis.* For every verb the obligatory and optional participants (speaker, addressee, content, topic) and their formal expression were recorded, following the approach of Qo'chqortoyev (1977) for Uzbek and Levin (1993) for English.

3. *Contrastive analysis.* The groups obtained for each language separately were compared for composition, internal oppositions and the morphological structure of their members.

The morphological structure of each verb was coded as simplex, derived or compound (noun + light verb), and the share of each type was counted for both samples.

Results. Componential analysis yielded nine semantic groups, and every group is present in both languages (Table 1). The class has a field structure: the group of general speaking forms the core, because its members carry only the integral seme, and the remaining groups add one differential seme each.

Table 1. Semantic groups of verbs of speech activity in the sample

No.	Group (differential seme)	English	Uzbek
1	General speaking (none)	say, tell, speak, talk	aytmoq, demoq, gapirmoq, so'zlamoq
2	Informing (transfer of new information)	inform, report, announce, declare, notify	xabar bermoq, bildirmoq, e'lon qilmoq, ma'lum qilmoq, yetkazmoq
3	Asking and requesting (obtaining information or action)	ask, inquire, request, beg, demand	so'ramoq, iltimos qilmoq, yalinmoq, talab qilmoq, o'tinmoq
4	Answering (reaction to prior speech)	answer, reply, respond, retort	javob bermoq, javob qaytarmoq
5	Directing (causing the addressee to act)	order, command, advise, urge, forbid	buyurmoq, amr qilmoq, maslahat bermoq, undamoq, taqiqlamoq
6	Committing (speaker's obligation)	promise, swear, vow	va'da bermoq, qasam ichmoq, ont ichmoq
7	Evaluating (positive or negative judgement)	praise, scold, blame, criticize, curse	maqtamoq, koyimoq, urishmoq, ayblamoq, tanqid qilmoq, so'kmoq, qarg'amoq
8	Manner of speaking (acoustic or articulatory quality)	whisper, shout, yell, mutter, murmur, stammer	shivirlamoq, baqirmoq, qichqirmoq, g'o'ldiramoq, ming'irlamoq, duduqlanmoq, to'ng'illamoq, vaysamoq, valdiramoq, javramoq
9	Interactive speech (reciprocity)	discuss, argue, chat, converse, quarrel, negotiate	suhbatlashmoq, gaplashmoq, so'zlashmoq, gurunglashmoq, bahslashmoq, tortishmoq, janjallashmoq, muhokama qilmoq, aytishmoq
	Total	**43**	**50**

Groups 2–6 correspond to Searle's assertive, directive and commissive classes, with directives split into asking (3) and directing (5) because the two differ in the status of the speaker. Groups 8 and 9 have no illocutionary correlate: they characterise how the speech is produced and how the participants are related.

The core of the system. The core verbs do not correspond one to one (Table 2).

Table 2. Feature profile of the core verbs

Verb	Focus	Addressee	Content	Direct speech
say	content	optional, *to* + NP	obligatory	yes

Verb	Focus	Addressee	Content	Direct speech
tell	addressee	obligatory, direct object	obligatory	restricted
speak	act, ability, language	optional, *to/with* + NP	absent or topic (*about*)	no
talk	interaction	optional, *to/with* + NP	topic (*about*)	no
aytmoq	content and addressee	optional, dative *-ga*	obligatory	yes
demoq	quotation	optional, dative *-ga*	obligatory (quoted clause)	yes, primary function
gapirmoq	act, ability, language	optional, dative *-ga*	absent or topic (*haqida*)	no
so'zlamoq	act, formal register	optional, dative *-ga*	topic or content	restricted

Three facts stand out.

First, English separates *say* and *tell* by the status of the addressee: *She said (to me) that she was tired* versus *She told me that she was tired*, where the addressee cannot be omitted. Uzbek expresses both with *aytmoq*: *U (menga) charchaganini aytdi*. The addressee is added or omitted freely by the dative form, and the verb does not change.

Second, Uzbek has a specialised quotative verb. *Demoq* introduces direct speech (*"Kelaman", – dedi u*) and has been grammaticalised: its converb *deb* works as a complementiser (*keladi deb o'yladim* 'I thought that he would come') and its participle *degan* links a name to a noun (*Anvar degan yigit* 'a young man called Anvar'). English has no verb with this range, and *demoq* is rendered by *say*, by a conjunction or by nothing at all.

Third, the pair *speak – talk* and the pair *gapirmoq – so'zlamoq* are built on different oppositions. The English verbs differ in directionality: *speak* presents speech as one-way and *talk* as an exchange. The Uzbek verbs differ in register: *gapirmoq* is neutral and *so'zlamoq* is bookish and formal (*nutq so'zlamoq* 'to deliver a speech'). The meaning of exchange is carried in Uzbek by a derived verb, *gaplashmoq*.

Structural means. The two samples differ sharply in morphological structure.

