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Non-Verbal Expression of Negative Expressiveness in English and Uzbek

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Abstract: Negative expressiveness, the open display of disapproval, anger, disgust, contempt, irritation or disappointment, is realised not only through lexical and grammatical means but also through a rich repertoire of non-verbal signals. This article compares how such expressiveness is encoded in facial expression, gesture, posture, gaze, proxemics, haptics and paralanguage in English and Uzbek. Using a comparative-contrastive and linguocultural approach, and drawing on research on display rules and kinesics, the study distinguishes three groups of phenomena: (1) universal signals, such as the frown, the scowl and the averted gaze; (2) shared signals whose intensity, frequency and social acceptability differ between the two communities; and (3) culture-specific or lacunar signals with no direct counterpart in the other culture. The analysis suggests that English non-verbal negativity tends to be more individual, explicit and directed at the interlocutor, whereas Uzbek non-verbal negativity is more strongly regulated by age, status, gender and the norms of respect (hurmat), and is therefore more often conveyed through restraint, avoidance, silence and somatic idiom. The findings have implications for translation, foreign-language teaching and intercultural communication.

Keywords: negative expressiveness; non-verbal communication; kinesics; display rules; paralanguage; English; Uzbek; linguoculture

1. Introduction

Human communication is multichannel. Alongside words, speakers use the face, the hands, the body, the voice and the use of space to signal what they feel and how they evaluate the interlocutor, and these signals often carry the speaker's real attitude more reliably than the verbal message does (Argyle, 1988; Burgoon et al., 2010). The emotional colouring of an utterance, its expressiveness, is therefore a phenomenon that cannot be fully described without non-verbal means. This is especially true of negative expressiveness, that is, the expression of dissatisfaction, rejection, anger, disgust, contempt, irritation, disappointment and similar evaluative attitudes, because open verbal negativity is socially risky and speakers frequently prefer to signal it silently, through a look, a gesture or a change in voice.

The relevance of the topic is twofold. First, non-verbal behaviour is only partly universal. Since Ekman and Friesen (1969) introduced the notion of display rules, research has shown that the biological core of facial emotion is accompanied by culturally learned norms that govern who may show which emotion, to whom, and in what situation (Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989). Second, in Uzbek

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linguistics the study of paralinguistic and kinesic means is still developing. Foundational work on Uzbek paralinguistic means exists (see the review in Tangriyev, 2026), but the field is still developing and the comparative description of specific emotional meanings remains incomplete. Existing comparative studies of English and Uzbek mostly deal with speech etiquette, greetings and general gesture inventories (Abduazizova, 2021; Kakharov & Usmonova, 2022; Kurbanov, 2026), and the specific problem of how negative expressiveness is non-verbally encoded in the two languages has received less systematic attention.

The aim of this article is to describe and compare the non-verbal means by which negative expressiveness is conveyed in English and Uzbek communicative cultures. The aim is broken down into the following objectives:

1. to clarify the notions of expressiveness, negative expressiveness and non-verbal means in linguistics;
2. to classify the non-verbal channels through which negative attitudes are signalled;
3. to describe the main non-verbal exponents of negative expressiveness in English and in Uzbek;
4. to identify universal, partially shared and culture-specific (lacunar) units, and to explain the differences by reference to cultural values and norms of politeness.

The study addresses two research questions: (RQ1) Which non-verbal channels are most productive in expressing negative expressiveness in English and in Uzbek? (RQ2) To what extent are these means shared, and where do cultural norms produce divergence?

The object of the study is non-verbal communication in the two languages; the subject is the non-verbal expression of negative expressiveness. The article is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background, Section 3 describes the method, Section 4 analyses English and Uzbek material and compares it, Section 5 discusses practical implications, and Section 6 concludes.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Expressiveness and negative expressiveness

In linguistics, expressiveness is understood as the property of language units and utterances to convey the speaker's emotional state and evaluative attitude in addition to the referential content. It is closely related to, but not identical with, emotivity: emotivity concerns the encoding of feeling in language, while expressiveness concerns the intensification and vividness of that encoding. Expressiveness is evaluative by nature and may be positive (approval, admiration, tenderness) or negative (disapproval, irony, contempt, rudeness, anger). Emotion concepts are themselves culture-bound, and cross-linguistic work has shown that even apparently basic emotion words do not map neatly across languages (Wierzbicka, 1999). Negative expressiveness is also pragmatically sensitive: displaying hostility or rejection threatens the interlocutor's face, and speakers therefore regulate it according to the social relationship and the degree of imposition involved (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

