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Grammatical Categories and Derivational Features in the Semantic Scope of Speech Verbs: A Contrastive Analysis of Uzbek and English

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Abstract: This article investigates the influence of grammatical categories and derivational features on the semantic scope of speech verbs in Uzbek and English within a contrastive linguistics framework. Drawing on a corpus of 1,200 naturally occurring utterances from literary and journalistic sources in both languages, the study examines how morphological processes — including affixation, conversion, and compounding — expand or restrict the referential, modal, and illocutionary dimensions of speech verbs. The analysis reveals that Uzbek, as an agglutinative language, encodes a broader range of semantic nuances through bound morphemes directly attached to verbal roots, whereas English relies more heavily on syntactic and lexical strategies. Tense, aspect, voice, and modality markers are shown to interact with derivational patterns to produce systematic shifts in the semantic scope of verbs denoting communication, reporting, and verbal performance. These findings contribute to a more precise understanding of the grammar–semantics interface and have implications for translation studies, natural language processing, and cross-linguistic pedagogy.

Keywords: Speech Verbs, Semantic Scope, Grammatical Categories, Derivation, Contrastive Linguistics, Uzbek, English, Morphosemantics.

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1. Introduction

Language, as a primary instrument of human communication, relies on verbs of speech — a semantically rich and grammatically complex category — to encode the full range of communicative acts. Verbs such as 'say,' 'tell,' 'declare,' 'whisper,' and 'argue' in English, and their Uzbek counterparts *aytmoq*, *so'zlam**oq*, *e'lon qilmoq*, *pichirlashmoq*, *bahslashmoq*, do not merely denote the act of speaking; they give information about manner, intention, social relation, and epistemic stance. The semantic scope of these verbs — that is, the range of meanings, contexts, and propositional attitudes they can lawfully express — is profoundly shaped by grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, voice, and modality, as well as by derivational processes that create new lexical items from existing verbal stems [1].

Despite the centrality of speech verbs in both theoretical linguistics and applied domains such as translation and natural language processing, relatively few contrastive studies have examined the interplay between morphological derivation and the semantic broadening or narrowing of speech-verb meanings across typologically distinct languages. This gap is particularly pronounced in comparisons involving Uzbek, a Turkic agglutinative language, and English, an analytic Indo-European language, where the

structural differences in morphological expression create divergent pathways for semantic scope expansion.

The present study addresses this gap by pursuing three interconnected objectives: (1) to identify and classify the grammatical categories and derivational morphemes that operate on speech verb stems in Uzbek and English; (2) to analyse how these morphological operations systematically affect the semantic scope of the resulting forms; and (3) to contrast the strategies available in each language, accounting for typological differences. By adopting a contrastive, corpus-informed methodology, the article contributes to the growing literature on morphosemantics, the grammar–semantics interface, and cross-linguistic variation in verbal semantics [2].

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the theoretical background, covering definitions of semantic scope, the taxonomy of speech verbs, and relevant frameworks in morphosemantics and contrastive linguistics. Section 3 describes the methodology and corpus. Sections 4 and 5 present the analysis of Uzbek and English data respectively. Section 6 offers a contrastive synthesis. Section 7 concludes with implications and directions for further research.

The term semantic scope, borrowed from formal semantics and logic, is used here in an extended sense to denote the range of propositional content, illocutionary forces, and contextual interpretations that a verbal predicate can legitimately govern. Following Levin and Rappaport Hovav and Pustejovsky's generative lexicon framework, we treat verbal meaning as structured and decomposable, with identifiable components subject to modification by grammatical operators. The semantic scope of a speech verb is thus not fixed but dynamically determined through interactions with aspectual operators, modal auxiliaries, voice alternations, and derivational morphology [3].

Crucially, scope in this sense encompasses both broadening — where derivational processes yield a verb applicable to wider ranges of situations — and narrowing, where morphological specification restricts the verb to a more precise semantic niche. For example, the English verb 'announce' already occupies a narrower scope than 'say,' but the nominalized form 'announcement' and the agentive 'announcer' further restructure the semantic content, displacing the event-denoting core in favour of entity reference [4].

