

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF PRAGMATIC MARKERS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH CONVERSATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines how pragmatic markers in both English and Uzbek conversations are used by men and women. Pragmatic markers are small words or expressions (e.g., “you know”, “well”, “bilasanmi”, “ya’ni”) that help speakers manage conversation in many ways, such as expressing attitude, or softening statements. The article turns to several existing literature about gender and pragmatics and provides relevant examples to show how different is the men and women's use of pragmatic markers in both languages. After discussion, this paper talks about how a better understanding of these patterns can help English language teaching (ELT) as well as cross-cultural communication.*

**Key words:** *Gender, feature, women, men, pragmatic markers, differences, language, culture*

### Introduction

In everyday conversation, we know that what we say is important—but few of us have noticed the fact that how we say it can impact the meaning a lot and matters just as much, if not more. Pragmatic markers (also known as discourse markers) may feel subtle, yet they are one of the most powerful features of spoken language that help speakers with organizing their talk, connecting with listeners, expressing attitude, or navigating conversation more smoothly. For instance, in English a speaker might say: “Well, I think...” before jumping right into an opinion to ease and introduce it first, or “You know...” to involve the listener. Similarly, in Uzbek, comparable markers—such as “bilasanmi” (you know/see) or “ya’ni” (that is/you mean)—perform the very conversational functions.

Moreover, gender plays a crucial role in how speakers use language which is seen in the decades of research in sociolinguistics and pragmatics where scholars have observed that men and women's choice of conversational styles often tend to differ. These styles reflect many aspects like cultural expectations, social roles, and the interpersonal dynamics of communication. For example, in conversation, women may place greater emphasis on building and maintaining social relationships, while men may emphasize independence or status more. (See, for example, Tannen, 1990; Erman, 1992).

When we combine these two strands—pragmatic markers with gender differences—an intriguing question occurs: Do both genders use pragmatic markers differently? And if they do, how do those differences look/sound like in different languages and cultural contexts? This article explores how the use of pragmatic markers in English and Uzbek conversational contexts is affected by those differences, and what these comparisons mean for language learners, teachers, and cross-cultural communicators.

By looking into these issues, I hope to provide insights for English Language Teaching (ELT) field in Uzbekistan, as well as other settings, where learners may get benefit from recognizing not just the grammar and vocabulary of English, but also the subtle features of conversation that are shaped by language, culture and gender.

### **Literature Review**

Gendered differences in language use are highlighted in many studies. Deborah Tannen (1990), can be a good case in point, where she argues that women often use language to build connection, while men often use it to assert status or independence. In the area of pragmatic/discourse markers, Britt Erman (1992) conducted a study of British English speakers examining the expressions “you know,” “you see,” and “I mean.” Her findings show that there are indeed gender-specific differences: women tend to use these expressions between complete propositions to link ideas, whereas men preferred to use them as attention-drawing devices or to signal repair.

In the Uzbek context, although studies focussing specifically on pragmatic markers by gender are fewer, there is research into gender and pragmatics more generally, such as the article “Speech Expression of Gender and its Pragmatic Classification” (2024), which examines how gender appears in speech and pragmatic classification in Uzbek. While it does not provide detailed quantitative data about each pragmatic marker, it suggests gender is relevant in pragmatic use in Uzbek. Other research in discourse markers more broadly suggests that women may use markers more for involvement and connection, while men may use them more for

information management or controlling the flow of conversation. For example, in summaries of multiple studies, women are found to use more "softeners", hedges, tag-questions, and participation markers (Holmes, 2008) whereas men may favour more direct forms.

From these findings, we can begin to anticipate that in English and in Uzbek, pragmatic marker use may differ by gender—and that language teachers and learners should be aware of such differences when interpreting or producing spoken language to avoid misunderstandings.

## Discussion

In this section, illustrative (not empirical) examples and commentary are given to show how gender might influence pragmatic marker use in both languages in question, based on the literature and general patterns of conversation.

### English

Female speaker: "Well, I think we should start now, you know?"

Here "well" introduces the statement gently; "you know" involves the listener, softening the opinion and inviting response.

Male speaker: "Let's start."

This is more direct, with fewer fillers or involvement markers.

According to Erman (1992), although men used the pragmatic markers more frequently in her corpus, their functions were different: men used them for attention drawing or repair, whereas women used them to link propositions and involve listeners.

Therefore, for English conversation one might hypothesize that:

Women use more markers that build social connection or soften statements;

Men use fewer markers or use them to manage turns, repair speech, or draw attention.