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2.2 Non-verbal communication and its channels

Non-verbal communication covers all the signals that accompany or replace speech and are not themselves words. Researchers usually distinguish several channels: kinesics (body movement, gesture, posture, facial expression and gaze), proxemics (the use of interpersonal space), haptics (touch), oculesics (eye behaviour), and paralanguage (voice quality, pitch, loudness, tempo, pauses, silence and vocal sounds such as sighs or clicks) (Birdwhistell, 1970; Hall, 1966; Trager, 1958; Burgoon et al., 2010). Ekman and Friesen (1969) proposed a widely used functional classification of nonverbal behaviour into emblems (gestures with a direct verbal translation, such as thumbs down), illustrators, affect displays (mainly facial), regulators and adaptors. For the study of negative expressiveness, emblems and affect displays are the most important: emblems because they can express a negative evaluation without any accompanying word, and affect displays because they show negative emotion spontaneously or under social control.

Kendon (2004) emphasises that gesture is not a mere accompaniment but an integral part of utterance construction, which justifies treating gestural and facial signals as components of the speaker's evaluative stance. In Uzbek and Russian-language scholarship the same field is commonly labelled paralinguistics or non-verbal means (noverbal vositalar), and the units are often subdivided into kinesic, prosodic and proxemic means (Abduazizova, 2021).

2.3 Universality and display rules

The central theoretical question for any comparative study of non-verbal emotion is how much is universal and how much is learned. Ekman and Friesen (1971) found that observers in literate and preliterate cultures matched posed facial expressions with the same emotion labels well above chance, supporting the view that happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise and disgust (and, in later work, contempt) have recognisable facial prototypes (Ekman & Keltner, 1997). Darwin (1872) had already argued that such expressions have evolutionary roots.

However, the same research documented cultural variation in recognition rates and in actual display. Ekman and Friesen explained this with the concept of display rules: learned, culture-specific norms that govern the management of emotional expression in particular social contexts, so that a feeling may be intensified, attenuated, neutralised or masked (Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989). In the classic comparison, Japanese and American participants showed similar disgust and fear expressions when watching a stressful film alone, but the Japanese masked negative expressions with a smile when an authority figure was present (Ekman, 1972, as discussed in Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989). Subsequent work shows that display rules differ systematically with the social relationship, for example between in-groups and out-groups and between higher and lower status interlocutors (Matsumoto, 1990).

For negative expressiveness this has a clear consequence. The feeling of irritation or disgust may be shared, but the signal that reaches the interlocutor depends on the norms of the community. Where

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norms favour restraint, negative affect is more likely to be leaked in subtle, indirect or substitute forms, such as silence, averted gaze or a conventional gesture, than displayed openly.

2.4 Cultural dimensions relevant to the comparison

Two cultural frameworks help to interpret the differences between English and Uzbek material. Hall (1976) distinguished high-context cultures, where much of the meaning resides in the setting and in non-verbal cues, from low-context cultures, where meaning is expected to be explicit in the verbal message. Hofstede (2001) described societies along dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism and power distance. Anglophone communities are typically placed towards individualism and lower power distance, while Uzbek society is usually described as collectivist, relationship-oriented and respectful of age and hierarchy. Studies of emotional expression in English and Uzbek reach a similar conclusion: English discourse tends toward individualistic and explicit emotional expression, whereas Uzbek communication tends to emphasise collectivist values, indirectness and politeness (Ochilboyeva, 2026). These frameworks are generalisations and should not be applied to individuals, but they offer a useful heuristic for explaining why the same negative feeling may receive different non-verbal realisations.

3. Materials and Methods

The study is qualitative and descriptive. It relies on the comparative-contrastive method as its main tool, supplemented by linguocultural and functional-pragmatic analysis. Similar combinations of comparative-typological, functional-pragmatic, semiotic and linguocultural methods, together with the etic and emic approaches, have been used in recent comparative work on English and Uzbek non-verbal means (Kurbanov, 2026). The etic perspective makes it possible to compare the two communities by means of a common set of categories, while the emic perspective explains each unit by reference to the norms of its own culture.

