

AUTHORITY WITHOUT DOMINANCE: LINGUISTIC SOFT  
POWER IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK INSTITUTIONAL PR DISCOURSE**Kamola Fayziyeva O'tkur qizi**

*Oliy ta'lim, fan va innovatsiyalar vazirligi huzuridagi  
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**Abstract:** *Faced with a paradox in communicating through digital mediums, institutions are in a dilemma as they attempt to assert authority by letting the public know they are in control and at the same time want to avoid seeming controlling and losing the trust of the public. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of linguistic soft-power in both English-speaking and Uzbekistan's institutional PR communications to project authority without seeming dominant. Research will be contextualized by linguistic pragmatics and linguistic culture frameworks and will incorporate a corpus (a body of written work) of publicly funded PR text produced by public institutions and large organizations on official Web sites and social media. Through qualitative comparison analysis, this research will examine strategies that mitigate, modalities, pronoun use, types of justification framing, and impersonal constructions in the PR corpus. While both forms of PR communication rely on mechanisms that promote soft power, the type of English PR is based upon the cultural perception of openness, rational decision-making, and service to the betterment of others while the Uzbekistan PR form relies heavily on a collectivist view of the world, moral obligation to others, and harmony with their fellow citizens.*

**Keywords:** *institutional discourse; linguistic soft power; pragmatics; PR discourse; English–Uzbek comparison*

**Annotatsiya:** *Raqamli vositalar orqali muloqot olib borishda institutlar muayyan paradoksga duch keladi: bir tomonidan, ular jamoatchilikka vaziyat ustidan nazorat mavjudligini ko'rsatish orqali o'z avtoritetini mustahkamlashga intilsa, ikkinchi tomonidan esa haddan tashqari buyruqboz yoki nazoratchi sifatida ko'rinish qolish va jamoatchilik ishonchini yo'qotishdan qochishga harakat qiladi. Ushbu tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi ingliz tilida so'zlashuvchi mamlakatlar hamda O'zbekiston institutsional PR diskursida lingvistik yumshoq kuch (linguistic soft power) qanday vositalar orqali avtoritetni hukmroniksiz namoyon etishini tahlil qilishdan iborat.*

*Tadqiqot lingvistik pragmatika va lingvokulturologik yondashuvlar asosida olib borilib, rasmiy veb-saytlar va ijtimoiy tarmoqlarda e'lon qilingan davlat muassasalari hamda yirik tashkilotlarga oid ochiq PR matnlaridan iborat korpusga tayangan holda amalga oshiriladi. Sifatga asoslangan qiyosiy tahlil orqali PR diskursida qo'llaniladigan yumshatish strategiyalari, modal vositalar, olmoshlar tanlovi, asoslash va legitimatsiya qilish usullari hamda shaxsdan xoli (impersonal) konstruktsiyalar o'rganiladi. Tahlil*



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*natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, inglez va o'zbek institutsional PR diskurslari avtoritetni yumshoq kuch orqali amalga oshirishda o'xshash mexanizmlardan foydalansa-da, ularning madaniy asoslari farqlidir. Ingliz tilidagi PR diskursi asosan ochiqlik, ratsional qaror qabul qilish va jamoat manfaatlariga xizmat qilish g'oyalariga tayanadi. O'zbekiston institutsional PR diskursi esa ko'proq jamoaviylik, axloqiy majburiyat va jamiyat a'zolari o'rtasidagi uyg'unlikni ta'kidlovchi kollektivistik dunyoqarash bilan tavsiflanadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *institutsional diskurs; lingvistik yumshoq kuch; pragmatika; PR diskursi; inglez-o'zbek qiyosiy tahlili*

### Introduction

Digital media has transformed institutional communication, making public relations discourse increasingly visible, interactive, and evaluable by audiences. Institutions such as government bodies, universities, banks, and public service organizations must communicate policies, decisions, and regulations while maintaining public trust and legitimacy. In this context, authority can no longer be exercised through direct command or coercive language, as such strategies often provoke resistance or reputational damage.

This communicative tension gives rise to the phenomenon addressed in this study: authority without dominance. Institutions retain their power to regulate, instruct, and decide, yet they perform this authority through linguistic strategies that appear cooperative, empathetic, and inclusive. This form of influence aligns with the notion of soft power, originally conceptualized by Nye (2004) as the ability to shape preferences through attraction rather than coercion.

While authority and power have been widely studied in political and institutional discourse (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008), fewer studies have examined how authority is pragmatically softened in digital PR contexts, particularly from a contrastive linguacultural perspective. Moreover, research on Uzbek institutional discourse remains limited in international scholarship. This study addresses these gaps by comparing English and Uzbek PR discourse to explore how linguistic soft power operates across distinct cultural and pragmatic systems.

