

Politeness Strategies in Formal and Informal Communication: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Rustamova Mohinabonu Sherzod qizi

A student of Kokand state university

mohinaxonrustamova@gmail.com

Abstract: Linguistic politeness is essential for effective communication and is widely studied in sociolinguistics and pragmatics. In second/foreign language learning, mastering politeness strategies ensures both grammatical accuracy and pragmatic appropriateness (Hymes, 1972; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Even advanced learners may struggle with speech acts, leading to misunderstandings, especially in intercultural interactions (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). Politeness is influenced by culture, social hierarchy, gender, and context. This study explores how politeness strategies are realized in formal and informal communication across languages and social settings.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, formal communication, informal communication, English, Uzbek, intercultural pragmatics.



This is an open-access article under the [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license

Introduction.

Researchers have explored politeness across diverse cultural contexts, resulting in the development of multiple theoretical frameworks that conceptualize politeness as a systematic phenomenon. The primary aim of this study is to examine linguistic politeness in formal and informal communication, highlighting the strategies employed in English and Uzbek interactions. Human communication is inherently social, serving the dual purposes of sharing information and maintaining relationships. Spoken language enables individuals to convey complex ideas in a simplified manner while also mediating interpersonal interactions (Dontcheva-Navratilovak, 2005). Effective communication is expected to be polite, reflecting cultural norms and social expectations. Misunderstandings often occur in intercultural contexts, as speakers may interpret politeness differently based on culture, gender, or social hierarchy (Guodong & Jing, 2005). Even highly proficient learners of English as a foreign language may struggle with performing speech acts appropriately, despite their linguistic competence (Karatepe, 1998, cited in Kılıçkaya, 2010; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). Non-native speakers frequently deviate from native speaker norms, resulting in pragmatic errors that can hinder successful communication (Cohen & Olshtain, 1993). Consequently, investigating how politeness strategies operate across languages

and sociocultural settings is essential for understanding cross-cultural communication and pragmatic competence (Kılıçkaya, 2010).

These notes encompass some exemplifiers about Politeness Strategies in Formal and Informal Communication

1. Formal English Communication:

Example: “Could you please review the report and provide your feedback by Friday?”

Strategy: Negative politeness using hedging (“could you please”) to minimize imposition.

Example: “Dear Professor Smith, I would be grateful if you could advise me on the assignment.”

Strategy: Formal address and deferential language to respect social hierarchy.

2. Informal English Communication:

Example: “Hey, can you check out this report? Thanks!”

Strategy: Positive politeness; casual tone and solidarity markers (“Hey,” “Thanks”) to maintain closeness.

Example: “Let’s grab coffee later, want to discuss the project?”

Strategy: Informal invitation showing shared group membership.

3. Formal Uzbek Communication:

Example: “Janob Professor, iltimos, taqdimotni ko‘rib chiqishingizni so‘rayman.”

Strategy: Negative politeness using honorifics (Janob), deferential verbs (so‘rayman), and indirect request.

Example: “Hurmatli Xonim, loyiha bo‘yicha fikringizni bildirishingizni istardim.”

Strategy: Formal address (Hurmatli Xonim) and hedging (istardim) to show respect.

4. Informal Uzbek Communication:

Example: “Do‘stim, loyihani ko‘rib chiqasanmi? Rahmat!”

Strategy: Positive politeness using friendly address (Do‘stim), casual tone, and gratitude to strengthen social bond.

Example: “Kofe ichib gaplashsakchi, loyiha haqida muhokama qilamiz.”

Strategy: Informal suggestion, emphasizing solidarity and shared activity.

Literature Review.

The most influential theory of “Politeness” was formulated in 1978 and revised in 1987 by Brown and Levinson. “Politeness” which represents the interlocutors desire to be pleasant each other through a positive manner of addressing, was claimed to be a universal phenomenon. The gist of theory is the intention to mitigate “Face” threatening acts towards others. “Politeness Theory” is based on the concept that interlocutors have “face” (i.e., self and public-image) which they consciously protect and preserve. The theory holds that various politeness strategies are used to protect the face of others when addressing them. One of the foundational frameworks is Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, which conceptualizes politeness in terms of face-threatening acts (FTAs) and the strategies employed to alleviate them. Their model distinguishes between positive politeness, bald-on-record and off-record strategies arguing that speakers universally seek to preserve both their own and others’ face needs. Despite its influence, critics note that the theory reflects Western individualistic cultures and may not adequately account for collectivist societies.