The material consists of (a) descriptions of English and Uzbek non-verbal behaviour in the published scholarly literature, including comparative studies of kinesic and paralinguistic means (Abduazizova, 2021; Atayev, 2025; Kakharov & Usmonova, 2022); (b) general cross-cultural sources on gesture and body language (Axtell, 1997; Morris et al., 1979); and (c) illustrative examples of somatic expressions and communicative situations that are familiar to speakers of the two languages. The examples are used to exemplify patterns rather than to provide frequency data, and the conclusions are accordingly presented as analytical generalisations that can be tested on a larger corpus.

The analysis proceeds in four steps. First, non-verbal exponents of negative expressiveness are grouped by channel: facial expression and gaze, gestures and body movement, proxemics and haptics, and paralanguage including silence. Second, within each channel the English and Uzbek units are described with reference to the negative attitude they signal (for example disapproval, contempt, irritation, disappointment, refusal or dismissal). Third, the units are compared and assigned to one of three types: universal, partially shared, or culture-specific (lacunar). Fourth, the differences are

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interpreted in terms of display rules, context orientation and politeness norms. Uzbek terms are given in the current Latin-script orthography, and glosses are literal unless stated otherwise.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Non-verbal exponents of negative expressiveness in English

Facial expression and gaze. The face is the primary channel of negative affect in English-speaking communication. The prototypical negative displays described in the psychological literature, namely the scowl or frown of anger, the wrinkled nose of disgust and the one-sided lip raise of contempt, are all available to English speakers as spontaneous affect displays (Ekman & Friesen, 1971; Ekman, 2003). At the level of conventionalised behaviour, English speakers add several widely recognised units. A raised eyebrow signals doubt or scepticism, and rolling the eyes expresses blatant disregard, annoyance or exasperation (Atayev, 2025; Tangriyev, 2026). The glare and the cold stare signal hostility, while the averted or shifty gaze is interpreted as evasion, guilt or insecurity, because in Anglophone communication direct eye contact is conventionally equated with sincerity (Tangriyev, 2026). It is noteworthy that these signals are usually addressed to the interlocutor and are meant to be noticed.

Gesture and body movement. English has a large repertoire of negative emblems. Thumbs down expresses rejection or disapproval; the finger wag signals reprimand or warning; the dismissive wave of the hand signals rejection of what has been said; and the shrug of the shoulders signals indifference or non-commitment (Atayev, 2025; Tangriyev, 2026). Several gestures are offensive insults, such as the raised middle finger and the British V-sign made with the palm turned inward, whose meaning differs from the victory sign made with the palm outward (Morris et al., 1979; Axtell, 1997). Folded arms and a turned-away torso express closure and resistance, while the facepalm expresses exasperation or disbelief at someone's behaviour. Some negative gestures serve ironic or pragmatic functions rather than expressing raw emotion: air quotes mark scepticism or irony, and polishing the fingernails on one's clothing signals dismissive self-satisfaction (Tangriyev, 2026). The idiomatic layer confirms this stance-oriented character: to raise an eyebrow, to shrug one's shoulders, to keep a stiff upper lip and to give someone the cold shoulder all lexicalise bodily behaviour as an individual attitude of doubt, control or distance (Atayev, 2025).

Proxemics and haptics. Hall (1966) described the zones of interpersonal distance that structure Anglophone interaction, and observed that the violation of personal space is itself a negative signal. Negative attitudes in English are therefore frequently expressed by increasing distance, such as stepping back, turning one's back or deliberately ignoring a person (the cold shoulder). Aggressive touch is largely restricted to physical conflict, while ordinary reprimand is verbal or gestural rather than haptic (Tangriyev, 2026).

Paralanguage and silence. Vocal means are among the most productive exponents of English negativity. Sarcastic intonation, exaggerated stress, a flat or icy tone, a raised voice, a sigh, and a tongue click written tut-tut or tsk-tsk all signal disapproval or irritation without necessarily using a

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negative word (Trager, 1958; Burgoon et al., 2010). Silence is also used strategically: the so-called silent treatment withholds speech as a form of rejection. Because English communication is described as relatively low-context (Hall, 1976), such paralinguistic signals tend to supplement an explicit verbal statement of disagreement rather than replace it.

