GRAMMATICAL INDIRECTNESS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: CONTEXTUAL INFERENCE AND FUNCTIONAL CORRESPONDENCE IN LITERARY DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Grammatical form does not uniquely determine the action performed by an utterance. This article examines how contextual inference connects sentence form with indirect speech-act functions in English and Uzbek literary dialogue. A qualitative contrastive analysis considers six short excerpts from Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Abdulla Qodiriy's O'tkan kunlar, and Abdulla Qahhor's O'g'ri. The analysis distinguishes linguistic form, propositional content, contextual assumptions, candidate illocutionary force, and the response represented in the text. Interrogatives can facilitate another speaker's contribution, defend an evaluative position, express deferential concession, or undermine an interlocutor; a negative declarative can challenge an apparent offer. A prohibitive imperative provides a counterexample to the assumption that socially marked or impersonal wording is necessarily indirect. The comparison identifies functional correspondences alongside differences in modal, copular, interrogative, and person-marking resources. It also shows why shared function, shared grammatical structure, and shared interpersonal value must be assessed separately. The proposed framework treats isomorphism and allomorphism as dimension-specific analytical descriptions rather than mutually exclusive labels for whole languages. Because the evidence consists of selected fictional exchanges, the findings establish interpretive possibilities, not contemporary usage frequencies or national politeness hierarchies.

Keywords: indirect speech acts; English–Uzbek comparison; contextual inference; grammatical indirectness; literary pragmatics; functional correspondence

1. Introduction

Speech-act interpretation requires more than identifying whether a sentence is interrogative, declarative, or imperative. An interrogative can make further information relevant while also encouraging speech, disputing an evaluation, or exerting pressure. A declarative can describe a situation and simultaneously challenge what an interlocutor has just proposed. Conversely, an imperative can perform an offer or an invitation without first functioning as a command. These possibilities make the relationship between grammatical form and communicative action a central problem for pragmatics (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975).

The problem becomes particularly important in English–Uzbek comparison. English auxiliary constructions and Uzbek inflectional or copular constructions cannot be equated simply because both admit an interrogative translation. Nor does a difference between word order and suffixation demonstrate a difference in the action performed. A useful comparison therefore requires an independent description of each expression and an explicitly defined basis of comparison. Haspelmath's (2010) distinction between language-specific descriptive categories and comparative concepts supplies a methodological safeguard against treating one language as the grammatical template for the other.

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This article develops that distinction through contextualized literary examples. It asks how an analyst can justify a speech-act attribution, preserve ambiguity, and compare its realization across languages. Its contribution is an evidence-sensitive procedure connecting contextual inference, pragmatic-functional classification, and dimension-specific correspondence.

Three research questions guide the analysis. First, which textual and contextual evidence supports an indirect interpretation rather than an ordinary question, assertion, or injunction? Second, how can a principal communicative function be distinguished from an accompanying evaluation or interpersonal effect? Third, which similarities and differences between English and Uzbek can legitimately be described as functional isomorphism or structural allomorphism on the basis of a small, historically situated sample?

1.1. Speech acts, inference, and interpersonal evaluation

Searle's (1975) account explains indirect speech acts through the performance of one illocutionary act by means of another. The familiar case of a question functioning as a request is important, but it does not exhaust indirectness. Grice's (1975) account of conversational implicature explains how a hearer can move beyond what is explicitly said by relating an utterance to the conversational purpose and mutually available assumptions. These frameworks address complementary problems: identifying an action and explaining how an interpretation becomes inferentially available.

Neither framework licenses the equation of every additional interpretation with an indirect speech act. A presupposition concerns background assumptions associated with using an expression; an implicature is an additional communicated meaning inferred in context. An indirect speech act concerns the action performed through the utterance. The three can interact without being interchangeable. Likewise, an utterance may be insincere, ironic, or evaluative without thereby becoming an indirect directive. An analyst must specify the proposed action and show how the text supports that attribution (Levinson, 1983; Culpeper & Haugh, 2014).