### Theoretical Background

#### Authority and Institutional Discourse

Institutional discourse is characterized by asymmetrical power relations, where one party possesses the right to define norms, rules, or procedures (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Authority in such discourse is not merely positional but discursively constructed through language choices that signal legitimacy, expertise, and responsibility (Fairclough, 1995).

However, contemporary institutions increasingly avoid explicit dominance, as direct imperatives or authoritarian tones may threaten the audience's face and provoke negative reactions, particularly in public digital spaces.

#### Pragmatics, Face, and Politeness

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Pragmatic theories of politeness and face provide essential tools for analyzing how authority is mitigated linguistically. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), directives and obligations constitute face-threatening acts (FTAs) that require redressive strategies. Redressive strategies are linguistic devices used to mitigate the impact of face-threatening acts by protecting the addressee's positive or negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Mitigation, indirectness, and justification allow speakers to maintain authority while protecting the addressee's negative and positive face.

In institutional PR discourse, politeness strategies are not merely interpersonal but strategic, serving reputational and persuasive goals.

### **Linguistic Soft Power**

Soft power, in linguistic terms, refers to discourse strategies that encourage compliance or acceptance through appeal, alignment, and legitimacy, rather than force (Nye, 2004). In PR discourse, linguistic soft power is realized through modal verbs, impersonal constructions, inclusive pronouns, justificatory reasoning, and value-based framing (Chilton, 2004).

From a linguocultural perspective, these strategies are shaped by culturally specific norms of authority, respect, and social responsibility.

### **Data and Methodology**

The corpus consists of institutional PR texts in English and Uzbek, collected from:

- Official institutional websites
- Verified Telegram channels (Uzbek)
- Facebook and Instagram pages (English-language institutions)

The data represents government agencies, universities, and large service institutions and was published between 2023 and 2025.

### **Analytical Framework**

A **qualitative contrastive pragmatic analysis** was employed, focusing on:

- **Modal verbs** (must, should, may; kerak, lozim, mumkin)
- **Grammatical voice** (active vs passive)
- **Pronoun choice** (we, our; biz, barchamiz)
- **Justificatory clauses** (purpose and reason framing)
- **Impersonal constructions** ("it is recommended...", "talab etiladi...")

Examples were analyzed within their communicative context to identify pragmatic functions rather than surface frequency alone.

### **Analysis and Findings**

#### **Mitigated Directives**

Both English and Uzbek institutional PR texts systematically avoid direct imperatives when communicating obligations, reflecting an awareness of directives as inherently face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In English institutional discourse, authority is frequently exercised through modalized recommendations, such as should,



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are encouraged to, or are advised to, which reframe obligations as voluntary cooperation rather than enforced compliance. For example:

Students are encouraged to submit documents early to ensure timely processing.

Such constructions exemplify indirect speech acts, where the illocutionary force of obligation is softened through grammatical mitigation (Searle, 1975). Corpus-based studies of institutional registers confirm that modal verbs play a central role in reducing coerciveness while preserving institutional authority (Biber et al., 1999).

In Uzbek PR discourse, mitigation is often achieved through collective and impersonal obligation markers, particularly the use of request-oriented predicates such as so‘raladi (“is requested”), combined with plural or generalized reference:

Talabalarni hujjatlarni belgilangan muddatda topshirishlari so‘raladi.

This pattern aligns with Uzbek linguocultural norms that favor respectful indirectness and social harmony in authoritative communication (Mahmudov, 2019). In both languages, mitigation allows institutions to maintain control while minimizing perceptions of dominance, illustrating a shared pragmatic logic shaped by different cultural realizations.

### Justification and Legitimacy Framing

Justificatory clauses constitute a core mechanism of linguistic soft power in institutional PR discourse, as authority is increasingly legitimized through explanation rather than command (Fairclough, 1995). English PR texts frequently rely on procedural rationalization, presenting decisions as the logical outcome of transparent and standardized processes:

To ensure transparency and equal access, the following procedures have been introduced.

This reflects what van Leeuwen (2007) defines as rational legitimization, where authority is grounded in efficiency, legality, and institutional norms rather than personal power.

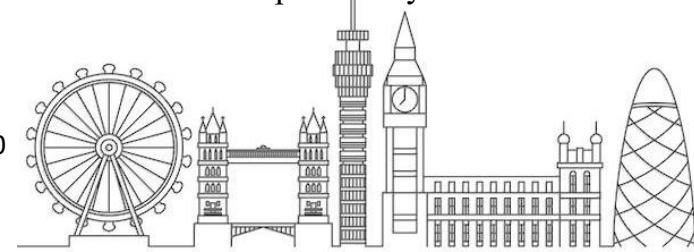
In contrast, Uzbek institutional PR discourse more often employs moral and collective legitimization, framing authority as an ethical obligation toward society:

Jamiyat manfaatlari yo‘lida ushbu tartib joriy etildi.