Speech verbs, also termed *verba dicendi* or verbs of verbal communication, form a well-studied lexical field in multiple theoretical traditions (Coulmas, 1986; Maldonado, 2008). For this study, we adopt a broad definition encompassing all verbs whose core semantic content involves the production, transmission, or performance of verbal messages. Following Wierzbicka's (1987) semantic primitives approach and the cross-linguistic typology proposed by Kittilä (2006), and informed by the anthropocentric analysis of body-part lexemes in Uzbek and English folk discourse developed by Raximova (2025), we distinguish three primary subtypes:

1. Neutral reporting verbs (e.g., Eng. say, tell; Uzb. aytmoq, demoq) — verbs with minimal specification of manner or force;
2. Manner-of-speaking verbs (e.g., Eng. whisper, shout; Uzb. shivirlamoq, baqirmoq) — verbs encoding phonological or prosodic features;
3. Illocutionary-force verbs (e.g., Eng. promise, order, warn; Uzb. va'da bermoq, buyurmoq, ogohlantirmoq) — verbs lexically specifying speech-act type.

Grammatical categories — morphosyntactic features encoded in verbal morphology — interact with lexical meaning to produce interpretations that neither the root nor the grammatical marker alone can predict. Key categories in the present analysis include:

Tense and aspect: The imperfective/perfective distinction in Uzbek (encoded by aspectual suffixes and auxiliary constructions) affects whether a speech event is presented as ongoing, habitual, or completed, with corresponding effects on its scope over embedded propositions. English progressive constructions similarly shift between event-in-progress and future-oriented readings [5].

Voice: Both languages possess active-passive alternations, but Uzbek additionally employs a causative voice (with the causative suffix *-tir/-dir*) and a reflexive-reciprocal voice (*-in/-ish*), each of which fundamentally restructures the argument structure and thereby the semantic scope of the speech predicate.

Modality: English modal auxiliaries (can, must, might, should) and Uzbek modal suffixes and postverbal particles interact with speech verbs to introduce epistemic, deontic, or dynamic shading that widens or constrains their propositional scope [6].

Derivational morphology creates new lexical items from existing stems, and in doing so it typically shifts one or more semantic parameters of the source form. For speech verbs, the most consequential derivational processes include nominalization (converting the event-denoting verb into a noun referring to the speech act or its product), agentive derivation (creating a noun denoting the habitual performer), causative formation, and lexical compounding. Lieber (2004) and Plag (2003) provide comprehensive accounts of these processes for English; Johanson (2002) and Sjöberg (1963) address parallel phenomena in Uzbek and Turkic more broadly. The present study builds on both traditions to develop a comparative account [7].

2. Materials and Methods

The empirical basis of this study is a purpose-built parallel and comparable corpus comprising 1,200 speech-verb instances: 600 in Uzbek and 600 in English. The corpus was assembled from four source types: (1) literary prose (novels and short stories published 2000–2023); (2) journalistic writing (news reports and opinion pieces from major Uzbek and English-language outlets); (3) translated texts (Uzbek source texts with English translations and vice versa, to enable direct *tertium comparationis* analysis); and (4) a smaller spoken sub-corpus drawn from transcribed political speeches and interviews. This multi-genre design ensures that findings are not artefacts of a single register.

Each corpus instance was coded along the following parameters: (a) the speech verb lemma; (b) the grammatical categories instantiated (tense, aspect, voice, modality, person, number); (c) the derivational morphemes present on the verbal stem or on lexically related nominalizations; (d) the semantic subtype of the verb (neutral reporting, manner-of-speaking, illocutionary-force); and (e) the direction of semantic scope shift (broadening, narrowing, neutral). Scope shifts were identified through a combination of distributional diagnostics — substitution tests, passivisation, embedding under factive and non-factive predicates — and intuitive native-speaker judgements verified with two trained informants per language. Inter-rater reliability was measured using Cohen's kappa, yielding $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating strong agreement.

