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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ATTENTION-GETTING EXPRESSIONS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK FROM A LINGUOPRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study investigates the linguopragmatic features of attention-getting units in English and Uzbek, focusing on their linguistic form, discourse context, communicative intention, speech-act realization, directness, politeness, and social function. The material of the research includes English examples drawn from established corpus-based analysis and Uzbek examples from spoken, digital, pedagogical, formal, and warning-oriented discourse, supplemented by a systematically organized candidate inventory. The analysis demonstrates qualitative comparative-pragmatic design combining contextual analysis, discourse analysis, speech-act theory, and politeness analysis. The findings support a functional definition of attention-getting expressions as context-dependent linguopragmatic units and contribute to comparative pragmatics by identifying both cross-linguistic correspondences and language-specific patterns.

Keywords: attention-getting devices, linguopragmatics, pragmatics, English, Uzbek, speech acts, politeness, discourse, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

Attention-getting expressions constitute an important but relatively underexplored category of interactional linguistic resources through which speakers attract, redirect, maintain, or intensify an addressee's attention. Attention is a fundamental component of successful interpersonal communication because speakers must frequently establish the addressee's orientation before conveying information, issuing a directive, initiating a request, or managing a conversational sequence. Although previous pragmatic studies have examined attention signals, discourse markers, summonses, vocatives, and related interactional forms, systematic English–Uzbek comparison remains limited. A direct comparison of English and Uzbek attention-getting forms from a unified linguopragmatic framework remains insufficiently developed. The present study therefore focuses on the following research questions:

1. What linguistic forms are used to attract, redirect, maintain, or intensify the addressee's attention in English and Uzbek?

2. What communicative intentions, speech-act types, and pragmatic functions are associated with these devices?

3. How do English and Uzbek attention-getting strategies differ or correspond in terms of directness, politeness, social relations, and discourse context?

It also draws on the broader pragmatic and speech-act tradition, which emphasises the relationship between linguistic utterances, communicative intentions, and actions performed through language (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Literature review

Previous researches have demonstrated that such expressions should not be treated merely as semantically transparent lexical items because their communicative interpretation is strongly dependent on interactional context (Aijmer, 2018; Van Olmen & Tantucci, 2022).

Aijmer (2018) demonstrates that expressions such as look, listen, come on, and excuse me may function as discourse markers with an attention-getting role beyond their literal lexical meaning. Importantly, their pragmatic interpretation is related to the speaker's positioning toward the addressee and toward the proposition that follows.[1]

Similarly, Van Olmen and Tantucci (2022), in a cross-linguistic investigation of parenthetical LOOK in Chinese, Dutch, English, and Italian, demonstrate that attention-getting is associated with specific discourse positions and speech-act configurations. Their analysis also shows that attention-getting may interact with assertive and expressive functions rather than functioning exclusively as a simple summons.This provides support for examining AGDs comparatively rather than treating them as exclusively language-specific phenomena.[2]

How the interactional meaning of attention-getting devices cannot be separated from social relations discussed in the analysis of ey in East London adolescent speech illustrates by Ilbury (2021). He argues that attention signals may function as socially meaningful discourse-pragmatic variables and how a relatively short attention signal can contribute to stance-taking and group boundary construction.

Following famous theories by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), an utterance can be analysed not only according to what it literally says but also according to what the speaker does through it.

For example:

- Listen! may function as a directive;
- Excuse me may initiate a request;
- Watch out! may perform a warning;
- Look! may introduce an assertion or an evaluative statement;
- Eshit! may establish the addressee's attention before a subsequent directive;
- Diqqat! may signal institutional or urgent attention.

