

AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH PARALINGUISTIC SYSTEMS: A CONTRASTIVE KINESIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Head movements and their accompanying vocal and manual signals are widely assumed to constitute a near-universal binary code for affirmation and negation, yet cross-cultural kinesic research has long shown that this opposition is neither uniformly executed nor uniformly interpreted across languages and cultures. This article examines the affirmation-negation dichotomy as a paralinguistic parameter within the broader semantic-pragmatic reclassification of nonverbal means in Uzbek and English, focusing on head nods and shakes together with the vocal particles and gaze behaviour that accompany them. Drawing on the classical account of motor signs for "yes" and "no", subsequent kinesic and pragmatic research on the discourse functions of head movement, and authentic examples from Uzbek literary prose, corpus sources, and prior Uzbek-language studies of nonverbal pragmatics, the analysis identifies both a shared iconic core and language-specific divergences in how affirmation and negation are paralinguistically encoded. The findings indicate that while the vertical-nod/lateral-shake opposition is broadly stable in both languages, Uzbek nonverbal practice shows a markedly wider zone of polysemy around the negation pole, where the same head movement or its withholding can encode refusal, hesitation, or embarrassed evasion depending on context, whereas English usage keeps these functions more clearly separated. Implications for the dichotomic model of paralinguistic classification, for translation, and for cross-cultural pragmatics are discussed.

Keywords: *paralinguistics; affirmation-negation; kinesics; head movement; nonverbal communication; contrastive linguistics; Uzbek-English; pragmatics*

1. Introduction

Since Darwin's earliest systematic observations on the expression of emotion, the vertical head nod for affirmation and the lateral head shake for negation have been treated as one of the most robust and near-universal elements of human nonverbal behaviour, yet Darwin himself already noted that this apparent universality is not absolute and that isolated communities exist in which the association is reversed or absent. Roman Jakobson's classic analysis of "motor signs for 'yes' and 'no'" placed this problem on a firm semiotic footing by showing that at least three distinct regional systems of jugular and facial motion are used in Europe alone to express approval and dissent, and that the iconic grounding of each system differs enough that speakers moving between them can seriously misread one another's signals (Jakobson, 1972). Subsequent kinesic research has complicated the picture further: rather than functioning as a simple binary switch, head movements have been shown to carry a wide range of discourse and pragmatic functions beyond affirmation and negation, including marking inclusivity, intensification, uncertainty, lexical repair, listing, and deixis (McClave, 2000), while the head shake in particular has been documented to extend, in some languages and registers, well beyond straightforward negation into expressions of disbelief, self-correction, and emphatic intensification (Kendon, 2002). Cross-linguistic replications of this research programme in Arabic, Bulgarian, Korean, and African-American Vernacular English found a

stable core of shared form-function pairings alongside language-specific extensions, confirming that the affirmation-negation dichotomy, however iconically motivated, is realised through culturally conventionalised and only partially overlapping systems rather than a single universal code (McClave, Kim, Tamer, & Mileff, 2007). Within the broader dissertation programme on the semantic-pragmatic reclassification of paralinguistic means in Uzbek and English, the affirmation-negation opposition has been identified as one axis of a dichotomic model that also encompasses axiological, gender-specific, and holonymic-meronymic parameters; unlike these other axes, however, the affirmation-negation dimension has not yet been subjected to a dedicated contrastive analysis, even though prior Uzbek-language research on nonverbal pragmatics has already registered, in passing, that a single Uzbek head movement may be read as either negation or hesitation depending on context, without situating this observation within a systematic cross-linguistic framework (Hasanova, 2021). Likewise, earlier comparative work on Uzbek, Russian, and English kinesic systems has catalogued individual gestures without addressing the affirmation-negation dichotomy as a coherent semantic-pragmatic category in its own right (Abduazizova, 2021). This article addresses that gap by asking, first, whether the core iconic opposition between vertical and lateral head movement holds equally in Uzbek and English paralinguistic practice, and second, whether the two languages differ in the range of secondary, non-literal meanings that cluster around the negation pole of the dichotomy. The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: the Materials and Methods section describes the corpus sources and classificatory procedure; the Results section reports the resulting inventory of affirmation and negation markers in the two languages; the Discussion situates these findings within existing kinesic and pragmatic theory and within the broader dichotomic model; and the Conclusion summarises the study's contribution and outlines directions for further research.