The analysis integrates three complementary frameworks. First, Levin's (1993) verb classification provides the structural semantic backbone for categorising speech verbs and predicting argument alternations. Second, Booij's (2010) Construction Morphology accounts for the interaction between derivational templates and constructional meaning in both languages. Third, Grice's (1975) cooperative maxims and Searle's (1969) speech act theory serve as interpretive tools for identifying illocutionary scope effects. This triangulated approach is designed to capture both the formal and pragmatic dimensions of semantic scope.

3. Results and Discussion

Uzbek is an agglutinative SOV language in which a single verbal root may host a sequence of suffixes, each contributing a discrete grammatical meaning. The speech-verb stem is thus not merely a carrier of lexical content but an ordered concatenation site at which grammatical categories leave overt morphological traces. Consider the neutral

reporting verb *ayt-* (to say). Its inflectional paradigm includes aspect markers (-a, -di, -yap-, -moqda), tense suffixes (-di, -gan, -ar), voice morphemes (-il- for passive, -tir- for causative, -ish- for reciprocal), mood markers (-sin, -sa, -ishi kerak), and agreement suffixes (-man, -san, -di). Each layer modifies the semantic scope of the base form [8].

Crucially, the causative suffix -tir/-dir merits detailed attention because it is among the most productive scope-broadening devices available in Uzbek. When applied to a neutral speech verb, it introduces a causative argument and simultaneously extends the scope of the speech event to include an agent who initiates or compels the communication:

aytmoq (to say) → *ayttirmoq* (to make/have [someone] say)
so'zlamog (to speak) → *so'zlattirmoq* (to make [someone] speak)

The causative forms extend the speech event across two agents — the primary causer and the performing speaker — thereby broadening the predicate's scope over embedded propositions and participant roles. This causative–semantic scope relationship is systematic across the manner-of-speaking and illocutionary-force subtypes as well, as Table 1 illustrates [9].

Table 1. Causative Derivation and Semantic Scope in Uzbek Speech Verbs.

Base Verb	Causative Form	Semantic Subtype	Scope Effect
<i>aytmoq</i>	<i>ayttirmoq</i>	Neutral reporting	Broadening: adds causer argument
<i>baqirmoq</i>	<i>baqirtirmoq</i>	Manner-of-speaking	Broadening: cause controls manner
<i>buyurmoq</i>	<i>buyurtirmoq</i>	Illocutionary force	Double force: causer + commander
<i>pichirlashmoq</i>	<i>pichirlashtirilmog</i>	Manner (reciprocal+passive)	Narrowing: constrained event

Aspect interacts with speech verbs in Uzbek to determine whether the communication event is construed as a bounded, completed act or as an unbounded, ongoing process. The imperfective aspect, marked by the suffix -moqda or the progressive auxiliary -yap-, typically narrows the scope of speech verbs by foregrounding the internal temporal contour of the act and suppressing its propositional result[10]. Conversely, the perfect participle -gan combined with the copula *bo'lmoq* produces an evidential reading that broadens scope by introducing an epistemic dimension — the speaker's access to the results of the speech event:

U gapirmoqda. (He is speaking.) — narrow scope, ongoing process
U gapirgan. (He has spoken / He apparently spoke.) — broader scope, evidential/resultative

This aspect-driven scope alternation has direct consequences for how reported speech is interpreted: imperfective forms favour direct quotation construals, while perfect-participial forms favour indirect, inference-mediated readings. Such findings align with Cross-Linguistic Semantics of Aspect accounts developed by Klein and extended to Turkic by Johanson.

Uzbek possesses several nominalizing suffixes applicable to speech-verb stems. The suffix -ish creates an action nominal (*so'zlamog* → *so'zlash*, 'the act of speaking'), while -(u)v creates a result nominal (*e'lon qilmoq* → *e'lon*, 'announcement'). The agent suffix -chi yields occupational or habitual-agent nouns (*tarjimon*, 'interpreter'; *so'zlovchi*, 'speaker'). These nominalizations shift the semantic scope dramatically: whereas the base verb predicates over an event and its participants, the nominalization refers to an entity (event, result, or agent), displacing the propositional scope entirely and embedding the original verb's meaning as a presupposition [11].

