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A Classroom Material Analysis to Develop Sociopragmatic Skills in English Language Education

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Abstract: This study investigates the alignment of Uzbek high school English textbooks with local sociocultural norms. Findings reveal a significant gap between textbook content and Uzbek communication practices, highlighting the need for cultural authenticity and explicit pragmatic instruction. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating local cultural norms, providing metapragmatic explanations, and fostering critical reflection to enhance learners' intercultural competence.

Keywords: Sociopragmatic skills, English language education, Uzbek high schools, cultural authenticity, pragmatic instruction, intercultural competence, metapragmatic explanations, critical reflection.

Introduction: The integration of sociopragmatic skills—learners' ability to use language appropriately in socially and culturally specific contexts—has become a critical yet underexplored area in English language education within Uzbek high schools. Despite Uzbekistan's recent educational reforms, such as the "2021 National Curriculum Development Concept" and the "2023 Program for Enhancing Foreign Language Teaching", which emphasize communicative competence, the development of sociopragmatic awareness remains inadequately addressed in classroom materials (Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan, 2021). This gap often results in learners producing grammatically correct but culturally inappropriate utterances, leading to misunderstandings in intercultural interactions (Khamidova, 2020). For instance, students may struggle to differentiate between direct and indirect refusal strategies in English, a challenge compounded by the fact that Uzbek communication norms prioritize indirectness and deference to authority (Toshpulatova, 2021). Globally, research underscores the necessity of explicit sociopragmatic instruction. Bardovi-Harlig (2001) argues that pragmatic competence cannot be acquired incidentally; it requires targeted pedagogical interventions. Kasper and Rose (2002) further emphasize that textbooks often neglect speech acts (e.g., requests, apologies) and politeness strategies, focusing instead on transactional language. This issue is particularly acute in contexts like Uzbekistan, where English textbooks frequently adopt Western-centric content, overlooking local cultural pragmatics. For example, Urinboyev's (2022) analysis of Grade 10 English textbooks revealed that less than 12% of activities addressed sociopragmatic nuances, such as adapting language to hierarchical relationships—a cornerstone of Uzbek social interactions (Jalilov, 2018).

The disconnect between global pedagogical standards and local realities is stark. Taguchi (2015) advocates for materials that incorporate authentic, context-bound examples and metapragmatic explanations (e.g., why certain phrases suit formal vs. informal settings). However, Uzbek textbooks often lack such features. A 2023 study by Rasulova found that 80% of Uzbek English teachers reported dissatisfaction with existing materials, citing insufficient cultural relevance and overreliance on structural exercises. This aligns with Vellenga's (2004) global findings, which showed that only 15% of ESL textbooks meaningfully integrate pragmatic content. In Uzbekistan, the problem is exacerbated by the historical dominance of grammar-translation methods, which persist despite the government's push for communicative approaches (G'ulomova, 2022). Cultural mismatches further complicate the issue. For instance, Uzbek learners may transfer L1 pragmatics into English, such as using excessive honorifics with peers (e.g., *siz* instead of *sen*), which can seem overly formal or distant in

English contexts (Xolboyeva, 2019). Conversely, direct English phrases like "Give me the book" may be perceived as rude in Uzbek culture, where indirectness (e.g., "Could I possibly borrow the book?") is preferred. Yet, current textbooks rarely address these contrasts. A content analysis by Khamidova (2020) showed that Uzbek-authored English materials included only superficial cultural notes (e.g., holidays) without explaining how language varies across power dynamics or social settings.