Common ground is not identical to objectively true information. It concerns what participants treat as shared for the purposes of the interaction (Stalnaker, 2002). Their assumptions may diverge, and subsequent turns can expose that divergence. Clark's (1996) account of language as joint action and Schegloff's (2007) account of sequence organization consequently make the response relevant evidence. A response, however, does not transparently reveal a speaker's mental intention: it can display understanding, disagreement, strategic literalism, or repair. Recognition of a request must also be distinguished from compliance with it.

Conventionality adds another dimension. Repeated use can make a form–function association readily recognizable without requiring an analyst to posit a consciously executed reasoning sequence in every encounter (Morgan, 1978). The present study reconstructs interpretive relations; it does not measure processing speed or demonstrate conventionalization. Its short literary sample cannot establish how frequently a construction occurred in either speech community.

Interpersonal evaluation must also remain independent of the direct–indirect distinction. Brown and Levinson (1987) relate indirect strategies to face management, whereas Blum-Kulka (1987) demonstrates that perceived politeness cannot be reduced to a simple scale of indirectness. A modal question can be confrontational, and a direct injunction can be appropriate to its setting. Leech (2014) likewise situates politeness within relations between participants and their competing concerns. Uzbek pragmalinguistic scholarship provides a complementary basis for considering utterance meaning through communicative purpose and context (Safarov, 2008; Hakimov, 2013).

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2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Design and source boundaries

The study uses qualitative contrastive close reading. Six numbered excerpts are selected for analytical contrast rather than statistical representativeness: three English excerpts from Austen (1813, Chapters 1 and 34) and Carroll (1865, Chapter 7), and three Uzbek excerpts from Qodiriy (1926, the parental discussion of Otabek's second marriage) and Qahhor (1936, the amin's questioning of Qobil bobo). Selection prioritizes a recoverable interactional setting, a short identifiable expression, and a plausible alternative to the initial speech-act classification. The final Uzbek example functions as a negative control for indirectness.

The evidence is published literary dialogue, not newly recorded conversation, questionnaire responses, or invented bilingual exchanges. Literary dialogue is authorially designed and cannot be treated as an unmediated transcript of everyday speech. Nevertheless, its represented turns and narrative framing provide evidence for historically situated constructions of communicative action. Work on dialogue as writing supports using such material while retaining the distinction between represented interaction and naturally occurring talk (Culpeper & Kytö, 2010).

The English and Uzbek passages are independently occurring source examples, not translations of one another. English renderings accompanying the Uzbek quotations are explanatory translations prepared for this article; they are not additional English observations. Short Uzbek quotations are presented in Latin script with normalized apostrophe typography. Chapters and narrative episodes are used as locators because pagination varies across editions. No edition-specific page number is asserted for a primary quotation.

2.2. Analytical procedure

Each excerpt is examined at five levels. The first records grammatical resources, including clause type, negation, modality, person marking, and relevant lexical material. The second identifies the propositional content without replacing it with the presumed intention. The third specifies the contextual bridge: what participants know, what action is currently relevant, and what institutional or interpersonal relation the narrative establishes. The fourth identifies a candidate principal act and any accompanying stance. The fifth checks the attribution against the represented response and a competing interpretation.

The comparison then asks whether the examples correspond in action, inferential route, formal construction, interpersonal orientation, and response expectations. Correspondence in one dimension does not imply correspondence in the others. Here, functional isomorphism means an analytically specified similarity of communicative organization; structural allomorphism means a difference in the linguistic resources implementing a comparable relation. The term allomorphism is used in this contrastive sense, not in the narrower morphological sense of alternative realizations of one morpheme.

An indirect interpretation is retained when an additional action is supported by the local exchange rather than only by an imagined situation. A competing reading is retained when the passage does not determine a unique function. The inquiry does not report inter-annotator agreement, experimental validation, or inferential statistics: no independent coding study or participant experiment was conducted. Figure 1 summarizes the interpretive procedure without presenting it as a psychological processing model.

