CONDOLING ACROSS CONTINENTS: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF OFFICIAL CONDOLENCE MESSAGES IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH DIPLOMACY

Xidirov Olmosbek Abdurazak o‘g‘li
Guliston davlat pedagogika instituti
olmosbekxidirov@gmail.com

Abstract. *Official condolence messages occupy a marginal position in studies of diplomatic discourse, despite their importance for crisis communication and symbolic statecraft. This article offers a pilot comparison of 20 official condolence messages issued between 2018 and 2024: 10 from Uzbek governmental sources and 10 from English-language diplomatic institutions. Combining speech act theory, politeness theory, genre/move analysis, and intercultural rhetoric, the study identifies a seven-move condolence schema and compares its pragma-linguistic realization across the two sub-corpora. The findings suggest that Uzbek messages tend to intensify affect, foreground collective solidarity, include Islamic-origin invocations more often, and elaborate commitment clauses as relationship-maintenance devices. English messages, by contrast, more often favor institutional restraint, nominalized empathy, and brief assistance formulas. A practical implication is that diplomatic translators should treat religious and affective markers as functional resources, not ornamental material to be neutralized.*

Keywords: *official condolence messages, diplomatic discourse, crisis communication, speech act theory, politeness theory, genre analysis, intercultural rhetoric, pragma-linguistics, diplomatic translation.*

Annotatsiya. *Rasmiy hamdardlik xabarlari inqirozli kommunikatsiya va davlatning ramziy diplomatik faoliyatida muhim ahamiyatga ega bo‘lishiga qaramay, diplomatik diskurs tadqiqotlarida nisbatan kam o‘rganilgan yo‘nalishlardan biri hisoblanadi. Ushbu maqolada 2018-2024-yillar oralig‘ida e’lon qilingan 20 ta rasmiy hamdardlik xabarining pilot qiyosiy tahlili amalga oshiriladi: ulardan 10 tasi O‘zbekiston hukumatining rasmiy manbalaridan, 10 tasi esa ingliz tilidagi diplomatik institutlar manbalaridan olingan. Nutq aktlari nazariyasi, xushmuomalalik nazariyasi, janr va kommunikativ harakatlar (move) tahlili hamda madaniyatlararo ritorika yondashuvlarini uyg‘unlashtirgan holda, tadqiqot hamdardlik xabarlarining yetti bosqichli kommunikativ sxemasini*

aniqlaydi va uning ikki subkorpusdagi pragma-lingvistik voqelanishini qiyoslaydi. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, o‘zbek tilidagi xabarlarda hissiy ta’sirni kuchaytirish, jamoaviy birdamlikni alohida ta’kidlash, islomiy kelib chiqishga ega duo va tilak ifodalaridan ko‘proq foydalanish hamda munosabatlarni saqlash vositasi sifatida majburiyat va ko‘makka tayyorlik mazmunidagi qismlarni kengroq ifodalash tendensiyasi kuzatiladi. Ingliz tilidagi xabarlarda esa, aksincha, institutsional vazminlik, otlashgan empatiya ifodalari va qisqa yordam taklifi formulalariga ko‘proq ustunlik beriladi. Tadqiqotning amaliy xulosasi shundan iboratki, diplomatik tarjimonlar diniy va hissiy markerlarni tarjimada neytrallashtirilishi lozim bo‘lgan bezak unsurlari sifatida emas, balki muayyan kommunikativ vazifani bajaruvchi funksional vositalar sifatida talqin qilishlari zarur.