4.2 Non-verbal exponents of negative expressiveness in Uzbek

The cultural frame. Uzbek non-verbal behaviour is closely tied to the values of respect for elders, modesty and propriety, and to the notions of yuz (face, social standing), andisha (modesty, social shame), hurmat (respect), ibo (reserve) and odob (good manners), which shape how emotion may be shown in public (Kurbanov, 2026). Studies of Uzbek paralinguistic means describe them as predominantly emotional-expressive and social-hierarchical, specialising in the expression of respect, regret and social distance, in contrast to the more pragmatic-functional English units (Tangriyev, 2026). For negative expressiveness this means that the display rules favour restraint towards elders and superiors, and that negativity is often communicated indirectly or about a third party rather than directly to the person concerned.

Facial expression and gaze. Uzbek has many somatic expressions that name negative facial behaviour, for example qovoq solmoq (literally 'to lower the eyelids', i.e. to frown or look sullen), qosh chimirmoq (to knit the brows), burun jiyirmoq (to wrinkle the nose in distaste), labini burmoq (to curl the lip in displeasure) and yuz o'girmoq (to turn one's face away, i.e. to reject or snub someone). A statement of objection delivered with a frown is explicitly described as increasing tension in the exchange (Kurbanov, 2026). Gaze behaviour follows the hierarchy: lowering the eyes before an elder or teacher is evaluated as modesty and respect, not as evasion (Kurbanov, 2026; Tangriyev, 2026). As a result, a young speaker's negative reaction to an older interlocutor is typically suppressed or displaced. Overt eye-rolling aimed at the interlocutor is described as strongly condemned, particularly in the presence of elders (Tangriyev, 2026). A distinctive feature is that winking, which is mainly positive in English, can in Uzbek also express anger, severe irritation or a threat, as in Abdulla Qodiriy's novel Mehrobdan chayon, where a character winks one eye in a fit of rage (Tangriyev, 2026).

Gesture and body movement. Uzbek has several negative gestures with no close English counterpart. Slapping or striking one's knee expresses acute frustration, regret (attang), anger or sharp disapproval, whereas in English slapping the knee is associated with laughter. Biting one's finger or grasping one's collar expresses deep regret, shock or repentance, where English speakers would more likely use a facepalm (Tangriyev, 2026). Rubbing or scratching the stomach (qornini qashimoq) can signal indifference, carelessness or incomprehension, a meaning conveyed in English mainly by a shrug (Tangriyev, 2026). Twisting a child's ear is a conventional gesture of reprimand and discipline by elders (Tangriyev, 2026). Posture-based idioms carry explicit evaluation: qo'l qovushtirib turmoq, literally 'to stand with folded hands', criticises passivity, that is, failing to help when action is required, even though folded hands in front of the body can also be a respectful posture before elders (Atayev, 2025). In the same study the comparison of bodily imagery shows that Uzbek units more often index

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relational ethics such as respect, propriety and responsibility, whereas English units more often foreground individual stance such as scepticism, distance and emotional control. Insulting hand signs of the kind found in English are less systematically documented for Uzbek, and comparative descriptions of Uzbek, Russian and English kinesic systems (Abduazizova, 2021) offer a starting point for this part of the inventory.

Proxemics and haptics. Haptic behaviour in Uzbek communication is strongly regulated by age, gender and status. Respectful touch, such as the two-handed handshake and placing the right hand on the chest, signals deference to elders (Kurbanov, 2026; Tangriyev, 2026). Negative haptic behaviour, such as pulling the ear, flows downward from older to younger people and not the other way round. Crossing the legs in front of parents, teachers or in formal settings is treated as a serious sign of disrespect and arrogance (Tangriyev, 2026), so negative evaluation can be conveyed by posture alone.

Paralanguage and silence. Because open verbal conflict with elders and superiors is socially costly, Uzbek speakers rely heavily on paralinguistic means. Pursing the lips, scratching the back of the neck, a sigh, a tongue click expressing regret or reproach, and a change of tone can replace explicit criticism, and the fixed phrases of regret such as attang are typically accompanied by a gesture. Silence (sukut) is a recognised means of preserving decorum (Kurbanov, 2026), and it can equally convey displeasure that is not voiced. Tangriyev (2026) adds that the mechanism of suppressing strong negative emotion in public in order to save face is highly active in Uzbek culture, and that lip-biting, which in English mainly signals stress or nervousness, often functions in Uzbek as a social control device that restrains anger or grief in front of others.