The study of Uzbek attention-getting expressions has also been extended through a pragmatic-semantic analysis in which forms such as qara, mana, and eshit were examined in relation to communicative intention and contextual variation (Izbosarova, 2025). The present author's previous research specifically examined attention-getting devices in Uzbek Telegram discourse and identified interjections, imperatives, vocatives, graphic markers, and emojis as

[1] Aijmer, K. (2018). Adolescents' use of attention-getters. In K. Beeching, C. Ghezzi, & P. Molinelli (Eds.), *Positioning the Self and Others: Linguistic Perspectives* (pp. 177–195). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326877115_Positioning_of_self_in_interaction_Adolescents'_use_of_attention-getters

[2] Van Olmen, D., & Tantucci, V. (2022). Getting attention in different languages: A usage-based approach to parenthetical LOOK in Chinese, Dutch, English and Italian. Intercultural Pragmatics, 19(2), 141-181. https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2022-2001https://research.lancaster-university.uk/en/publications/getting-attention-in-different-languages-a-usage-based-approach-t/?

resources for initiating interaction, signalling urgency, directing attention, and managing digital communication (Izbosarova, 2026).

Methodology

The study applies a qualitative comparative-pragmatic design. The analysis combines:

1. comparative linguistic analysis;
2. discourse analysis;
3. contextual-pragmatic interpretation;
4. speech-act analysis;
5. politeness and directness analysis.

The initial inventory was organized into five broad discourse domains: formal/polite communication, informal/spoken interaction, pedagogical discourse, warning/emergency communication, and written/formal discourse. The English inventory contains forms such as excuse me, pardon me, look, listen, hey, eyes on me, watch out, and please note, while the Uzbek inventory includes kechirasiz, e'tibor bering, qara, eshit, quloq soling, diqqat!, ehtiyot bo'l!, and hurmatli fuqarolar!

Six principal pragmatic functions are distinguished:

P1 – Contact initiation
P2 – Attention orientation
P3 – Discourse management
P4 – Institutional/classroom control
P5 – Warning/urgent attention
P6 – Textual attention direction

This approach is consistent with the author's earlier English corpus-based study, where English AGDs were examined according to linguistic form, discourse context, speech act, and pragmatic function. That study used BNC, COCA, and MICASE material and deliberately emphasized qualitative interpretation rather than statistical frequency measurement (Izbosarova, 2026)[3].

Results

A central methodological finding of the present study is that attention-getting status cannot be determined exclusively on the basis of linguistic form. The same lexical or grammatical form may perform different communicative functions depending on discourse context.

For example, excuse me can function as an apology, while in an utterance such as Excuse me, could you tell me where the nearest bus stop is? it precedes a request and functions as an attention-getting and mitigating device. The English corpus material demonstrates precisely this pattern: excuse me precedes a request and simultaneously reduces the imposition of the subsequent directive.

The first major group consists of politeness-oriented forms used when the speaker needs to obtain attention while simultaneously minimizing the potential imposition on the addressee.

[3] FROM "EXCUSE ME" TO "HEY": EVOLUTION OF ATTENTION-GETTING STRATEGIES IN MODERN ENGLISH COMMUNICATION. (2026). SCIENCE TIME, 4(4/1), 655-662. https://doi.org/10.66345/stj.v4i4/1.6003

In English, representative forms include: Excuse me, Pardon me, May I have your attention, please?, If I may…, Could I just say something?, Sorry to interrupt

In Uzbek, corresponding resources include: Kechirasiz, Uzr, bir daqiqa, Ijozat bersangiz, Aytsam bo‘ladimi?, Ruxsatmi?, Bunga e’tibor qaratishingizni so‘rayman

The pragmatic similarity is evident: both languages employ forms that reduce the perceived imposition involved in interrupting or redirecting another person’s attention. For example: English: Excuse me, could I ask you something? Uzbek: Kechirasiz, sizdan bir narsa so‘rasam bo‘ladimi? In both constructions, the attention-getting component precedes the main request. The initial element does not provide the substantive information; rather, it prepares the addressee for the forthcoming speech act.

The English examples examined in previous corpus-based research similarly demonstrate that excuse me and pardon me are particularly compatible with formal and institutional interaction, where social distance and mitigation are pragmatically relevant (Izbosarova, 2026).

The Uzbek material indicates a comparable use of polite constructions. Earlier analysis identified constructions such as Marhamat, bir daqiqa eshiting and Aytsam bo‘ladimi? as indirect attention-getting strategies whose syntactic organization mitigates the force of the subsequent request (Izbosarova, 2025).