- **Compound verbs.** Fourteen of the 50 Uzbek verbs (28%) consist of a noun and a light verb (*qilmoq* 'do', *bermoq* 'give', *ichmoq* 'drink', *qaytarmoq* 'return'): *xabar bermoq, e'lon qilmoq, iltimos qilmoq, va'da bermoq, qasam ichmoq* and others. The nominal part is typically an Arabic or Persian loan. The English sample contains no such units; the corresponding concepts are named by simplex verbs, most of them of Romance origin (*inform, announce, request, promise*). Compound verbs dominate exactly the illocutionary groups 2–6, where they make up 12 of 20 Uzbek members.
- Reciprocal derivation. Eight of the nine Uzbek interactive verbs are formed with the reciprocal suffix *-(i)sh*: *gaplashmoq, so'zlashmoq, suhbatlashmoq, gurunglashmoq, bahslashmoq, tortishmoq, janjallashmoq, aytishmoq*. English expresses reciprocity lexically (*discuss, argue, chat*) and syntactically (*with* + NP, *each other*).

- Imitative stems. In group 8 Uzbek draws on imitative (*taqlidiy*) stems with the formants *-illa, -irla, -ira*: *shivirlamoq, ming'irlamoq, to'ng'illamoq, g'o'ldiramoq, valdiramoq*. English manner verbs are also sound-symbolic (*whisper, mutter, murmur*), but they are not derived by a productive pattern.
- Polysemy across fields. Several Uzbek verbs join the class through a secondary sense: *urishmoq* 'to fight' and 'to scold', *tortishmoq* 'to pull each other' and 'to argue', *yetkazmoq* 'to deliver' and 'to convey a message'. In English the same path is seen in *report* and *deliver (a speech)*, but within the sample it is less frequent.

Discussion.

The coincidence of the nine groups supports the view that the classification of speech verbs rests on the structure of the communicative situation itself (speaker, addressee, content, purpose, manner), which is universal (Fillmore, 1982; Proost, 2007). The differences lie in which component each language builds into the verb and which it leaves to grammar.

The *say – tell* opposition is a case in point. Dirven et al. (1982) describe it as a difference of perspective on one scene. Our comparison shows that this perspective is a lexical property of English and not of the scene: Uzbek leaves the perspective to the case system and keeps one verb. For the learner and the lexicographer this means that the Uzbek entry *aytmoq* needs two English equivalents distinguished by a syntactic condition (addressee expressed as direct object or not), and a bare list *aytmoq – say, tell* is insufficient.

The status of *demoq* confirms Qo'chqortoyev's (1977) observation that Uzbek speech verbs differ primarily in valency. *Demoq* requires a quoted clause and cannot take a topic phrase, whereas *gapirmoq* takes a topic and rejects a quoted clause. Its grammaticalisation into *deb* and *degan* places it on the border between lexicon and grammar, a position none of the four English core verbs occupies.

The weight of compound verbs in the Uzbek illocutionary groups has a historical explanation: the concepts of institutional communication (announcing, requesting, promising) were named with borrowed nouns, and the Turkic light verb supplied verbal categories. English borrowed the corresponding verbs whole. The consequence is practical. In an alphabetical Uzbek dictionary a compound verb is usually placed inside the entry of its noun, so a large part of the class is not visible as verbs at all, and a semantic field can be reconstructed only by reading noun entries. An ideographic or field-based presentation would remove this limitation.

Reciprocal derivation shows the opposite distribution of labour. Uzbek builds interactive verbs regularly from non-interactive ones (*gapirmoq → gaplashmoq*), so the relation between groups 1 and 9 is transparent. In English the relation between *say* and *discuss* is purely semantic. A bilingual dictionary should therefore show the derivational link on the Uzbek side and supply the preposition *with* on the English side.

The sample is purposive and small; the proportions reported describe the sample and should be tested on the full inventory of both dictionaries. The analysis relies on dictionary definitions and constructed examples; corpus data would allow frequencies and actual valency patterns to be measured. Dialectal and obsolete verbs were excluded.

Conclusion.

1. Verbs of speech activity form a field with the same nine semantic groups in English and Uzbek: a core of general speaking and eight groups, each defined by one differential seme.
2. The cores are not isomorphic. English lexicalises the addressee perspective (*say* vs *tell*) and directionality (*speak* vs *talk*). Uzbek lexicalises quotation (*demoq*) and register (*gapirmoq* vs *so'zlamoq*) and leaves the addressee to case marking.
3. The languages prefer different building material. Uzbek relies on noun + light-verb compounds in the illocutionary groups (28% of the sample), on the reciprocal suffix in the interactive group and on imitative stems in the manner group. English relies on simplex, largely borrowed verbs.
4. For lexicography, one-to-one pairing of the verbs is misleading. Entries for speech verbs should state the semantic group, the valency pattern and the conditions under which each equivalent applies, and compound verbs should be accessible as independent units.

Further research will extend the analysis to the complete inventory of both languages and to corpus evidence.

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