English, as an analytic language with minimal inflectional morphology on the verb, relies substantially on periphrastic and syntactic strategies to achieve the semantic-scope effects that Uzbek encodes morphologically. The speech verb paradigm in English distinguishes tense (simple past vs. non-past), aspect (progressive, perfect), voice (active/passive), and modality (through auxiliary verbs), but these are expressed through grammatical words rather than bound morphemes. This architectural difference has important consequences for the relationship between grammatical categories and semantic scope [12].

The passive construction, for instance, rearranges argument structure and shifts the thematic foreground from agent to patient of the speech act, thereby narrowing the scope of intentional agency while potentially broadening the event's applicability across contexts:

The minister announced the decision. (Active: agent prominent, narrow intentional scope)

The decision was announced. (Passive: agent suppressed, broader applicability)

English derivational morphology, while less densely stacked than Uzbek, is nonetheless highly productive for speech verbs. The most consequential processes include:

Prefixation: Prefixes such as *re-* (retell, restate), *mis-* (miscommunicate, misreport), and *over-* (overstate, overpromise) systematically narrow or specify the scope of the base verb. The prefix *re-* adds an iterative dimension; *mis-* introduces a criterion of incorrectness against which the speech act is measured; *over-* introduces a scalar comparison that restricts the verb to contexts exceeding a contextual norm [13].

Suffixation and conversion: The suffix *-er* creates agentive nouns (speaker, announcer, whisperer), while *-ment* and *-ation* create event or result nominals (announcement, declaration, communication). Conversion (zero-derivation) is notably productive: the noun 'signal' becomes the verb 'to signal,' 'echo' becomes 'to echo,' each acquisition expanding the semantic scope of the original form into the verbal domain. Table 2 presents the main derivational patterns and their scope effects [14].

Table 2. Derivational Patterns and Semantic Scope Effects in English Speech Verbs.

Process	Example	Base Form	Scope Effect	Direction
Prefixation (re-)	<i>retell</i>	<i>tell</i>	Adds iterativity	Narrowing
Prefixation (mis-)	<i>miscommunicate</i>	<i>communicate</i>	Introduces error criterion	Narrowing
Suffixation (-er)	<i>announcer</i>	<i>announce</i>	Entity reference; presupposed event	Neutralisation
Conversion	<i>to echo</i>	<i>echo (n.)</i>	Extends to the verbal domain	Broadening
Compounding	<i>sweet-talk</i>	<i>talk</i>	Encodes manner+goal simultaneously	Narrowing

The interaction of speech verbs with modal auxiliaries represents one of the most productive scope-widening mechanisms in English. Modals introduce a second propositional layer — that of necessity, possibility, or permission — over and above the basic communicative act denoted by the speech verb. The resulting interpretations can be epistemic (reflecting the speaker's degree of certainty about the speech event), deontic (encoding social obligation), or dynamic (relating to the agent's capability) [15]:

She must have said something important. (Epistemic: inference about a past speech event)

You should tell him the truth. (Deontic: obligation to perform the speech act)
He can speak three languages fluently. (Dynamic: ability broadens manner-of-speaking scope)

Crucially, modal scope interacts with tense to produce complex interpretive arrays not available in Uzbek through a single morphological operation. The combination of past tense and perfect aspect under a modal auxiliary (might have declared, could have warned) introduces counterfactual readings that broaden the speech verb's scope into the domain of unrealised communicative events — a dimension for which Uzbek employs a separate conditional morpheme (-sa) in combination with the negated auxiliary [16].

The most fundamental structural contrast revealed by the corpus analysis concerns the mode of encoding semantic scope effects. Uzbek realises the majority of scope modifications through bound morphology stacked on the verbal stem, yielding dense but formally transparent polysyllabic forms. English realises the same conceptual range through combinations of free grammatical morphemes, resulting in analytically transparent but syntactically distributed structures. This typological difference — well-known in a general sense — has specific consequences for speech-verb semantics that previous contrastive accounts have not fully elaborated [17].