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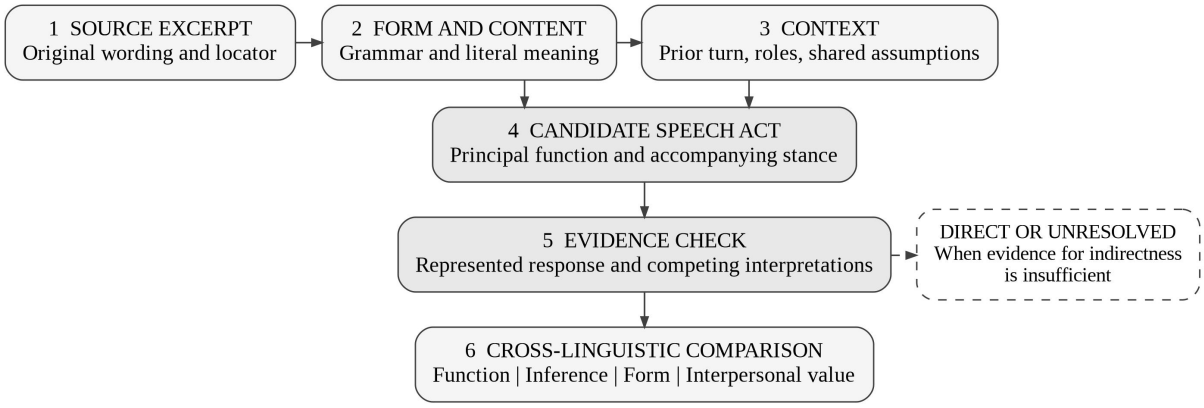


Figure 1. Evidence-sensitive analysis of grammatical indirectness and cross-linguistic correspondence.

Note. The diagram is an analytical synthesis of speech-act, inferential, interactional, and comparative principles (Searle, 1975; Grice, 1975; Clark, 1996; Haspelmath, 2010). The verification stage permits a direct or unresolved classification; a hearer's compliance is not required for recognizing an act.

3. Results

3.1. Interrogatives and declaratives in the organization of participation

Example E1. Austen, Pride and Prejudice, Chapter 1

Mrs Bennet: "Do not you want to know who has taken it?"

Mr Bennet: "You want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it."

Mrs Bennet has introduced the news that Netherfield Park has been let. Her husband's initial lack of response makes the continuation of her report interactionally relevant. Her negative interrogative explicitly concerns his desire for information, but it also presses him to display interest and authorize the telling. His response does not answer that question with a simple statement about his own curiosity. It attributes a desire to her and removes an obstacle to her speaking. The narrative continuation represents the response as sufficient for her to proceed (Austen, 1813, Chapter 1).

Two distinct indirect relations are therefore available within the same exchange. The question can be read as a prompt for participation rather than a neutral investigation of private preference. The declarative can operate as permission or an invitation to continue without adopting imperative form. At the same time, the statement about Mrs Bennet's desire contributes a teasing evaluation. This secondary stance should not displace the exchange's organizational function: enabling the report to begin.

Mr Bennet's words retain assertive content: he represents himself as having no objection. The permission-like force emerges because the relevant activity is Mrs Bennet's prospective telling. The grammatical meaning does not disappear, and the passage does not establish that every statement of non-objection functions as an invitation.

3.2. Modal questions and confrontational stance

Example E2. Austen, Pride and Prejudice, Chapter 34

Darcy: "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?"

The utterance occurs during Darcy and Elizabeth's confrontation surrounding his first proposal. Its interrogative form and the modal could do not make it a deferential request. Darcy challenges the reasonableness of an expectation and simultaneously maintains an adverse evaluation of Elizabeth's

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family connections. The modal frames what it would have been reasonable to expect; the action is argumentative defense accompanied by an affronting assessment (Austen, 1813, Chapter 34).

The relevant contextual bridge is not that Darcy lacks information about Elizabeth's expectations. The exchange already concerns the insulting terms of his proposal. Asking whether she could expect rejoicing projects a negative answer and makes that answer support his position. The construction thus makes a proposition arguable while also treating its rejection as warranted. This supports a rhetorical, evaluative interpretation without requiring the stronger claim that the sentence is secretly a command.