Kalit so‘zlar: *rasmiy hamdardlik xabarlari, diplomatik diskurs, inqirozli kommunikatsiya, nutq aktlari nazariyasi, xushmuomalalik nazariyasi, janr tahlili, madaniyatlararo ritorika, pragma-lingvistika, diplomatik tarjima.*

Аннотация. *Официальные послания с выражением соболезнований занимают сравнительно периферийное место в исследованиях дипломатического дискурса, несмотря на их важную роль в кризисной коммуникации и символической деятельности государства на международной арене. В данной статье представлен пилотный сравнительный анализ 20 официальных посланий с выражением соболезнований, опубликованных в период с 2018 по 2024 год: 10 из них были получены из официальных правительственных источников Узбекистана, а 10 - из англоязычных дипломатических институтов. На основе сочетания теории речевых актов, теории вежливости, жанрового анализа и анализа коммуникативных ходов (move analysis), а также межкультурной риторики в исследовании выделяется семикомпонентная коммуникативная схема выражения соболезнования и сопоставляется её прагмалингвистическая реализация в двух подкорпусах. Результаты показывают, что узбекские послания характеризуются тенденцией к усилению эмоциональной выразительности, акцентированию коллективной солидарности, более частому использованию формул и обращений исламского происхождения, а также более развёрнутому выражению обязательств и готовности оказать поддержку как средств поддержания межгосударственных отношений. Англоязычные послания, напротив, чаще отличаются институциональной сдержанностью, номинализированными средствами выражения эмпатии и краткими формулами предложения помощи. Практический вывод исследования заключается в том, что дипломатическим переводчикам*

следует рассматривать религиозные и эмоциональные маркеры не как факультативные декоративные элементы, подлежащие нейтрализации, а как функциональные ресурсы, выполняющие определённые коммуникативные задачи.

Ключевые слова: *официальные послания с выражением соболезнований, дипломатический дискурс, кризисная коммуникация, теория речевых актов, теория вежливости, жанровый анализ, межкультурная риторика, прагмалингвистика, дипломатический перевод.*

Introduction. Condolence is a paradoxical speech act: it is among the most formulaic forms of public communication, yet in diplomatic settings it is politically loaded. A state’s expression of grief does not merely comfort; it ranks relationships, acknowledges suffering, assigns moral meaning to loss, and often reaffirms future cooperation. The formula “we extend condolences” therefore performs more than sympathy. It converts affect into a recognizable act of international alignment.

Research on condolence has examined grief and sympathy in social interaction and culturally patterned bereavement [1], [2], [3]. However, official state-level condolence discourse, particularly from Central Asian diplomatic contexts, remains underexamined. This gap is significant because diplomatic condolence messages combine interpersonal emotion with institutional voice. They also operate under constraints of protocol, translation, ideology, and audience plurality.

The Uzbek case is especially revealing. Since independence, Uzbekistan has developed a diplomatic voice that appears to blend Soviet-era bureaucratic formality, Islamic moral vocabulary, Turkic-Central Asian kinship rhetoric, and the modern multilateral register of international organizations. Studies of post-Soviet Uzbek culture and Islam show that public language is shaped by both inherited state formality and selective religious-cultural legitimation [4], [5]. This article asks two questions. RQ1 asks what rhetorical moves and illocutionary strategies characterize official condolence messages in Uzbek and English diplomatic discourse. RQ2 asks how these messages diverge culturally in expressivity, religious reference, solidarity framing, and face-work strategies. The article first outlines the theoretical framework, then describes the corpus and coding procedure, and finally discusses four contrastive findings and their implications.

Theoretical Framework. The study is anchored in speech act theory, where condolence can be treated as an expressive illocutionary act: the speaker publicly displays sorrow toward a loss experienced by another party [6], [7]. In diplomatic discourse, however, the expressive act is rarely only expressive. It may also contain

commissive elements, as when a state offers assistance, and relational declarations, as when it reiterates friendship or alliance.

Politeness theory helps explain why condolence is interactionally delicate. For Brown and Levinson [8], face-work concerns the management of social dignity and relational vulnerability. Condolence is not a conventional face-threatening act in the same way as criticism or refusal, but it enters a context where the addressee’s symbolic face has been damaged by tragedy, national mourning, or leadership loss. Consequently, condolence requires positive face repair through warmth, respect, and affiliation, while also preserving negative face by avoiding overintrusion into grief.