2. Materials and Methods

The study follows the same qualitative, corpus-informed contrastive design adopted elsewhere in this research programme, prioritising classificatory validity over quantitative generalisation at this exploratory stage. English-language material was drawn from the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English, supplemented by descriptions of nonverbal affirmation and negation in English-language prose; Uzbek-language material was drawn from classic and modern Uzbek prose (notably Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan kunlar* and Pirmqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli tunlar* and *Humoyun va Akbar*), from the *O'zbek tilining milliy korpusi* and *Ziyouz.com* electronic library, and from prior Uzbek-language pragmalinguistic scholarship in which authentic examples of head movement, gaze, and silence functioning as affirmation or negation signals have already been documented and glossed (Hasanova, 2021; Abduazizova, 2021). From these sources, contexts in which a nonverbal unit was explicitly identified, by the surrounding verbal co-text, as conveying agreement, refusal, consent, hesitation, or evasion were extracted and compiled into parallel English and Uzbek working files. Each unit was coded along three dimensions: (a) its primary dichotomic value, affirmation or negation, following the classical vertical-nod/lateral-shake opposition (Darwin, 1872; Jakobson, 1972); (b) its channel, distinguishing head movement from accompanying vocal particles (English "mm-hm", "uh-uh"; Uzbek "ha", "yo'q", "ha-a") and from gaze or silence-based signals; and (c) its secondary or extended function where one was discernible from context, following the inventory of non-literal head-movement functions established in the

cross-linguistic literature (McClave, 2000; Kendon, 2002; McClave et al., 2007). Coding was carried out by the researcher and cross-checked against the glosses already supplied in the Uzbek pragmalinguistic sources drawn upon, with residual disagreements resolved through re-examination of the wider textual context. As in the companion studies in this programme, no frequency counts or statistical association measures were computed at this stage, since the aim was to establish a reliable qualitative classification prior to quantitative validation on a larger, systematically sampled corpus; this limitation and the steps required to address it are taken up in the Discussion.

3. Results

The classification confirms that both Uzbek and English organise affirmation and negation around the same basic iconic opposition identified by Jakobson (1972): a vertical head movement (nodding, *tushirib-ko'tarish* of the head) functions as the default marker of affirmation in both languages, while a lateral, side-to-side head movement (shaking, *bosh chayqash* or *bosh silkish*) functions as the default marker of negation, and this core opposition is reinforced in both languages by parallel vocal particles (English *yes/mm-hm* versus *no/uh-uh*; Uzbek *ha/ha-a* versus *yo'q*). Beyond this shared core, however, the two systems diverge markedly in the secondary functions that attach to the negation pole. In the English material, head shakes retain a comparatively narrow functional range: besides straightforward refusal or disagreement, shakes are documented mainly as markers of disbelief, self-correction, and emphatic intensification (Kendon, 2002; McClave, 2000), but they are not typically reported as ambiguous between negation and an unrelated affective stance such as embarrassment. In the Uzbek material, by contrast, the same head-shake form recurs across contexts that a reader must disambiguate almost entirely from surrounding co-text: in one authentic example a character's head shake straightforwardly declines a proposed pairing in a game, functioning as unambiguous refusal, while Uzbek pragmalinguistic scholarship explicitly notes that an outwardly identical head shake can, in other contexts, express hesitation or an inability to answer rather than negation proper (Hasanova, 2021), a polysemy that is not paralleled to the same degree in the English inventory. A second point of divergence concerns the marking of affirmation under socially constrained conditions: where English relies principally on an explicit nod or verbal token even in polite or deferential exchanges, Uzbek narrative prose repeatedly encodes consent through the withholding of a negative signal combined with lowered gaze and silence, a pattern in which the addressee is expected to infer affirmation from the culturally conventionalised absence of refusal rather than from an explicit affirmative gesture; this silence-as-consent strategy interacts with the *andisha*-based politeness norms already identified in earlier stages of this research programme and further widens the pragmatic space that a bare head-movement classification must accommodate on the Uzbek side. Manual and postural correlates were comparatively marginal in both languages, appearing mainly as intensifiers of an already-established head movement (an emphatic downward hand chop reinforcing an English "no", a hand placed on the chest reinforcing an Uzbek affirmative) rather than as independent affirmation-negation channels in their own right.