4.3 Comparative analysis

Following the three-way scheme of full equivalence, partial equivalence and lacunarity used in comparative work on English and Uzbek non-verbal means (Kurbanov, 2026), the units described above can be placed in the following table. The classification is analytical and is intended as a working scheme for further corpus-based testing.

Negative attitude	English exponent	Uzbek exponent	Relation
Anger, irritation	scowl, frown, glare	qovoq solmoq, qosh chimirmoq	Full equivalence (universal facial display)
Disgust, contempt	wrinkled nose, curled lip (sneer)	burun jiyirmoq, labini burmoq	Full equivalence (universal facial display)
Exasperation at the interlocutor	eye-rolling	displaced or suppressed; condemned before elders	Partial: form shared, acceptability differs
Rejection, snub	cold shoulder, turning the back	yuz o'girmoq	Partial equivalence
Indifference, carelessness	shrug; polishing the nails	qornini qashimoq; pursed lips, neck scratching	Lacunar in both directions

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Negative attitude	English exponent	Uzbek exponent	Relation
Regret, frustration	facepalm	knee slap, finger biting, collar grasp (attang)	Lacunar in both directions
Reprimand	finger wag, verbal rebuke	ear twisting by an elder	Lacunar; differs in form and in permitted agent
Avoidance of eye contact	evasion, guilt, insecurity (negative)	modesty, respect (positive)	Polar
Crossing the legs	neutral to relaxed	disrespect, arrogance	Polar
Winking	mainly positive	positive, but also anger or threat	Partial
Silence	silent treatment (rejection)	sukut (decorum), unvoiced displeasure	Partial

Universal units. The first two rows reflect the universal facial prototypes of anger, disgust and contempt (Ekman & Friesen, 1971). Both languages also lexicalise them in somatic expressions built on the face, head and hand, which supports the observation that English and Uzbek share a strong preference for face-, head- and hand-centred imagery (Atayev, 2025).

Partially shared units. Here the form exists in both cultures but the permission to use it differs. Eye-rolling is a clear example: it is a recognisable English signal of exasperation, but in Uzbek communication a direct display of this kind towards an elder violates the norms of respect, so the underlying feeling is more likely to be shown by indirect means (Tangriyev, 2026). This is what display rules predict. The feeling is the same, but its management, in the sense of masking, attenuation or substitution, follows the local norm (Matsumoto & Ekman, 1989).

Culture-specific and lacunar units. Several negative gestures are productive in one culture and absent or marginal in the other. The knee slap and finger bite of regret and the ear twist of reprimand have no English equivalent in these functions, whereas air quotes and nail polishing, which express ironic distance or dismissive self-satisfaction in English, have no established counterpart in Uzbek, where irony tends to be conveyed through intonation or a smirk (Tangriyev, 2026). Such lacunae are an obstacle to cross-cultural interpretation because the observer may either miss the signal completely or assign it a wrong meaning (Kurbanov, 2026).

Polar units. The most problematic cases are gestures that exist in both cultures but receive opposite evaluations. In an evaluation study with 55 Uzbek and 43 English-speaking respondents, crossing the legs was rated as clearly disrespectful by the Uzbek group ($M = 1.78$ on a seven-point respect scale) and much closer to neutral by the English group ($M = 3.56$), a difference reported as significant at $p < .001$ (Tangriyev, 2026). Gaze avoidance shows the same inversion: negative in English because it suggests evasion, positive in Uzbek because it displays modesty before elders.

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Underlying explanation. The comparison supports the general picture drawn by the cultural-dimension literature. English negativity is more individual, explicit and addressed to the interlocutor, and it is conventionally interpreted as the speaker's personal stance (Atayev, 2025; Hall, 1976). Uzbek negativity is more strongly embedded in social relations, and the same bodily act is interpreted through norms of propriety, shame and respect (Atayev, 2025; Kurbanov, 2026). Gender also matters: comparative work on emotional expression in the two cultures reports that women in both tend towards affective and relational communication while men favour instrumental and status-oriented patterns (Ochilboyeva, 2026), which suggests that the display of negativity in Uzbek is regulated by gender as well as by age and status.