A more direct configuration is observed in informal communication. English includes forms such as: Hey! Look! Listen! Wait! Hold on! Hang on! Look here! Just a sec! Now listen!

Uzbek has comparable expressions: Qara! Eshit! Mana! Ana! Boqing! To‘xta bir! Bu yoqqa qara! Qani, bir daqiqa! Ey, uka!

The main difference between these expressions and the formal group is their reduced mitigation. They orient the addressee toward the speaker without necessarily encoding an explicit apology or request for permission. For example: English: Hey, listen! Uzbek: Ey, eshit! / Qara, eshit! Both expressions can perform P2—attention orientation—while simultaneously indexing interpersonal proximity.

However, context remains decisive. Come on in English, for example, should not automatically be categorized as a linguistic unit – attention-getting because it may express encouragement, impatience, persuasion, or disagreement. Similarly, Uzbek xo‘sh is primarily a discourse-organizational marker and becomes an attention-getting unit only where it actively redirects the addressee’s attention.

This multifunctionality corresponds with previous research showing that attention-getting expressions can acquire additional interactional meanings. Aijmer (2018) notes that English attention-getters may contribute to positioning and interpersonal stance, while Ilbury (2021) demonstrates that attention signals can carry social-indexical meanings.

The comparative evidence therefore suggests that directness is not equivalent to impoliteness. A direct expression may be entirely appropriate when the interlocutors have a close relationship or when the communicative situation requires rapid attention.

Pedagogical discourse represents a particularly distinctive environment because the speaker often controls the attention of multiple addressees simultaneously.

English examples include: Eyes on me!, Listen carefully!, Pay attention, kids!, Focus, please!, Look at the board!, All eyes here!, Let’s focus now!, Stop and listen!

Uzbek examples include: Quloq soling, bolalar!, Hamma jim!, Ko‘zlar bu yerda!, Diqqat qilamiz!, Darsga qaranglar!, E’tibor!, Hammaning ko‘zi menga qarasin!, Boqing, mana bu…

These forms demonstrate a shift from interpersonal politeness to institutional attention management. The teacher’s communicative objective is not simply to obtain attention from one interlocutor but to organize the collective behavior of a group. The pragmatic function can therefore be coded as P4 – institutional/classroom control.

An important structural feature is the frequent use of imperatives. The imperative construction provides a direct route from linguistic form to behavioral expectation. In this respect, classroom they are closely connected with directive speech acts.

At the same time, the Uzbek system contains morphological and lexical resources for expressing respect through plural or polite forms such as -ing in eshiting, qaranglar, boqing. Consequently, the imperative itself does not necessarily indicate interpersonal rudeness. Its pragmatic force depends on the social role of the speaker and addressee.

Warning-oriented attention-getting expressions form another clearly distinguishable group. Their defining feature is the high communicative value of immediacy. The relationship between attention-getting and the subsequent action becomes particularly transparent. The speaker seeks immediate perceptual orientation because delayed attention may prevent the intended response.

For example: English: Watch out! A car is coming! Uzbek: Ehtiyot bo‘l! Mashina kelyapti!

The first utterance performs P5—warning/urgent attention, while the second supplies the propositional explanation.

Written communication demonstrates another functional configuration because the addressee is usually not physically co-present with the writer.

English written forms include: Please note, Kindly be informed, It should be noted that…, This is to draw your attention to…, Take notice, Attention:, Observe the difference, Refer to the section below, Be advised that…

Uzbek written/formal forms include: Diqqat e’lon!, Quyidagiga e’tiboringizni qaratamiz, Muhim:, Ma’lumot uchun:, Quyidagiga ahamiyat bering, Hurmatli fuqarolar!, E’tiborli bo‘ling!, Muhim ma’lumot.

These forms perform P6 – textual attention direction. Instead of attracting physical attention through voice, gesture, or eye contact, they organize the reader’s visual and cognitive attention.

The comparative results provide grounds for treating attention-getting units as a functional-pragmatic category rather than a closed lexical or grammatical class.