Genre and move analysis provide the structural lens. Following Swales [9] and Bhatia [10], diplomatic condolence can be analyzed as a professional genre whose moves are conventional but variably realized. Intercultural rhetoric, especially Connor’s shift from contrastive rhetoric to context-sensitive intercultural rhetoric, supports attention to how similar genres diverge across institutions, audiences, and communicative histories [11], [12]. Fairclough’s [13] view of discourse as socially embedded further suggests that condolence messages are not neutral; they reproduce institutional values.

Islamic discourse conventions are particularly relevant for Uzbek messages. Phrases such as *Alloh rahmat qilsin* and *Inna lillahi va inna ilayhi roji’un* may function as culturally marked pragmatic resources, especially in messages to Muslim-majority states [14]. They distinguish condolence from adjacent speech acts such as general sympathy, solidarity declaration, and commitment to cooperation, though official messages frequently braid all three with condolence proper.

Data and Methodology. The pilot corpus comprised 20 official condolence messages issued between 2018 and 2024. The Uzbek sub-corpus contained 10 messages from the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Presidential Administration; the English sub-corpus contained 10 messages from the U.S. State Department, the UK Foreign Office, or the UN Secretary-General. The messages responded to major international disasters, terrorist attacks, plane crashes, earthquakes, and deaths of state figures. Selection favored comparable triggering events where possible, and all texts were publicly available on official government or intergovernmental websites.

The unit of analysis was the full message text. Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, rhetorical moves were identified through an inductively derived seven-move coding scheme. Second, pragma-linguistic features were coded, including religious markers, first-person plural solidarity framing, metaphor, hedging, and commitment clauses. Third, contrastive frequency analysis compared the Uzbek and

English sub-corpora. Corpus items were coded as [UZB-01] through [UZB-10] and [ENG-01] through [ENG-10]; the examples quoted below are invented but realistic composite renderings of recurring patterns, not verbatim extracts. The analysis was conducted in both source languages. Uzbek messages were analyzed in the original language rather than through machine translation, with English glosses used only for presentation. Where institutional English translations existed, they were consulted only after source-language coding so that translation choices did not predetermine the move analysis.

Findings and Discussion. The analysis suggests a seven-move schema for diplomatic condolence: addressee acknowledgment, expression of grief, tribute to the deceased or magnitude of disaster, solidarity declaration, religious or philosophical invocation, commitment to continued relations or cooperation, and formal closure. The schema appeared across both sub-corpora, but its density and cultural anchoring differed. In particular, the Uzbek messages tended to accumulate moves in longer syntactic chains, while English messages more often separated grief, solidarity, and assistance into brief clauses or omitted one move altogether.

Rhetorical Move	Present in Uzbek corpus (n/10)	Present in English corpus (n/10)	Key pragma-linguistic feature
M1: Addressee acknowledgment	10	8	Honorific address versus institutional salutation
M2: Expression of grief/sorrow	10	10	High-affect lexis versus restrained formula
M3: Tribute/magnitude of disaster	8	7	Moral evaluation or scale of loss
M4: Solidarity declaration	10	9	Inclusive “we” and people-to-people alignment
M5: Religious/philosophical invocation	9	3	Islamic formula or secular reflection
M6: Commitment to cooperation	8	5	Elaborated relational pledge versus assistance formula
M7: Formal closure	10	9	Named signatory or institutional close

First, Uzbek messages tended to contain a fuller move structure. M5 was especially diagnostic: [UZB-01] “Muhtaram Janobi Oliylari, fojia haqidagi xabarni chuqur qayg‘u bilan qabul qildik; Alloh marhumlarni rahmat qilsin, Siz va xalqingizga bardamlik tilaymiz, O‘zbekiston yaqindan ko‘maklashishga tayyor.” By contrast, English messages often condensed the sequence: [ENG-01] “We extend our deepest condolences to the families of those lost and stand with the people of X at this difficult time.” The Uzbek example integrates grief, invocation, solidarity, and cooperation into one relationally saturated sentence, whereas the English example prioritizes concise institutional sympathy. This does not imply greater sincerity in one corpus; rather, it indicates different norms for making sincerity institutionally legible.

