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PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF THE “HAND” CONCEPT IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract: this article explores the concept of the "hand" (qo‘l) from a comparative pragmatic perspective in English and Uzbek languages. While the hand is anatomically identical across cultures, its conceptualization in language spans far beyond literal physical usage. By analyzing idioms, somatic expressions, and conversational formulas, this study uncovers how both languages utilize the "hand" to project power, control, assistance, agreement, and emotional states. The findings reveal that while English heavily associates the hand with agency, efficiency, and legal/contractual agreements, the Uzbek conceptualization deeply intertwines qo‘l with social hierarchy, hospitality, destiny, and moral obligations.

Keywords: Pragmatics, somatic phraseology, concept of “hand”, Comparative Linguistics, English, Uzbek, Cultural Linguistics.

In cognitive linguistics and pragmatics, body parts (somatisms) serve as primary tools for human beings to anchor abstract experiences into concrete reality. Among these, the hand is arguably the most active instrument of human agency. We touch, build, signal, and possess using our hands. Consequently, both English and Uzbek have developed rich layers of figurative meaning surrounding this body part. However, how these meanings are deployed in actual communication the pragmatic context differs based on cultural values, historical developments, and social structures. This paper contrasts the pragmatic functions of "hand" in English and "qo‘l" in Uzbek to highlight universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific nuances.

In the English language, the pragmatic deployment of "hand" expressions often revolves around themes of control, labor, honesty, and immediate action. In English communicative contexts, the hand represents power over a situation.

"To have an upper hand": Used pragmatically to denote a position of advantage or dominance in negotiations.

"In good hands" / "Out of hand": these expressions serve as pragmatic reassurances or warnings regarding the stability of a situation (e.g., "Don't worry, the project is in good hands" vs. "The crowd got out of hand").

The hand in English is highly utilitarian, reflecting an industrial and highly organized social history.

"Give a hand" / "Lend a hand": A standard pragmatic request or offer for physical or collaborative assistance.

"All hands on deck": Used in professional settings to signal an urgent need for collective, immediate effort.

Western legal traditions have embedded themselves into everyday English pragmatics.

"On the one hand... on the other hand": Functions as a discourse marker to balance arguments logically.

"Show your hand": Derived from card games, used pragmatically in business or political discourse to demand transparency or reveal intentions.

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In Uzbek culture and language, the hand (qo‘l) is heavily loaded with socio-cultural etiquette (andoza), hospitality, spiritual submission, and social hierarchy.

Unlike English, where hand expressions are largely egalitarian, Uzbek pragmatics uses qo‘l to establish and maintain social order.

"Qo‘li ko‘ksida" (Hand on chest): Pragmatically describes or dictates a posture of ultimate respect, humility, and readiness to serve elders or guests. Telling someone "Eshikda qo‘li ko‘ksida turibdi" carries a deep pragmatic weight of hospitality and respect.

"Qo‘l berish" (Giving the hand): While it can mean a handshake, in traditional contexts, it signifies spiritual allegiance (bay'at) between a master (pir) and a disciple (murid), or a deep promise.

Uzbek pragmatics uses qo‘l to gauge a person's moral standing and economic status through metaphor.

"Qo‘li ochiq" (Open-handed): Used to praise someone's hospitality and generosity highly valued traits in Uzbek culture.

"Qo‘li kalta" (Short-handed): Pragmatically used as a polite, euphemistic way to describe someone who is going through financial hardship or lacks the resources to help (e.g., "Hozir qo‘limiz kalta" expresses an apology for not being able to provide financial aid).

"Qo‘lini yuvib, qo‘ltig‘iga urmoq": Used to describe complete disappointment or giving up entirely on a task or person.

"Qo‘lini so‘ramoq" (To ask for her hand): Much like the English "asking for a hand in marriage," this functions as a formal proposal marker. However, in Uzbek, it often involves families negotiating rather than just individuals.

"Qo‘l qo‘ymoq" (To put a hand): Pragmatically used to signify signing an official document or confirming a binding agreement.

When we contrast the two systems, several striking pragmatic differences and similarities emerge:

Pragmatic Dimension	English Context ("Hand")	Uzbek Context ("Qo‘l")
Core Value	Efficiency, individual control, transparency.	Respect (hurmat), generosity, hierarchy.
Economic Euphemism	"Living hand to mouth" (Focus on survival/labor).	"Qo‘li kalta" / "Qo‘li uzun" (Focus on capability and social reach).
Discourse Markers	Structural argumentation ("On the other hand").	Behavioral descriptions of respect ("Qo‘li ko‘ksida").
Involvement	Utilitarian assistance ("Lend a hand").	Relational/Emotional involvement ("Qo‘lini tutmoq" - to support emotionally/financially).

Both languages share basic somatic mappings based on human anatomy. For instance, holding someone's hand or capturing someone "red-handed" (ustidan chiqmoq / qo‘lga tushmoq) share the cognitive root that the hand represents direct action and presence.

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The fundamental divergence lies in interpersonal dynamics. English uses "hand" predominantly as an instrument of the self (individual agency, skills, control). Uzbek, deeply rooted in collective and Eastern traditions, uses qo‘l as a bridge of social relationship, reflecting how one stands in relation to family, guests, elders, and the community.

The comparative pragmatic analysis of the "hand" concept in English and Uzbek proves that language is not merely a tool for labeling physical objects, but a mirror of cultural psychology. While an English speaker uses their "hand" to manage tasks, signal control, and negotiate deals, an Uzbek speaker navigates social hierarchy, expresses deep-seated respect, and communicates their financial and moral standing through the concept of qo‘l. Understanding these subtle pragmatic variances is vital for translation, cross-cultural communication, and language learning.

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