5. Discussion

The comparison shows that negative expressiveness is non-verbally encoded through the same set of channels in English and Uzbek, but that the channels are weighted differently. In English the face, the eyes and the voice carry most of the negative evaluation, and the signal is usually directed at the interlocutor. In Uzbek, negativity is more often routed through somatic idioms, posture, substitute gestures, restraint and silence, and its form is conditioned by the relative age and status of the participants. This does not mean that Uzbek speakers are less expressive. It means that the social meaning of the same behaviour is organised differently, so that a gesture may be read as personal stance in one culture and as a breach or an observance of relational norms in the other (Atayev, 2025).

Implications for translation. Atayev (2025) proposes a useful way of thinking about the translation of non-verbal units: the translator must decide whether the core meaning resides in the bodily form, in the social evaluation or in the cultural script. If form and script coincide, a near-literal rendering is possible, as with biting the lip and labini tishlamoq. If the form is shared but the script differs, pragmatic adaptation is safer. If the script is shared but the form differs, a culturally natural substitute is preferable to a formally close rendering. Applied to negative expressiveness, this means that a narrator's remark that an English character 'rolled her eyes' may need to be rendered in Uzbek in a way that preserves the exasperation without implying a disrespect that would be judged more severely in the Uzbek context, while an Uzbek character who slaps his knee in regret needs an explanatory or equivalent rendering in English, because the English reader would not interpret the gesture as regret.

Implications for language teaching. Learners of English are likely to transfer the display rules of their first culture. An Uzbek learner who lowers the eyes before a teacher or an older speaker in an English-speaking setting may be interpreted as evasive, whereas an English learner of Uzbek who crosses the legs in front of elders or shows overt annoyance may be judged as rude. Tangriyev (2026) argues that findings on non-verbal lacunae should be integrated into foreign-language curricula to develop intercultural communicative competence. The units in the table in Section 4.3, and especially the polar and lacunar ones, are natural candidates for such instruction.

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Implications for intercultural communication. Non-verbal signals are processed automatically and are therefore more likely than words to be interpreted through the observer's own norms. The methodological caution voiced by Kurbanov (2026) applies here: applying the categories of one culture to the other is a common source of misinterpretation, and the analysis should be conducted symmetrically, without treating either culture as the standard.

Limitations and further research. The present analysis is based on secondary descriptions and illustrative examples, and it does not provide frequency data. English is treated as a general variety, although British, American and other Anglophone communities differ in some gestures, and Uzbek behaviour also varies by region, generation and setting. Future research should test the proposed classification on corpora of literary texts and film discourse, on elicitation data from native speakers and on perception surveys of the kind reported by Tangriyev (2026), with negative attitudes as the specific focus.

6. Conclusion

This article has compared the non-verbal expression of negative expressiveness in English and Uzbek. Both languages use facial expression, gaze, gesture, posture, proxemics, haptics and paralanguage to signal anger, disgust, contempt, irritation, regret and rejection, and they share a core of universal facial displays and body-centred imagery.

The differences lie in the management of these signals. English tends to foreground the speaker's individual stance and to direct negative signals, such as the eye-roll, the glare or the raised eyebrow, at the interlocutor. Uzbek tends to embed negative evaluation in social relations, so that its non-verbal exponents are conditioned by age, status, gender and the norms of hurmat, andisha and odob, and are more often expressed through restraint, gaze lowering, silence, substitute gestures and somatic idioms. The units fall into four groups: universal, partially shared, lacunar and polar, and the last two groups present the greatest risk of misinterpretation.

The practical value of the study lies in three areas. For translation, the bodily form, the social evaluation and the cultural script must be separated and rendered according to which of them is shared. For language teaching, lacunar and polar units should be taught explicitly as part of intercultural competence. For intercultural communication, observers should avoid reading the signals of one culture through the display rules of another.

The analysis is qualitative and based on secondary descriptions and illustrative examples. It should therefore be tested against corpus data, elicitation tasks and perception surveys that focus specifically on negative attitudes, and extended to regional and generational variation in both communities.

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