Such formulations resonate with Uzbek cultural discourse traditions that emphasize communal values, social responsibility, and moral duty as foundations of legitimacy (Yusupov, 2017; Karimov, 2020). As Chilton (2004) argues, authority becomes persuasive when it aligns institutional actions with shared cultural values. Thus, while both English and Uzbek PR texts justify authority, they draw on distinct cultural scripts—procedural in English and moral—collective in Uzbek.

### 4.3 Inclusive Pronouns and Collective Identity

Inclusive pronouns function as powerful alignment devices that transform institutional authority into a shared social endeavor. In English institutional PR discourse, the pronoun we is commonly used to signal accountability and institutional responsibility:



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We are committed to improving our services.

According to Hyland (2005), such engagement markers invite audiences into a cooperative relationship, reducing hierarchical distance while reinforcing institutional credibility. From a critical discourse perspective, we also constructs ideological alignment between institutions and the public (van Dijk, 2008).

In Uzbek PR discourse, the pronoun *biz* ("we") plays an even stronger role in constructing collective identity and shared obligation:

Biz birqalikda bu vazifani amalga oshiramiz.

This usage reflects deeply rooted Uzbek sociocultural norms that privilege collectivism and mutual responsibility over individual agency (Mahmudov, 2019). As Wodak et al. (2009) note, collective pronouns are central to the discursive construction of social unity, allowing authority to be framed as partnership rather than hierarchy. In this way, pronoun choice becomes a key resource for performing authority without dominance.

### 4.4 Impersonalization and Responsibility Diffusion

Another prominent strategy for softening authority in institutional PR discourse is impersonalization, which reduces the visibility of decision-makers and presents authority as systemic rather than personal. English texts frequently employ passive constructions:

Applications will be reviewed by the committee.

Such grammatical choices obscure agency and shift attention from who decides to how decisions are made, a pattern widely observed in institutional and bureaucratic discourse (Fowler, 1991).

Uzbek PR discourse often relies on nominalized or impersonal structures that further diffuse responsibility:

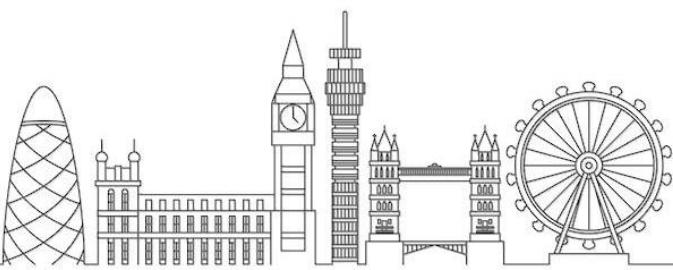
Arizalarni ko'rib chiqish tartibi belgilangan.

Here, authority is embedded in abstract procedures rather than identifiable actors. According to Halliday and Hasan (1989), nominalization functions as a form of grammatical metaphor that transforms actions into seemingly objective facts. Fairclough (2003) argues that such impersonalization strategies are central to non-dominant authority, as they naturalize institutional decisions and minimize confrontational power dynamics.

In Uzbek institutional communication, this strategy aligns with cultural expectations of respectful distance and institutional dignity, reinforcing legitimacy while avoiding overt dominance (Karimov, 2020).

### Discussion

The findings demonstrate that authority without dominance is achieved through a shared pragmatic logic of mitigation, justification, and alignment, yet realized through culturally distinct linguistic resources. English institutional PR reflects an individualist orientation that values transparency, accountability, and procedural explanation. Uzbek



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institutional PR reflects a collectivist orientation that emphasizes moral responsibility, social harmony, and shared purpose.

These patterns support the view that linguistic soft power is not universal but linguoculturally embedded, shaped by local norms of respect, authority, and public communication.

### Conclusion

This study has shown that institutional authority in digital PR discourse can be effectively exercised without authoritarian language through pragmatic soft power strategies. By comparing English and Uzbek institutional PR discourse, the research highlights both shared pragmatic mechanisms and culturally specific realizations of non-dominant authority.

The study contributes to pragmatics and intercultural discourse analysis by proposing a linguocultural model of authority that integrates facework, legitimacy, and cultural values. Practically, the findings offer insights for institutions seeking to communicate authority in ways that maintain trust and public cooperation.

Future research may extend this model to crisis communication, AI-generated PR texts, or audience reception studies to further explore the dynamics of soft power in digital communication.

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