The same lexical form can belong to different categories depending on its contextual realization which substantially improves analytical criterion precisely. This would prevent inclusion of discourse markers, imperative or politeness formula within the category of attention-getting units. For example:

Excuse me → apology or attention-getter;

Come on → encouragement, impatience, persuasion, or attention-getter;

Iltimos → request/politeness marker or part of an attention-getting construction;

Marhamat → invitation, turn-giving, or attention orientation;

Xo‘sh → discourse marker or attention redirection;

For your information → discourse management rather than direct attention-getting;

As mentioned earlier → textual reference rather than attention-getting;

Tavsiya qilamiz → recommendation rather than AGD.

These results show multifunctionality of interactional expressions to discourse position and context corresponding findings by Aijmer and others (Aijmer, 2018; Van Olmen & Tantucci, 2022).

Attention-getting units according to speech-act and pragmatic function

Attention-getting units	Typical speech act	Pragmatic function
Excuse me	Directive/request pre-sequence	P1
Look!	Directive/assertive orientation	P2
Listen!	Directive	P2
Hey!	Summons/directive	P1/P2
Watch out!	Warning directive	P5
Eyes on me!	Directive	P4
Please note	Directive	P6
Kechirasiz	Request pre-sequence	P1
Qara!	Directive/attention orientation	P2
Eshit!	Directive	P2
Diqqat!	Warning/directive	P5
Quloq soling!	Directive	P2/P4
Hurmatli fuqarolar!	Vocative/announcement opening	P1/P6

Table 1.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that English and Uzbek possess a considerable degree of functional convergence in attention management. Both languages employ:

1. polite formulas;
2. imperative constructions;
3. interjections;
4. vocatives;
5. warning expressions;
6. classroom/institutional directives;
7. textual attention markers.

The main cross-linguistic difference is therefore not the existence of attention-getting itself but the **pragmatic organization of individual forms**.

According to researches, attention-getting is multifunctional, associated with discourse boundaries and can encode social index and interpersonal positioning. Therefore, it may be supported by a model which presents conclusion of the present comparative analysis:

Linguistic form + Context + Intention + Speech act + Social relation = Pragmatic interpretation.

More directly, research by Ilbury (2021) and Van Olmen and Tantucci (2022) demonstrates the value of investigating attention signals through their interactional functions and cross-linguistic patterns. Speech act theory explains how attention-getting expressions can perform communicative actions beyond their literal meanings (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), while pragmatic approaches emphasise the role of context, speaker intention, and social interaction in interpreting linguistic choices (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001; Yule, 1996). Politeness and discourse perspectives further highlight the relevance of interpersonal relations, institutional roles, and social expectations (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fairclough, 1992; Watts, 2003).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives support a functional and context-sensitive approach to attention-getting devices. Building on these perspectives, the present study argues that attention-getting devices should be defined primarily in functional-pragmatic terms rather than exclusively through lexical or formal characteristics. Their identification therefore requires examining whether a linguistic unit attracts, redirects, maintains, or intensifies attention in its specific communicative context.

Conclusion

An attention-getting expression is a linguistic unit which contextually realized its communicative function to attract, redirect, maintain, or intensify the addressee's attention in order to initiate, regulate, or facilitate subsequent interaction. Therefore, the attention-getting units should be defined functionally rather than exclusively lexically is aimed to be the central proposition of the study.

The present study has examined the linguopragmatic features of attention-getting devices in English and Uzbek from a comparative perspective. The two languages display substantial functional correspondence. English and Uzbek both employ polite formulas for contact initiation, imperatives for direct attention orientation, vocatives for interpersonal engagement, warning expressions for urgent attention, and institutional forms for classroom or public communication.

The study also confirms that attention-getting and speech-act realization constitute related but analytically distinct dimensions. An attention-getting expression may simultaneously function as a directive, warning, request pre-sequence, assertion introducer, or discourse-management device.

Future research should expand the empirical corpus, introduce quantitative frequency analysis, and examine prosodic, gestural, and multimodal aspects of attention management in both languages. Functional definition provides a basis for further English–Uzbek comparative research.

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