4. Discussion

These findings support treating the affirmation-negation opposition not as a clean cross-linguistic binary but as an asymmetric cline whose iconic core is shared while its outer, pragmatically extended zones are language- and culture-specific, a conclusion consistent with

the broader cross-cultural literature showing that head-movement form-function pairings combine a stable universal component with substantial local elaboration (McClave et al., 2007). The particular shape of the Uzbek extension identified here, in which negation-pole signals shade into hesitation and evasion rather than into the disbelief- and repair-related functions documented for English (Kendon, 2002; McClave, 2000), is plausibly related to the same politeness-oriented avoidance of direct refusal that has been noted in connection with andisha-based communicative norms elsewhere in this research programme, so that what looks, from a purely kinesic standpoint, like referential ambiguity may in fact be a systematic pragmatic strategy for softening or deferring an unwelcome negative response; this interpretation, however, remains a hypothesis grounded in a small set of literary and previously glossed examples rather than a finding established through controlled elicitation or discourse-analytic work with live interactants, and it should be tested accordingly before being generalised. The silence-and-lowered-gaze affirmation strategy documented in the Uzbek material similarly complicates any classification of the dichotomy that is restricted to head movement alone, suggesting that a fully adequate treatment of affirmation-negation as a paralinguistic category needs to be defined multimodally, incorporating gaze and the pragmatically marked absence of a negative signal alongside the more obviously codified nod and shake; this has a direct bearing on the dichotomic model developed elsewhere in this dissertation programme, since it indicates that the affirmation-negation axis cannot be treated as symmetric with the other axes of that model (such as the axiological or gender-specific dimensions) without qualification, given that its negative pole carries a demonstrably heavier pragmatic load in Uzbek than its positive pole does. From a translation and cross-cultural pragmatics standpoint, the results suggest that rendering an Uzbek head shake or a silence-based affirmation into English, or vice versa, cannot rely on a one-to-one kinesic correspondence and instead requires attention to the surrounding discourse context that alone disambiguates the intended illocutionary force. As with the companion studies in this programme, the principal limitation of the present analysis is its qualitative, non-quantified character and its reliance on literary and previously published examples rather than on a systematically sampled corpus of spontaneous spoken or video-recorded interaction, so that the relative frequency and cross-cultural robustness of the divergences identified here remain to be established rather than assumed.

5. Conclusion

This article has extended the classical affirmation-negation dichotomy in kinesic research (Darwin, 1872; Jakobson, 1972) into a contrastive analysis of Uzbek and English paralinguistic practice, showing that both languages share a stable iconic core, vertical movement for affirmation and lateral movement for negation, while diverging in the secondary, contextually dependent meanings that accumulate around the negation pole, with Uzbek showing a markedly wider zone of polysemy between refusal, hesitation, and evasion than has been reported for English. The study further identified a silence-and-lowered-gaze strategy for encoding affirmation in Uzbek narrative material that has no direct counterpart in the English inventory examined here, underscoring the need to treat the affirmation-negation dichotomy as a multimodal rather than a purely head-movement-based category. Within the dissertation's broader dichotomic model of paralinguistic classification, these results indicate that the affirmation-negation axis is asymmetric in its pragmatic loading between the two languages and cannot be assumed to behave in parallel with the model's other axes without independent

verification. The findings carry practical implications for literary and audiovisual translation, where head-movement and silence-based signals cannot be transposed one-to-one across the two languages without attention to context, and for English for Specific Purposes instruction, where explicit discussion of the pragmatic range of negation-pole signals may help learners avoid misreading hesitation as outright refusal or vice versa. Future research should move from the present qualitative classification to a systematically sampled corpus of spontaneous spoken and video-recorded Uzbek-English interaction, apply frequency-based and statistical measures of association such as chi-square or Cramér's *V* to test the robustness of the divergences identified here, and extend the analysis to additional channels, including facial affect displays and prosodic marking, that were only marginally addressed in the present study.

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