### Uzbek

In Uzbek, while direct published data is limited, we can draw from known pragmatic features and consider gendered patterns.

Female speaker example: "Bu kino juda han zo'r ekan, to'g'rimi?" ("This movie is very good, isn't it?")

The question-tag "to'g'rimi?" invites agreement and involves the listener, which is also softening the statement.

Male speaker example: "Bu kino zo'r ekan." ("This movie is good.")

A very straightforward statement, without add-ons or softeners.

Other Uzbek pragmatic markers include “bilasanmi” (“you know/see”), “ya’ni” (“that is/you mean”), and “o’sha-da” (“you see/that one”), which speakers may use to manage conversation, indicate assumption or engage the listener.

One could propose that female Uzbek speakers might use involvement markers (such as question tags, “bilasanmi”, “ya’ni”) more often to invite response or show connection, while male speakers may favour more direct statements. Because cultural norms in Uzbek communication often favour politeness and indirectness, these differences may manifest subtly.

### **Cross-Language and Gender Patterns**

Comparing English and Uzbek, some cross-language insights emerge:

Both languages use pragmatic markers to soften statements, involve listeners, manage discourse.

Women in both cultures might use more markers that invite engagement and show cooperation.

Men, however, might use fewer markers or even if they do use them, it would be more for managing discourse rather than social connection.

Cultural norms influence how direct or indirect speech is acceptable. In Uzbek culture, for example, polite conversational forms may favour involvement markers – which might shape marker use differently from English contexts.

For example:

Uzbek female: “Menimcha, bu taklif juda yaxshi, shunday emasmi?” (“I think, this proposal is good, isn't it?”) — contains involvement marker “shunday emasmi”, which asks for the confirmation or opinion of the other person.

Uzbek male: “Taklif yaxshi deb o'ylayman” (“I think the proposal is good”) — more direct.

In English: Female: “Well, I guess we could maybe try that.” Male: “Let’s try that.”

These contrast show how participation, softening, and involvement may be mediated through pragmatic markers and differ by gender.

### **Implications for ELT**

For ELT students and teachers (especially in Uzbekistan), recognizing these patterns has practical value:

Raising awareness: Teaching students about how pragmatic markers like “you know”, “well”, “I mean” (and Uzbek equivalents) function helps learners better understand natural speech and become more fluent in conversation.

**Gender-sensitive awareness:** Understanding that men and women may favour different conversational styles allows teachers to design activities that reflect this variation, encourage flexible use of language, and reduce learner anxiety around “how I should say it”.

**Cross-cultural transfer:** Uzbek learners of English may carry over pragmatic marker habits from Uzbek into English (e.g., using “bilasanmi”-equivalent). If English learners know the functions of these markers, they can choose appropriate equivalents and avoid unnatural transfers.

**Practice and reflection:** Pair or group activities can simulate conversational styles (direct vs softening). Students can analyse how the conversation changes when markers are present or absent. For example, one student speaks with many involvement markers, the other more direct, then discuss how the tone changed.

**Avoid stereotyping:** It’s important to emphasise that these are tendencies, not rigid rules. Each speaker is unique; context matters more than gender alone.

## **Conclusion**

Pragmatic markers may seem small or insignificant in conversation, but they play a major role in how we communicate: how we start an opinion, invite a response, soften a refusal, hold a turn, or repair a misunderstanding. The literature shows that gender differences in the use of these markers exist — for example, in English research women often use them to build social connection and involve listeners, while men use them more to manage discourse or draw attention (Erman, 1992). In Uzbek pragmatics, while detailed gender-specific data is scarcer, research shows gender plays a role in pragmatic classification of speech (Jo’rayeva, 2024), suggesting that gendered patterns likely affect pragmatic marker use too.

Comparing English and Uzbek shows that despite cultural and linguistic differences, some broad patterns hold: women often favour markers of involvement and connection; men often favour more direct styles with fewer involvement markers. However, the specific markers, their frequency, and their cultural functions depend heavily on the norms of each language community. For ELT in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, this means that beyond grammar and vocabulary, teachers and learners should pay attention to how people speak—including the little words and phrases that organise and smooth speech.

By raising awareness of pragmatic markers and gendered patterns, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching can help learners become not only correct but also natural and socially aware speakers. If learners understand how to use “you know” or its equivalent, how to soften an expression, or how to invite dialogue, they can

communicate more effectively. In short: appreciating the intersection of gender, pragmatics, and culture in language use enriches both teaching and learning.

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