First, the agglutinative stacking available in Uzbek permits a single verbal word-form to simultaneously encode causative, passive, and perfect meanings, each contributing independently to the semantic scope of the underlying speech predicate. English requires at minimum three separate words to express the same triple specification (e.g., 'had been made to say,' as compared with Uzbek *ayttirilib bo'lindi*). The English form distributes the scope-modifying operators across a verbal phrase, whereas the Uzbek form concentrates them within a single phonological word [18].

Second, this difference has pedagogical implications: Uzbek learners of English must learn to decompose scope modifications that their native language expresses holistically, while English learners of Uzbek must learn to integrate scope-modifying elements that their native language distributes analytically.

The corpus data permit the formulation of a tentative Scope Hierarchy for derivational processes in speech verbs, which appears to hold for both languages, albeit with language-specific realisations. The hierarchy, from maximal scope broadening to maximal scope narrowing, is:

Conversion / zero-derivation > causative affixation > agentive nominalization > prefixation (re-, mis-) > compounding > result nominalization

In Uzbek, this hierarchy maps onto a set of suffix positions within the verbal complex, permitting combinatorial application. In English, it maps onto separate lexical and syntactic operations that cannot always be combined within a single word. The hierarchy thus illuminates why certain semantic-scope configurations are lexicalised (appear as individual vocabulary items) in English but remain compositional (analysable as combinations of morphemes) in Uzbek.

Despite their typological distance, Uzbek and English display notable convergences in the domain of speech-verb semantics. Both languages show a consistent mapping from causative voice to broadened propositional scope; both employ nominalization to displace verbal scope in favour of entity reference; and both exploit modal operators to introduce a deictic centre distinct from the primary speech event. These parallelisms suggest that the grammar-semantics interface in the domain of verbal communication may be constrained by universal functional pressures — a conclusion consistent with Croft's (2001) typological work on verbs and with the predictions of Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin, 2005). At the level of folk and everyday discourse, Raximova (2025) similarly demonstrates that both Uzbek and English speakers map somatic concepts onto inanimate objects through shared anthropocentric cognitive templates, reinforcing the cross-typological validity of this convergence.

The divergences are equally instructive. The Uzbek reciprocal suffix *-ish*, with no morphological equivalent in English, systematically introduces a co-participant reading that broadens the scope of speech verbs to include interactional events not lexically present in the base form (*so'zlamok*, 'to speak' → *so'zlashmoq*, 'to converse'). English expresses this distinction lexically, with separate verb lemmas, entailing a much higher degree of lexical storage and acquisition burden [19].

4. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that grammatical categories and derivational features are not merely formal embellishments on speech-verb roots but constitute primary determinants of semantic scope in both Uzbek and English. Through a corpus-informed contrastive analysis, we have shown that: (1) Uzbek exploits a dense agglutinative morphology, particularly its causative, passive, reciprocal, and aspectual suffixes, to encode systematic scope modifications within single word-forms; (2) English achieves comparable semantic diversity through combinations of modal auxiliaries, prefixes, and productive conversion processes distributed across the syntactic phrase; and (3) despite these structural divergences, both languages observe a common Scope Hierarchy in which conversion and causative formation produce the broadest scope broadening, while compounding and result nominalization produce the most pronounced narrowing.

These findings have implications across several domains. For translation theory and practice, the study highlights the structural asymmetry that translators must navigate when transposing speech-verb meanings between Uzbek and English, particularly in contexts — such as literary dialogue and journalistic attribution — where the nuances of propositional scope carry significant interpretive weight. For natural language processing, the identified morphosemantic patterns offer features that could improve part-of-speech tagging, semantic role labelling, and event extraction in Uzbek NLP pipelines, where annotated resources remain scarce. For contrastive and typological linguistics, the proposed Scope Hierarchy adds a new dimension to the comparative study of verbal categories across agglutinative and analytic languages.

Future research should extend the corpus to spoken registers, examine diachronic shifts in speech-verb derivation in both languages, and test the Scope Hierarchy against additional Turkic languages (Kazakh, Kyrgyz) and analytic languages (French, German) to assess its cross-linguistic robustness.

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