Second, Uzbek messages appeared to privilege affective intensity and inclusive solidarity. Lexemes such as *chuqur qayg‘u*, *dard*, and *motam* occurred with first-person plural framing, as in [UZB-02] “Biz siz bilan birgamiz; ushbu dard va motamni butun xalqimiz yurakdan his etmoqda.” English messages tended toward nominalized empathy: [ENG-02] “Our deepest condolences are extended to all those affected by this tragedy.” Interpreted through Brown and Levinson [8], Uzbek discourse may prioritize positive face repair by reducing social distance, while English diplomatic prose appears to balance positive face with negative-face restraint by avoiding excessive emotional proximity.

Third, religious and ideological framing differed sharply. Explicit Islamic lexical markers occurred in 8/10 Uzbek messages but 0/10 English messages. [UZB-03] “Inna lillahi va inna ilayhi roji’un; Parvardigor marhumlarni o‘z rahmatiga olsin.” The nearest English counterpart was secular and affective rather than devotional: [ENG-03] “Our thoughts remain with the victims and their loved ones.” In Uzbek discourse, religious formulae may perform two functions at once: sincere cultural expression and pragmatic identity signaling, especially toward Muslim-majority recipient states. Their absence in secular Western foreign-office messages creates a translation problem: literal transfer may sound overly confessional in English, while deletion may erase an important solidarity cue.

Fourth, commitment clauses were more elaborated in Uzbek messages. English messages typically closed with a brief readiness formula: [ENG-04] “We stand ready to assist, as requested by the authorities.” Uzbek messages more often expanded the clause into a mini-declaration of bilateral solidarity: [UZB-04] “Qardosh xalqingiz boshiga tushgan sinovda birodarlik va hamjihatlik ruhida qutqaruvchilar va insonparvarlik yordamini yuborishga tayyormiz.” The emphasis on *birodarlik* and *hamjihatlik* may reflect a relationship-first orientation, while English institutional

prose often appears more task-first. This interpretation should be treated cautiously, since Hall [15] and Hofstede [16] offer broad cultural models rather than deterministic explanations.

Implications. Three implications follow. For diplomatic translators, religious and affective markers in Uzbek condolence discourse should not be treated as stylistic excess. They are pragmatically functional signals of shared grief, moral seriousness, and relational commitment. Translation therefore requires cultural equivalence strategies, such as calibrated retention, explanatory modulation, or register-sensitive paraphrase, rather than automatic neutralization. For diplomatic training programs in Uzbekistan, students would benefit from contrastive genre analysis of authentic MFA and presidential texts, especially exercises that compare Uzbek rhetorical warmth with English institutional concision. Such training could develop register flexibility without weakening national diplomatic voice. For intercultural communication theory, the dataset suggests that Central Asian diplomatic discourse constitutes a distinct rhetorical tradition. It is not reducible to a generic “Eastern” template or to a Western bureaucratic model; it warrants dedicated corpus-based study across Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Turkmen official communication. Such research would also help practitioners distinguish culturally grounded eloquence from unnecessary verbosity.

Conclusion. This pilot comparison has argued that official condolence messages in Uzbek and English share a recognizable diplomatic genre while diverging in move density, affective intensity, religious invocation, and commitment-clause elaboration. Uzbek messages tend to make condolence relationally expansive, drawing on Islamic-origin formulas and solidarity lexis, whereas English messages more often preserve institutional restraint and task-focused assistance. The study is limited by its small corpus, its reliance on a narrow set of institutional sources, and its inability to capture diachronic variation across administrations or crises. Future research should build a substantially larger, carefully balanced multilingual corpus of Central Asian diplomatic discourse, with parallel attention to source-language pragmatics, translation shifts, and audience reception. Comparative work should also examine whether similar patterns occur in congratulation, apology, and disaster-assistance genres in both bilateral and multilateral settings.

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