Recent efforts to localize materials have shown promise but remain limited. Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model, which stresses critical reflection on cultural norms, offers a framework for adaptation. However, as Toshpulatova (2021) notes, Uzbek textbook dialogues often lack authenticity, recycling scripted interactions (e.g., "tourist at a hotel") instead of reflecting real-world scenarios relevant to students, such as negotiating respect in teacher-student interactions. Digital resources, though increasingly available, similarly fail to bridge this gap. For example, Nurmatova's (2023) review of online platforms used in Uzbek schools found minimal interactive tasks for practicing politeness strategies or interpreting tone. This study aims to address these gaps by analyzing sociopragmatic content in Uzbek high school English textbooks. Building on Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) cross-cultural pragmatics framework, it evaluates how materials currently scaffold skills like recognizing register shifts, interpreting implied meaning, and adapting speech to cultural contexts. The findings will inform recommendations for material redesign that balances global communicative standards with Uzbekistan's sociocultural realities, ensuring learners acquire both linguistic and pragmatic agility.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative context analysis to evaluate the sociopragmatic content of English language textbooks used in Uzbek high schools. Grounded in Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) cross-cultural pragmatics framework, the methodology focuses on identifying how materials address (or neglect) culturally situated language use. Below is a detailed breakdown of the approach:

Research Questions

1. How do Uzbek high school English textbooks represent sociopragmatic features (e.g., politeness strategies, speech acts) in relation to local cultural norms?

2. To what extent do materials provide opportunities for learners to analyze and practice contextually appropriate language use?

3. What cultural mismatches exist between the textbook content and Uzbek communicative practices?

- Data Collection

A purposive sample of 10 state-approved English textbooks (Grades 7–11) used in Uzbek public schools, selected based on their alignment with the 2021 National Curriculum. Focus on grades where English transitions from basic to intermediate proficiency (CEFR A2–B1), a critical stage for sociopragmatic skill development.

- Analytical Framework

The analysis uses a hybrid coding scheme combining deductive categories (from theory) and inductive themes (emerging from data):

Category	Description	Example from Uzbek Context
1. Cultural Authenticity	How well materials reflect Uzbek communicative norms (e.g., indirectness, respect for hierarchy).	Analyzing if dialogues show deference to elders (e.g., using *siz* vs. *sen* in Uzbek).
2.Pragmatic Focus	Explicit/implicit treatment of speech acts (requests, apologies) and politeness.	Coding whether a dialogue explains *why* "Could you please…?" is preferred over "Give me…" in formal contexts

3. Contextual Variation	Representation of language across settings (formal/informal, power dynamics).	Assessing if a workplace dialogue includes appropriate titles (e.g., *Mr.* vs. first-name use).
4.Intercultural Reflection	Tasks prompting comparison of Uzbek and Anglophone pragmatics.	Tasks prompting comparison of Uzbek and Anglophone pragmatics.
5.Authentic Scenarios	Use of real-life situations relevant to Uzbek learners (e.g., school, family).	Evaluating if a "Visiting a Friend's House" dialogue includes Uzbek hospitality norms (e.g., refusing tea twice before accepting)

➢ Data Analysis Procedure

1. Contextual Coding:

- Step 1: Extract all dialogues, exercises, and cultural notes from selected units.

- Step 2: Code text segments using the above categories (e.g., labeling a dialogue as Pragmatic Focus: Request Strategies).

- Step 3: Note omissions (e.g., a unit on "Apologies" lacking discussion of non-verbal cues like avoiding direct eye contact in Uzbek culture).

Textbook Dialogue (Grade 9, Unit 4: "Making Requests"):

-"Student: "Hey, lend me your pen."

-"Peer: "Sure, here you go."

➢ Analysis:

- Pragmatic Focus: Lacks explicit instruction on politeness (e.g., no mention of "please" or modal verbs like "Could you…").

- Cultural Authenticity: Direct request ("lend me") conflicts with Uzbek preference for indirectness (e.g., "Mening qalamim yo'q, siznikidan foydalana olamanmi?").

- Contextual Variation: No distinction between formal (teacher-student) and informal (peer) scenarios.

RESULTS

The analysis of Uzbek high school English textbooks revealed critical insights into the representation and scaffolding of sociopragmatic skills, as well as persistent gaps between textbook content and Uzbek cultural communication norms. Below are the key findings structured around the research questions:

➢ Limited Alignment with Uzbek Norms:

Only 18% of dialogues reflected Uzbek cultural pragmatics. For example, units on "Making Requests" predominantly featured direct phrases like *"Pass me the book"* (Grade 8, Unit 3), disregarding the Uzbek preference for indirectness (e.g., *"Izin bersangiz, kitobdan foydalana olamanmi?"* [If you allow, may I use the book?]).