E2 is especially useful for separating mechanism from interpersonal value. E1 and E2 both make another contribution relevant through interrogative grammar, but their interactional orientations differ. E1 organizes a domestic telling; E2 defends a contested social evaluation. A label such as polite modal question would erase the contrast. The result accords with the separation of indirectness from politeness argued by Blum-Kulka (1987) and Leech (2014).

3.3. Uzbek modal predication and deferential concession

Example U1. Qodiriy, O'tkan kunlar, parental discussion of Otabek's second marriage

Otabek: "Sizlarni ranjitib bo'ladimi?"

Explanatory translation: "Would it be acceptable to upset you?"

Otabek's response belongs to a family discussion in which parental wishes bear on his marriage. The sentence does not state agreement by means of an explicit acceptance verb. Instead, it questions the acceptability of causing the addressees distress. Its contextual force is a deferential concession: parental disappointment is represented as something the speaker should not willingly cause. The precise scope of concession still requires the larger episode; the short question alone should not be treated as an unqualified expression of enthusiasm for every aspect of the arrangement (Qodiriy, 1926).

The construction combines a converb, ranjitib, with bo'ladi and interrogative -mi. In this environment, the predication concerns practical or normative acceptability rather than merely physical capacity. The expression sizlarni identifies the addressees. Because the represented addressees are Otabek's parents, plural reference and respectful interpersonal orientation coexist; the form should not be presented as proof that plural marking alone encodes indirectness. Uzbek descriptions of syntax provide the grammatical background, while the concession reading depends on the exchange (Mahmudov & Nurmonov, 1995; Safarov, 2008).

U1 and E2 share a restricted inferential organization: a modal question presents a prospective attitude or action as unacceptable or unreasonable. Their principal interpersonal functions nevertheless differ. Otabek's question limits his own willingness to oppose the addressees, whereas Darcy's challenges the addressee's evaluative position. The comparison therefore reveals inferential similarity without interpersonal identity. It would be unsound to convert these character-specific orientations into a general contrast between accommodating Uzbek speakers and confrontational English speakers.

3.4. Background assumptions and mock inquiry

Example U2. Qahhor, O'g'ri, the amin's questioning of Qobil bobo

The amin: "Yo'qolmasdan ilgari bormidi?"

Explanatory translation: "Did it exist before it went missing?"

Qobil bobo has reported the disappearance of his ox. Against that background, asking whether it existed before disappearing is conspicuously unhelpful. The utterance retains the surface organization of an inquiry, including an existential predicate and interrogative marking, but the requested information is already available through the reported event. The official's conduct and the narrative's presentation of the

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encounter support an interpretation of mock inquiry that diminishes the petitioner rather than advancing the search (Qahhor, 1936).

The analysis must not overstate what redundancy alone proves. Known-answer questions can serve legitimate pedagogical, procedural, or checking functions. Here the case for belittlement arises from the combination of redundant content, the petitioner's vulnerability, and the surrounding portrayal of official indifference. Nor should existence before disappearance be indiscriminately labeled a grammatical presupposition triggered by -mi. The prior existence of the ox is available from the event description and shared conversational setting; the interrogative marker does not independently encode that background.

U2 and E2 exhibit a functional correspondence in evaluative questioning: neither is best explained as a straightforward attempt to fill an information gap. Their linguistic implementation differs, however. E2 overtly predicates expectation and evaluation through could expect and rejoice; U2 makes the informational inadequacy of an existential question itself salient. Their power relations are also different. A disagreement during a marriage proposal and a petitioner's encounter with an official are not interchangeable social settings. The similarity is consequently bounded, not a claim of complete equivalence.

3.5. Challenging an offer through a negative declarative

Example E3. Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Chapter 7

The March Hare: "Have some wine."

Alice: "I don't see any wine."

The March Hare: "There isn't any."

The initial imperative appears to offer something that the setting does not provide. Alice's reply is grammatically a report about perception. In its sequential position, however, it challenges the practical basis of the offer and makes the absence of wine relevant. The March Hare's admission confirms that the obstacle is not simply Alice's failure to notice an available drink. The surrounding exchange then explicitly concerns the civility of the participants' conduct (Carroll, 1865, Chapter 7).

