BRIDGING THE COGNITIVE GAP: TOWARD INTERCULTURAL PSYCHOLINGUISTIC FRAMEWORKS IN UZBEK-ENGLISH JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMS

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Abstract: The expansion of joint degree programs between Uzbekistan and international partners is often viewed through a lens of administrative success. However, the lived experience of the student reveals a deeper challenge: the "psycholinguistic friction" encountered when moving between distinct media discourses. This paper argues that for international academic mobility to be truly effective, students must master the verbal-visual cues that shape meaning in both Uzbek and English contexts. By integrating psycholinguistic discourse analysis into joint curricula, we can move beyond mere language proficiency toward true intercultural competency.

Key words: psycholinguistics, multimodal discourse analysis, verbal-visual occurrence, Uzbek-English media discourse, joint degree programs, intercultural competency, academic mobility, digital literacy.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid internationalization of higher education in Uzbekistan has led to a fascinating surge in joint degree programs. While we have successfully synchronized our credit systems and administrative protocols, a vital human element remains unaddressed: the cognitive and psycholinguistic adaptation of the students. When a student engages in a joint program between an Uzbek and an English-speaking university, they don't just step into a new classroom; they enter a new media discourse. Modern learning is no longer confined to textbooks; it is a multimodal experience where digital visuals and verbal cues work together to create meaning. My research posits that the success of these programs depends on developing an intercultural psycholinguistic framework. We must teach students how to decode the "verbal-visual occurrences" in media so they can navigate international academic spaces without losing their cultural identity or misinterpreting global information.

METHODOLOGY

To explore this, the study employs a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) rooted in the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013) and Multimodal Grammar (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020). The goal is to move beyond what is said and look at how it is felt and processed by the student.

1) Corpus selection: Corpus A (Uzbek): selected digital news outlets and educational platforms to identify high-context psycholinguistic triggers common in Uzbekistan. Corpus B (English): global platforms to identify low-context, direct-agency triggers typical in Western academic and media settings.

2) Analytical tools: the verbal-visual matrix

We utilized a three-step psycholinguistic mapping process:

➢ Verbal identification: We isolated key "emotion-heavy" lexis and syntactical structures (e.g., the use of passive vs. active voice to denote responsibility).

➢ Visual semiotics: We analyzed the "compositional meaning" of images (framing, salience, and color) accompanying the text to see if they amplified or contradicted the verbal message.

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➢ Cross-cultural mapping (The SPF Model): Using Pavlenko's (2014) theory of the "bilingual mind," we mapped how these verbal-visual units trigger different mental "schemas" in Uzbek and English speakers.

3) Data synthesis for education

Finally, the research translated these linguistic findings into educational competencies. We looked for "friction points"—areas where an Uzbek student's psycholinguistic processing might lead to a misunderstanding of English media discourse—and used these points to design the proposed Joint Degree framework.

RESULTS

When we talk about "academic mobility," we often focus on the physical movement of students or the digital transfer of credits. But there is a third, more complex movement: the cognitive transition. A student moving from a Tashkent-based curriculum to an English-medium program isn't just changing languages; they are changing the way they "read" the world. Media discourse—the advertisements, news feeds, and digital visuals we consume daily—acts as a silent teacher. My research suggests that if joint degree programs do not explicitly teach the verbal-visual psycholinguistics of both cultures, we risk leaving students "cognitively stranded" between two different ways of perceiving reality.

In psycholinguistics, we know that words do not work in isolation. In the digital age, a "text" is almost always accompanied by an "image." This is what I refer to as verbal-visual occurrence.

In Uzbek Media: We often see a "high-context" approach. The visual metaphors often rely on shared community values or historical continuity. The psycholinguistic impact is one of belonging and stability.

In English Media: There is often a "low-context," high-intensity approach. The text is direct, and the visuals are designed to trigger immediate individualistic responses or "calls to action."

DISCUSSION

Why joint degrees need a shared framework? If a student in a double-degree program in International Relations or Journalism processes an English news report using Uzbek psycholinguistic "schemas," they may miss the subtle framing or emotional subtext intended by the author. This isn't a failure of vocabulary; it's a failure of discourse synchronization. To ensure Quality Assurance (QA) in these programs, we must ask: Are we assessing the student's ability to decode the intent behind the multimodal message? A shared framework would allow educators to harmonize how "competency" is defined in both Tashkent and London or Washington.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

To make joint programs successful, I propose three human-centered steps:

1) Comparative Media Workshops: Students should analyze how the same global event is framed in Uzbek and English media, focusing on the "psycholinguistic triggers" used in each.

2) Visual Literacy Training: Moving beyond grammar to teach the "grammar of visual design."

3) Reflective Assessment: Asking students to document their "cognitive shifts" as they move between the two academic cultures.

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