➢ Hierarchy and Respect:

While Uzbek culture emphasizes deference to elders and authority figures, just 12% of teacher-student dialogues modeled appropriate honorifics (e.g., *"Mr. Smith, could you please repeat that?"*). Most interactions used first names (e.g., *"John, explain this"*), conflicting with Uzbek norms of using titles (e.g., *"O'qituvchi"* [Teacher] + surname).

➢ Pragmatic Focus. Explicit Instruction Absent:

Only 10% of speech acts (e.g., apologies, refusals) included metapragmatic explanations. For instance, a Grade 10 unit on "Apologizing" provided phrases like *"I'm sorry"* but omitted cultural contrasts (e.g., Uzbek apologies often involve elaborate excuses or indirect admission of fault).

➢ Politeness Strategies Overlooked:

Dialogues rarely modeled mitigation devices (e.g.,

"Perhaps," "Maybe"). A Grade 9 dialogue showed a student saying, *"I don't agree"* to a teacher, which teachers interviewed called *"jarangli"* (disrespectful) in Uzbek contexts.

- Contextual Variation

Formal vs. Informal Settings: While 68% of units included dialogues, only 22% differentiated between formal and informal registers. For example, a "Job Interview" dialogue (Grade 11) used casual language (*"Hey, nice to meet you!"*), neglecting formal titles and structured politeness.

- Power Dynamics:

Materials lacked scenarios requiring adaptation to social hierarchies. A rare exception was a Grade 10 dialogue where a student used *"Could I ask…?"* with a principal, but no explanation highlighted its significance.

- Superficial Cultural Notes:

"Culture Corner" sections focused on Anglophone holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving) in 85% of cases, with minimal comparison to Uzbek practices. Only 2 units (Grade 11) prompted tasks like *"Compare how Uzbek and British people greet elders."*

- Missed Critical Analysis:

No activities asked learners to reflect on why directness might be inappropriate in Uzbek contexts. Teachers noted this as a *"katta kamchilik"* (major flaw) in interviews.

- Direct vs. Indirect Communication

Textbook Directness vs. Uzbek Indirectness: 90% of refusal strategies in textbooks used direct phrases (e.g., *"No, I can't"*), contrasting with Uzbek norms of hedging (e.g., *"Ehtimol, keyinroq"* [Maybe later]).

- Non-Verbal Cues Ignored: While Uzbek communication relies on gestures (e.g., hand-over-heart gestures to show sincerity), textbooks included no non-verbal pragmatics.
- Teacher Perspectives (Triangulation Data)

Material Dissatisfaction: 80% of teachers (15/20 interviewed) reported that textbooks *"madaniy jihatdan noto'g'ri"* (culturally inaccurate). One teacher stated: *"O'quvchilarim 'I need water' deyishadi, lekin bu o'zbekcha talqinda qo'pol bo'ladi"* [My students say "I need water," which sounds rude in Uzbek contexts].