The principal analytical target is Alice's declarative response, not an assumption that the initial imperative must be indirect. Her statement provides a reason to question the preceding act rather than saying explicitly that the offer is defective. An interpretation as an implicit request to identify the wine remains conceivable at the first response, but the next turn strengthens the challenge reading. This is a case in which sequential development helps discriminate between candidate actions.

The imperative also demonstrates a necessary boundary. An imperative can conventionally perform an offer; it need not first perform a command and then become an offer through inference. The absence of the offered object can make that offer infelicitous or provocative without automatically making its grammatical realization indirect. Aikhenvald's (2010) account of imperatives supports distinguishing imperative form from a single, invariant command function.

3.6. A direct Uzbek prohibitive as a negative control

Example U3. Qahhor, O'g'ri, the same official encounter

The amin: "Yig'lanmasin!"

Explanatory translation: "No crying!"

The form contains the verb yig'la-, the impersonalizing or passive-related element -n-, negative -ma-, and third-person imperative/jussive -sin. Although its grammatical organization differs from an overt second-person instruction, its prohibitive content is not concealed: the crying is to stop. In the represented encounter, the official uses the expression to regulate the petitioner's conduct. It is therefore

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classified here as a direct prohibitive with impersonal packaging, not as an indirect act merely because the addressee is not named (Qahhor, 1936; Mahmudov & Nurmonov, 1995).

U2 and U3 occur within the same unequal encounter, yet only U2 receives an indirect evaluative classification. Holding the narrative relationship approximately constant helps expose the difference between indirectness and power. Both utterances may demean or constrain the petitioner; shared interpersonal consequences do not erase their different grammatical-pragmatic organization. Table 1 consolidates the classifications and their evidential limits.

Table 1. Functional analysis and bounded English–Uzbek correspondences.

Excerpt	Grammatical resources	Function and textual evidence	Bounded comparative result
E1 Austen, Ch. 1	Negative interrogative; declarative of non-objection	Prompts and enables a telling; continuation supports this reading.	Participation management; teasing is a secondary stance.
E2 Austen, Ch. 34	Modal interrogative: could expect	Defends an evaluation through a projected negative answer.	Shares an evaluative-question function with U2, not its social setting.
U1 Qodiriy	Converb + bo‘ladi + -mi	Deferential concession; acceptability of upsetting parents is questioned.	Modal reasoning resembles E2; interpersonal orientation differs.
U2 Qahhor	Existential interrogative with past reference	Mock inquiry; context makes the information request unhelpful.	Functionally comparable to evaluative questioning; grammar differs.
E3 Carroll, Ch. 7	Negative perceptual declarative	Challenges an apparent offer; the next turn confirms the absence.	Shows the role of response evidence; no independent Uzbek pair is claimed.
U3 Qahhor	Impersonal negative imperative/jussive	Direct prohibition of crying; a negative control for indirectness.	Power and impersonal packaging do not entail indirectness.

Note. E and U identify English and Uzbek source excerpts; letters do not indicate translated pairs. The classifications concern the represented exchanges. A comparison of characters or episodes is not a frequency estimate or a national-cultural generalization.

3.7. A multidimensional account of functional correspondence

The excerpt analysis supports a distinction between principal act, accompanying stance, and grammatical packaging. E1 permits a participation-management reading with a teasing stance. E2 and U2 support evaluative challenge or belittlement through questions, but their inferential routes differ. U1 supports deferential concession rather than neutral information seeking. E3 supports a challenge through

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a negative declarative. U3 marks the boundary of the dataset by showing that a socially controlling, impersonal form can nevertheless express its injunction directly.

These results do not constitute a complete replacement for Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts. They refine its use in close reading. An evaluative challenge may combine an assertive commitment with expressive stance, while a concession reorganizes participants' positions without necessarily amounting to an unconditional promise. Forcing every excerpt into one broad class would conceal the very contextual relations under investigation. Conversely, unrestricted multiplication of labels would make the analysis unfalsifiable. A principal act is therefore stated together with only those secondary functions supported by the passage.

