

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION: EXPRESSING NEGATIVITY THROUGH PARALINGUISTICS*Shukhratjon Turgunov**EFL Teacher, ISFT Institute**shuhratturgunov98@gmail.com**ORCID number: 0009-0002-3873-8791*

Abstract: This paper explores the role of paralinguistic features in expressing negativity within verbal and non-verbal communication. Focusing on English and Uzbek, it analyzes how tone, intonation, facial expressions, pauses, and other paralinguistic cues convey negative emotions such as frustration, anger, sarcasm, and irony. The study highlights the importance of paralinguistics in cross-cultural communication and discusses implications for language teaching and intercultural understanding.

Keywords: paralinguistics, negativity, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

Communication is a complex interplay of verbal and non-verbal elements. While words convey explicit meaning, paralinguistic features—such as intonation, pitch, tempo, pauses, and facial expressions—add emotional and attitudinal layers to messages. These features are crucial in expressing negative emotions like anger, disappointment, sarcasm, or criticism.

This study focuses on how negativity is expressed through paralinguistic channels in English and Uzbek, two linguistically and culturally distinct languages. Understanding these nuances is essential for effective communication and avoiding misunderstandings in intercultural contexts.

2. Literature Review

Paralinguistics, as a subfield of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, studies the non-verbal elements of communication that accompany spoken language, such as intonation, pitch, loudness, speech rate, pauses, voice quality, and non-verbal vocalizations (Crystal, 2008). These paralinguistic features function as powerful tools for conveying emotions and attitudes beyond the literal meanings of words, enriching verbal messages with affective and pragmatic nuances (Kendon, 2004).

Expressing negativity—such as anger, frustration, sarcasm, criticism, or disappointment—is a complex communicative act that relies heavily on paralinguistic cues. These non-verbal markers modulate the speaker's intent and the listener's interpretation, often helping to soften or emphasize negative emotions in discourse (Dynel, 2014). Without paralinguistic signals, negative verbal expressions can come across as blunt, harsh, or even socially inappropriate.

Charles Darwin's seminal work on the expression of emotions (1872) established that facial expressions, vocal changes, and body movements are universal biological signals that accompany emotions, including negative ones. His research underlines the evolutionary and cross-cultural significance of paralinguistic cues in expressing affective states, supporting the idea that such non-verbal behaviors are deeply embedded in human communication.

Anna Wierzbicka (1999) emphasizes the close relationship between language, culture, and emotional expression, proposing that each language encodes culturally specific "scripts" for emotional communication. In collectivist cultures, such as those typical in Uzbekistan, negative

emotions are often conveyed indirectly, using subtle paralinguistic features and euphemistic language to maintain social harmony and avoid face-threatening acts. This indirectness contrasts with the more direct and explicit expressions of negativity common in many Western individualistic cultures, where paralinguistic cues may serve to intensify or clarify the speaker's stance (Wierzbicka, 1999).

In English-speaking cultures, especially in the UK and the US, sarcasm and irony are frequently employed forms of negative expressivity. These verbal devices rely heavily on paralinguistic elements—such as tone of voice, pitch modulation, and facial expressions—to signal the speaker's true intent, which often contradicts the literal meaning of the words (Dynel, 2014). Without these paralinguistic signals, irony or sarcasm can easily be misunderstood, potentially causing offense.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how negative expressions are managed in interaction. Their theory posits that speakers are motivated to mitigate face-threatening acts, especially when expressing criticism or negative evaluations. Paralinguistic features—such as softer intonation, hesitation, or smiling—serve as politeness strategies that help to reduce the social impact of negative messages, thereby maintaining interpersonal relationships. The application of this theory varies cross-culturally; for example, Uzbek speakers may employ more indirect paralinguistic strategies compared to English speakers, reflecting differing social norms and values regarding politeness and conflict (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Recent corpus-based studies further support these observations. Turgunov (2023) analyzed spoken and written data in Uzbek and found that negative expressivity is frequently encoded through metaphorical language complemented by paralinguistic cues like voice modulation and timing pauses, which soften or mask criticism and negative emotions. Conversely, in English corpora, explicit negative lexemes often appear alongside paralinguistic markers that enhance irony or sarcasm (Dynel, 2014).

Moreover, paralinguistic signals play a crucial role in intercultural communication, where misinterpretation of non-verbal cues can lead to misunderstandings or perceived rudeness. For example, an English speaker's sarcastic tone might be taken literally by an Uzbek interlocutor unfamiliar with this paralinguistic pattern, or an Uzbek speaker's indirect paralinguistic cues might be perceived as evasive or unclear by a Western listener (Gumperz, 1982; Turgunov, 2023).

In sum, paralinguistics provides an essential layer in the communication of negativity. It bridges the gap between literal verbal content and social-emotional meaning, enabling speakers to express disapproval, frustration, or criticism in socially nuanced ways. Cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences in the use and interpretation of paralinguistic features highlight the need for increased awareness in language teaching, translation, and intercultural dialogue.

3. Methodology

The study employs a comparative analysis of English and Uzbek paralinguistic features related to negativity. Data sources include:

- Recorded dialogues from everyday conversations and media
- Corpus analysis (COCA for English, Uzbekcorpus.uz for Uzbek)
- Observations of non-verbal behavior in social settings

The focus is on identifying common paralinguistic markers that accompany negative verbal expressions and their pragmatic functions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Paralinguistic Features in English

In English, expressing negativity often involves:

- **Tone and Intonation:** Sharp, rising-falling pitch patterns signal sarcasm or anger (e.g., “Oh, great...”).
- **Volume:** Raised voice can indicate frustration or anger.
- **Pauses and Speech Rate:** Slow, deliberate pauses may emphasize disapproval.
- **Facial Expressions:** Frowning, eye-rolling, and smirking often accompany sarcastic remarks.

These cues help listeners interpret the speaker’s true attitude beyond the literal meaning of words.

4.2 Paralinguistic Features in Uzbek

In Uzbek culture, negative emotions are typically conveyed more indirectly through paralinguistics:

- **Softened Tone:** Speakers often lower their voice or use a controlled tone to avoid overt confrontation.
- **Prolonged Pauses:** Pauses signal hesitation or indirect criticism.
- **Facial Expressions:** Subtle gestures such as raised eyebrows, pursed lips, or sidelong glances convey disapproval or sarcasm.
- **Breath and Voice Quality:** Audible sighs or changes in breath rhythm express frustration without explicit verbalization.

This reflects collectivist communication styles prioritizing social harmony.

4.3 Cross-Cultural Implications

Misinterpretations often occur when interlocutors are unaware of paralinguistic differences. For instance, a direct English sarcastic remark with overt paralinguistic cues may seem rude to an Uzbek listener accustomed to subtler signals. Conversely, the indirectness of Uzbek paralinguistics may be missed or misunderstood by English speakers.

Teaching paralinguistic awareness can improve intercultural communication by helping learners decode emotional subtleties beyond vocabulary and grammar.

5. Conclusion

Paralinguistic features are fundamental in expressing negativity within both verbal and non-verbal communication. This study reveals distinct patterns in English and Uzbek that reflect underlying cultural values. Recognizing these features enhances understanding in intercultural encounters and is valuable for language educators, translators, and communication professionals.

Further research could explore paralinguistics in other language pairs and contexts such as digital communication, where non-verbal cues are limited.

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