- Scaffolding Challenges: Teachers noted that role-plays lacked guidance for adapting language to context. For example, a Grade 8 activity asked students to *"act out a debate"* but provided no frameworks for respectful disagreement. Grade 10 "Hospitality" Unit: Included a dialogue where a guest refuses tea twice before accepting, aligning with Uzbek norms. However, this was an exception. Grade 11 "Formal Letters": Explained differences between *"Dear Sir/Madam"* and *"Hi John,"* though limited to written communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore a critical misalignment between the sociopragmatic demands of real-world communication and the content of English textbooks used in Uzbek high schools. These results resonate with broader debates in language education about the role of cultural authenticity and explicit pragmatic instruction in fostering intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Below, we contextualize the key outcomes within existing literature and discuss their implications for pedagogy and material design in Uzbekistan. The limited representation of Uzbek communicative norms in textbooks—evident in only 18% of dialogues**—reflects a global challenge observed by Vellenga (2004), who found that ESL materials often prioritize Anglophone cultural contexts. In Uzbekistan, this issue is exacerbated by the historical reliance on Western-centric content, which overlooks local pragmatics such as indirectness and hierarchical deference (Jalilov, 2018; Toshpulatova, 2021). For instance, direct requests (e.g., *"Lend me your pen"*) contradict the Uzbek preference for circumlocution (e.g., *"Agar iltimos qilsangiz, qalamingizdan foydalana olamanmi?"* [If you please, may I use your pen?]). Such omissions risk fossilizing pragmatic errors, as learners transfer L1 strategies into English, potentially causing misunderstandings in intercultural interactions (Thomas, 1983). This cultural mismatch aligns with Khamidova's (2020) critique of Uzbek EFL materials, which she argues "prepare students for hypothetical Western scenarios rather than their lived realities." The absence of extended family dynamics or community-based interactions in textbooks—key features of Uzbek social life—further alienates learners from the content. As Taguchi (2015) emphasizes, materials must bridge the *"global-local divide"* by integrating culturally familiar scenarios to enhance engagement and retention. The lack of explicit instruction on politeness strategies and speech acts (e.g., only 10% of units explaining *why* certain phrases are appropriate) mirrors Kasper and Rose's (2002) assertion that pragmatics is often "taught incidentally, if at all." For example, textbooks provided phrases like *"I'm sorry"* without contextualizing how apologies in Uzbek culture may involve non-verbal cues (e.g., avoiding eye contact) or indirect admission of fault (Xolboyeva, 2019). This neglect of metapragmatic explanations

deprives learners of the analytical tools needed to adapt language to context, a cornerstone of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Teachers' frustrations with this gap—reported by 80% of interviewees**—echo global concerns. As one teacher noted, *"O'quvchilarim grammatik jihatdan to'g'ri gapirishadi, lekin ularning nutqi ko'pincha qo'pol tuyuladi"* [My students speak grammatically correct English, but their speech often sounds rude]. This sentiment reflects Bardovi-Harlig's (2001) warning that without explicit pragmatics instruction, learners may achieve accuracy but fail at appropriateness—a phenomenon termed *"pragmatic fossilization."*

The underrepresentation of hierarchical language (e.g., titles like *"O'qituvchi"* [Teacher]) in favor of egalitarian interactions (e.g., first-name use) clashes with Uzbek social norms, where age and status dictate communication styles (Urinboyev, 2022). For instance, a dialogue where a student says *"I disagree, teacher"* conflicts with the Uzbek emphasis on deference, which typically requires softening dissent through phrases like *"Agar iltimos qilsangiz…"* [If you allow…]. Such oversights contradict Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) cross-cultural pragmatics framework, which stresses the need to teach register shifts across power dynamics. Similarly, the dominance of informal language in formal scenarios (e.g., casual job interviews) risks mispreparing learners for professional contexts. As Rasulova (2023) notes, Uzbek students entering global workplaces may struggle to navigate Anglophone formality norms, perpetuating cycles of marginalization. Despite these gaps, isolated examples (e.g., the Grade 10 "Hospitality" unit mirroring Uzbek tea-refusal rituals) demonstrate the potential for culturally grounded material design. Byram's (1997) model of *"critical cultural awareness"* offers a roadmap: materials could pair Anglophone dialogues with tasks prompting learners to compare L1/L2 pragmatics (e.g., *"How do you show respect in Uzbek? How is this similar/different in English?"*). Digital tools, as suggested by Taguchi (2015), could supplement textbooks with authentic multimedia (e.g., videos of Uzbek-English bilinguals negotiating politeness). Teacher training is equally critical. As Nurmatova (2023) argues, educators need professional development to *"decode"* sociopragmatic nuances and adapt materials. For example, role-plays could be revised to include Uzbek-specific scenarios (e.g., resolving conflicts in multigenerational households).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the urgent need to reconceptualize Uzbek ELT materials through a sociopragmatic lens. By integrating local cultural norms, explicit metapragmatic explanations, and critical reflection tasks, textbooks can better equip learners to navigate the complexities of global communication while preserving their sociocultural identity. As globalization intensifies, the stakes for such reforms grow: without them, Uzbek learners risk becoming *"linguistically fluent but pragmatically tone-deaf"* (G'ulomova, 2022) in an interconnected world.

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