Formally, the English examples use auxiliaries, complement clauses, and lexical evaluation. Uzbek examples use interrogative -mi, copular or existential predication, converbs, and person or voice-related morphology. These differences concern the selected expressions, not the full resources of either language. Functional correspondence therefore coexists with structural non-equivalence.

4. Discussion

4.1. What contextual inference contributes

Candidate interpretations are constrained by propositional content, the activity under way, participants' represented knowledge, and subsequent turns. Searle's (1975) action-based account, Grice's (1975) inferential account, and the interactional approaches of Clark (1996) and Schegloff (2007) are complementary precisely because they address different parts of this relation.

A crucial consequence concerns the evidential status of the response. Mr Bennet's declarative is followed by continued telling, which supports a participation-enabling interpretation. Alice's challenge is followed by an admission of absence, which narrows the initial ambiguity. Yet a response could also resist, reinterpret, or strategically misread an utterance. The framework accordingly treats represented uptake as defeasible evidence, not proof of a uniquely recoverable intention. It does not require obedience or successful persuasion as a condition for identifying the original action.

4.2. Isomorphism and allomorphism without national stereotypes

The terms isomorphism and allomorphism are most useful when their dimension is named. A question can correspond functionally to another question while differing in its modal source, participant orientation, and social effect. Conversely, two superficially similar questions can perform different actions. Haspelmath's (2010) comparative-concept approach prevents a label such as interrogative from becoming a substitute for demonstrated equivalence. The present analysis therefore avoids dividing entire constructions into wholly identical or wholly different sets.

The same restraint applies to politeness. U1 cannot establish that Uzbek indirectness is generally deferential, just as E2 cannot establish that English modal questions are generally confrontational. Authors, characters, narrative purposes, historical periods, and situations differ. A wider study would have to compare similar activity types and participant relations before attributing a contrast to language or cultural practice. Cross-cultural pragmatics offers methodological grounds for that control, but the literary examples here do not independently satisfy it (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989).

4.3. Implications, limitations, and further testing

For analysis and language teaching, the practical implication is to compare actions in context rather than offer a list of interchangeable translations. A learner who treats every modal question as a polite request may miss Darcy's challenge. A learner who equates every Uzbek impersonal form with mitigation may misread the amin's prohibition. Conversely, translating Otabek's question only as a

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capacity inquiry would underrepresent its deferential orientation. These are interpretive consequences of the passages, not measured instructional outcomes.

The study has four substantive limitations. Its cases are purposively selected and cannot establish distributional prevalence. They are fictional representations without recoverable acoustic evidence. The English and Uzbek works are historically and generically non-identical, so language and author effects cannot be isolated. Finally, interpretation is not supported by independent annotation or reader-response testing. These limits restrict the scope of the claims without making the source examples interchangeable with invented illustrative sentences.

A follow-up investigation could assemble a genre- and period-controlled dataset, retain the full preceding and following turns, and specify the criteria for direct, indirect, and unresolved cases before classification. Independent bilingual analysts could then compare judgments, recording disagreements rather than suppressing them. Contemporary spoken data would be necessary for claims about present-day conversational practice. Such a design would test the proposed framework; those measurements are not outcomes of the present article.

5. Conclusion

The comparison shows how English and Uzbek literary dialogue can link grammatical form to communicative action through context-sensitive inference. Interrogatives provide resources for participation management, evaluation, and concession; a negative declarative can challenge a preceding offer. A direct Uzbek prohibitive demonstrates that unusual person or voice packaging, social asymmetry, and interpersonal pressure are not sufficient conditions for indirectness.

The central methodological result is a separation of five questions: what the expression says, what action the exchange supports, how that action is inferred, which grammatical resources realize it, and how the interlocutor responds. Functional correspondence can coexist with structural allomorphism, while structural resemblance can coexist with divergent stance. Within the limits of six literary excerpts, this multidimensional account provides a transparent basis for English–Uzbek comparison without treating translations as independent evidence or character behavior as a national linguistic norm.

Data availability

Primary passages are identified by work and chapter or episode in Section 2 and the example headings. Explanatory translations are not independent observations.

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