UNIVERSAL FUNCTIONS, DIVERGENT REALISATIONS: LOCATING THE CONTRAST BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE

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Abstract. Contrastive studies of media discourse routinely report that one language is "more evaluative" than another. This paper argues that such claims conflate distinct phenomena and asks a narrower question: when Uzbek and English online news texts are compared on a common functional basis, which pragmatic functions diverge, and do the divergent ones form a coherent set? Drawing on a genre-balanced corpus of 50 editorial articles (26,210 words), the study finds that functions connected with the presentation of evidence show little divergence, whereas six functions connected with the marking of authorial stance diverge sharply. A genre control confirms that the pattern is not an artefact of corpus composition.

Keywords: authorial stance, hedging, evaluation, persuasive strategies, contrastive pragmatics, genre control, online news discourse.

1. Introduction

A recurrent claim in contrastive media linguistics is that some languages or cultures are more emotionally expressive in public discourse than others. Such generalisations are commonly grounded in Hall's contexting model [4], which distinguishes communicative cultures by the degree to which meaning is recoverable from situation rather than from the linguistic code. The model predicts that high-context cultures will rely less on explicit verbal marking.

Two difficulties attend such claims. The first is aggregation: "evaluative" subsumes phenomena as different as lexical appraisal, intensification, hedging and presupposition, which need not pattern together. The second is genre: evaluative resources are inherently denser in analytical than in hard-news writing, so any comparison that does not control for genre risks measuring composition rather than language.

This paper accordingly asks a narrower question. Comparing Uzbek and English online news texts on a common functional basis, which pragmatic functions actually diverge? And do the divergent functions form a coherent set, or are they scattered?

2. Material and method

The corpus comprises 25 editorial articles per language, drawn from Kun.uz and Spot.uz for Uzbek and from The Guardian and Reuters for English, published between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026. Commercially labelled material, columnists' pieces, live blogs, readers' letters and personal profiles were excluded; fifteen texts were excluded on stated grounds and recorded in an appendix.

Table 1. Corpus composition

Parameter	Uzbek	English
Texts	25	25
Words	9,470	16,740
Topic: economics / health	10 / 15	13 / 12
Genre: hard news / analytical	20 / 5	17 / 8
Period: first / second half	10 / 15	10 / 15

Twelve pragmatic functions were operationalised as language-specific linguistic markers, following the tertium comparationis principle [6, 7]: comparison starts from the function, not from the form. For source depersonalisation, for instance, the Uzbek marker is the passive participle in -ilgan and the reported-speech suffix -ishicha, while the English marker is the agentless passive. Coding was binary — presence or absence

in the text — because presence is an externally verifiable fact requiring no judgement of degree.

Because evaluative resources are genre-sensitive, the entire analysis was repeated separately within each genre as a control. A chronological control was also applied: the period was split in half and marker frequencies compared within each language, with no substantial variation detected.

3. Results

Three groups of functions emerged.

Table 2. Distribution of pragmatic functions (share of texts)

Pragmatic function	Uzbek	English	Diff.
Attributed sourcing	100%	96%	–4
Causal linking	84%	100%	+16
Source depersonalisation	92%	100%	+8
Quasi-statistical claiming	32%	28%	–4
Urgency appeal	4%	4%	0
Open quantification	20%	52%	+32
Evaluative lexis	72%	96%	+24
Presupposition	56%	92%	+36
Superlative marking	20%	64%	+44
Intensification	40%	92%	+52
Modal hedging	36%	96%	+60

The first group comprises functions connected with the presentation of evidence: attributed sourcing, causal linking, source depersonalisation and quasi-statistical claiming. Divergence here does not exceed sixteen percentage points in either direction. Urgency appeal forms a second group, near-absent in both languages — a finding that locates this device in commercial rather than editorial discourse.

The third group comprises six functions with a stable English advantage: modal hedging, intensification, superlative marking, presupposition, evaluative lexis and open quantification. These six are not a random subset. All belong to a single functional domain — the marking of authorial stance, the calibration of claim strength and the encoding of evaluation.

The genre control confirms that the pattern is not an artefact of composition.

Table 3. The same functions within each genre

Function	Hard news (uz / en)	Analytical (uz / en)
Modal hedging	30% / 94%	60% / 100%
Intensification	35% / 94%	60% / 88%
Presupposition	50% / 88%	80% / 100%
Superlative marking	20% / 65%	20% / 62%
Attributed sourcing	100% / 94%	100% / 100%
Causal linking	80% / 100%	100% / 100%

Had the divergence been a composition effect, it would have appeared in one genre and vanished in the other. It does not. Modal hedging diverges by 64 percentage points within hard news and by 40 within analytical writing; the universal functions converge in both.

Two qualitative observations deserve mention. The Uzbek suffix -ishicha combines in a single morphological form three functions that English distributes across two devices: attribution to a source, distancing from authorship and deletion of the agent. Conversely, English news texts employ reporting-verb selection as a stance device — “Agency officials claim …” rather than “said” — a distinction not attested in the Uzbek subcorpus.

4. Discussion

The two languages do not differ in how evidence is offered. They differ in how the writer’s relation to that evidence is linguistically marked.

This result does not support the straightforward prediction derivable from the contexting model, which would lead one to expect denser evaluative marking in the language conventionally classified as high-context. The opposite was observed. Three readings are possible, and they are not mutually exclusive.

The first is compositional. A majority of the Uzbek texts are reworkings of official documents or international agency reports, a register that suppresses evaluative marking by convention. The second concerns the scope of the theory: Hall's model was developed on interpersonal and spoken material, and its extension to institutional written discourse has been questioned on methodological grounds [1, 8]. The third reading retains the theory but applies it in the opposite direction: where meaning is recoverable from shared context, explicit marking becomes less necessary; where it is not, stance must be encoded in the text itself. On this reading the density of English hedges and intensifiers indexes not greater expressivity but a requirement of epistemic explicitness — an interpretation consistent with Hyland's account of hedging as calibration rather than affect [5].

Three limitations constrain these conclusions. The corpus is modest; mean text length differs between subcorpora, which binary coding does not neutralise; and independently authored material is underrepresented on the Uzbek side. A frequency-based coding scheme, recording how often each marker occurs rather than whether it occurs, would address the second of these.

5. Conclusion

Persuasive-manipulative strategies in Uzbek and English online news discourse are universal at the pragmatic-functional level and divergent at the level of grammatical realisation, and the divergence is concentrated in a single identifiable domain: the marking of authorial stance. The finding has two practical consequences. In translation, rendering an English modal chain word for word overloads the Uzbek text, while transferring an unmarked Uzbek statement unchanged into English makes the claim appear unwarrantedly categorical. In media-literacy instruction, the diagnostic question for Uzbek readers should concern the identifiability of sources rather than the emotional

temperature of the text — quasi-statistical claiming being the one function on which the Uzbek subcorpus scored higher.

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