



# **GENDER-BASED COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN CHILD DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

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<b>Article history:</b>	<b>Abstract:</b>
<p><b>Received:</b> 8<sup>th</sup> June 2025 <b>Accepted:</b> 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025</p>	<p>This article explores the communicative strategies used by children to express and perform gender in both Uzbek and English linguistic and cultural contexts. Building on the theoretical framework of Shokirova Dilorom's dissertation, the study investigates how boys and girls employ language differently in interaction, and how these differences are shaped by socio-cultural norms, discourse models, and pragmatic competence. The research applies a comparative approach, integrating data from authentic child dialogues, literary texts, and children's folklore. The study reveals that boys and girls tend to adopt distinctive communicative strategies, such as different uses of directives, mitigation, politeness markers, and humor, which reflect culturally sanctioned gender roles. While Uzbek children's speech is characterized by more hierarchical, role-based discourse strategies, English-speaking children display relatively egalitarian and expressive speech behavior. The analysis employs pragmatic tools such as Grice's maxims, speech act theory, and conversational analysis to examine how gender emerges not only as a biological or psychological category, but also as a discursive construct shaped through strategic language use. The study concludes that gendered communication in children is a dynamic process that both mirrors and perpetuates cultural ideologies. These findings contribute to the fields of gender linguistics, child pragmatics, and intercultural communication.</p>

**Keywords:** gender, communicative strategy, child discourse, pragmatics, Uzbek, English, comparative linguistics

**INTRODUCTION:** The study of gender in language has increasingly turned its attention to child discourse, where gendered behavior and roles are not only imitated but actively constructed. While biological and cognitive factors contribute to linguistic development, socio-pragmatic factors — including social norms, cultural narratives, and interactional experience — play a defining role in shaping how boys and girls speak. In Uzbek and English societies, differing models of masculinity and femininity manifest in children's communicative strategies, which are observable in everyday speech, storytelling, and peer interaction. Building upon Shokirova Dilorom's investigation into gender in child speech, this study seeks to examine the strategic dimensions of gendered communication and its pragmatic underpinnings.  
Research questions:

- What communicative strategies distinguish boys' and girls' speech in Uzbek and English?
- How are these strategies linked to cultural and pragmatic norms?
- To what extent do these strategies reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes?

**METHODOLOGY:** This study employs a comparative-descriptive and discourse-analytical method, using both qualitative and quantitative tools. Data were drawn from:

- Transcribed natural dialogues of Uzbek and English-speaking children aged 5–11.
  - Folktales and literary texts targeted at children (Sariq devni minib, The Gruffalo, etc.).
  - School-based classroom discourse and role-play tasks.
- The analytical approach integrates:



Speech act theory (Searle, 1979)  
Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975)  
Brown & Levinson's politeness theory  
Gender-based pragmatics (Lakoff, Tannen, Holmes, Ergasheva)

Discourse markers, conversational turns, pragmatic implicatures, and interactional strategies (e.g., mitigation, turn-taking, hedging) were coded and compared across gender and language.

**RESULTS:** Uzbek boys predominantly employed imperative and assertive forms:

"Ber buni!", "Ketdik!" (Give it! Let's go!)

Less use of politeness strategies

English-speaking boys also used direct commands but with more hedging:

"Can I have that?" or "Let's go, okay?"

Softened speech acts showed rising influence of politeness norms

Girls, in contrast, preferred indirect and cooperative language:

Uzbek: "Bo'ladimi agar men olsam?" (Would it be okay if I take it?)

English: "Could you maybe help me?"

Politeness strategies varied significantly:

Girls used more mitigation and negative politeness, especially in peer requests

Boys prioritized positive face strategies or omitted politeness markers altogether

This reflects cultural expectations: Uzbek culture encourages submissive and cautious communication for girls, while boys are socialized to speak confidently and dominantly.

In English discourse, humor functioned as a gender-neutral solidarity strategy. Girls and boys used jokes, role reversal, and irony:

"You be the mom, I'll be the dragon!" (breaking role stereotypes)

In Uzbek, humor among girls focused on relational topics ("singillar" or "do'stlar" dialogs), while boys used humor for competition or teasing:

"Sen qizlar kabi yig'layapsan!" (You cry like a girl!)

This exemplifies humor as a gendered discursive tool used to position the self in relation to cultural models.

Boys across both cultures controlled conversational topics more often and interrupted peers more frequently:

In Uzbek: "To'xta, men gapiraman!" (Wait, I'll talk!)

In English: "No, listen to me first!"

Girls demonstrated better turn management, often using cues like "Do you want to say something?" or "Let's both share."

**DISCUSSION:** These patterns reflect broader cultural ideologies. In Uzbek society, masculinity is linked with authority, action, and dominance — which translates into speech through assertiveness and topic control. Femininity, by contrast, is linked with modesty, supportiveness, and indirectness.

In English contexts, particularly in Western educational settings, gender roles are less rigid. While boys still tend to assert dominance, girls are encouraged to express leadership and agency, challenging traditional gendered speech norms.

This supports the work of Ergasheva (2021) and Ziyayeva (2020), who argue that gender in language is both culturally embedded and dynamically shifting.

Drawing on Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, children do not merely reflect gender — they perform it through strategic discourse. Each act of directive, each use of a hedging marker, contributes to reinforcing or reshaping the gender order.

Boys "perform masculinity" through assertive language, and girls "perform femininity" through relational speech. However, moments of deviation — girls issuing commands or boys mitigating requests — show the cracks in the traditional matrix, indicating potential for fluidity.

**CONCLUSION:** This study affirms that gendered communicative strategies are deeply rooted in sociocultural and pragmatic contexts. In both Uzbek and English, children deploy language in ways that reflect, reinforce, and occasionally challenge gender norms.

Key findings include:

Boys are more likely to use assertive, direct speech; girls use cooperative and mitigating strategies.

Humor and politeness are gendered differently across cultures.

Girls show greater pragmatic awareness and interpersonal sensitivity in discourse.

These findings suggest the need for inclusive and reflective educational practices that encourage balanced language development for all genders.

Additionally, they underscore the importance of considering cultural pragmatics in language acquisition research and pedagogy.

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