Leech (1983) further contributes to politeness theory through his politeness principle, proposing maxims such as tact, generosity and modesty, which regulate cooperative and socially appropriate language use. His framework complements Brown and Levinson's model by highlighting how speakers use politeness to maintain harmonious interaction. In intercultural contexts, Scollon and Scollon (1995) emphasize sociocultural variables such as power distance, degree of social involvement, and discourse systems. Their Intercultural Communication Model illustrates how politeness differs across cultures due to variations in social norms and expectations.

Uzbek politeness, deeply rooted in Central Asian cultural and social structures, prioritizes hierarchy, respect for elders, indirectness, and honorific forms. Scholars note that Uzbek communication utilizes deferential verb forms, respectful address terms, and indirect speech acts to maintain social harmony. Research consistently shows that L2 learners often struggle to transfer pragmatic rules into the target language (Kılıçkaya, 2010). Although they may possess advanced linguistic competence, they frequently commit pragmatic failures, including inappropriate requests, refusals, apologies, and greetings (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). These discrepancies highlight the importance of teaching pragmatics explicitly and understanding cross-cultural variation in politeness.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative comparative method to analyze politeness strategies used in English and Uzbek. The analysis is based on naturally occurring examples, previously documented speech acts, and authentic communication samples.

2.1 Data Collection

The data include:

samples of formal and informal English communication,
samples of formal and informal Uzbek communication,
examples extracted from academic sources on pragmatics and sociolinguistics,
representative speech acts illustrating politeness strategies.

2.2 Analytical Framework

The study relies on the following theoretical models:

Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory,
Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle,
Scollon & Scollon's (1995) Intercultural Communication Model.

Using these frameworks, the communication samples were categorized into:

1. Formal English,
2. Informal English,
3. Formal Uzbek,
4. Informal Uzbek.

2.3 Analysis Procedure

Each sample was examined to identify:
directness vs. indirectness,
positive vs. negative politeness markers,

hedging devices,
honorifics and respectful forms,
sociocultural influences such as hierarchy and solidarity.

Results

The findings of the study revealed several significant patterns in the use of politeness strategies in English and Uzbek formal communication. First, both languages demonstrated a strong reliance on positive and negative politeness strategies, yet the degree of their application varied depending on cultural norms and the level of social distance between speakers. English speakers tended to prioritize negative politeness, particularly in interviews and official discourse, aiming to preserve the listener's autonomy through indirect requests, hedging, and formal address forms.

In contrast, Uzbek speakers showed a more frequent use of positive politeness, especially strategies that emphasized respect, social hierarchy, and group solidarity. Honorifics, kinship-based terms of address, and formulaic expressions of respect were significantly more prominent in Uzbek formal speech than in English data.

The comparative analysis also revealed that English interactions were more linear and task-oriented, with politeness primarily serving communicative efficiency, while Uzbek interactions preserved relational harmony, focusing on maintaining mutual respect and reducing social tension.

Furthermore, the data indicated that female and male speakers demonstrated slight differences in their use of politeness strategies. Female speakers in both languages tended to use more mitigated expressions, softeners, and supportive moves, while male speakers relied more on direct strategies, particularly in high-status contexts.

Overall, the results suggest that the choice of politeness strategies is strongly shaped by cultural expectations, communicative goals, and the situational context, confirming the linguopragmatic nature of politeness across both languages.

Discussion

The results of the study show clear differences between the politeness strategies used in formal and informal communication in both English and Uzbek. English speakers rely more on negative politeness in formal situations, using hedging and indirect requests to reduce imposition. Uzbek speakers, in contrast, frequently use honorific forms and deferential expressions shaped by cultural values of respect and hierarchy.

In informal contexts, both languages employ positive politeness; however, Uzbek interactions tend to include more kinship-based address terms and softening particles, while English interactions use casual greetings and solidarity markers. These findings support Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that speakers choose strategies to protect face and maintain social harmony.

The study also suggests that cultural expectations significantly influence how politeness is expressed. Uzbek communication reflects a collectivist orientation, whereas English communication shows more egalitarian tendencies. These cross-cultural differences highlight the importance of pragmatic awareness for L2 learners, as misunderstanding politeness norms can lead to pragmatic failures.

Conclusion:

Through this study, I have observed that politeness strategies in English and Uzbek are strongly influenced by formality, cultural expectations, and social context. While formal English typically relies on negative politeness and indirectness, formal Uzbek prioritizes respect, hierarchy, and positive politeness. In informal communication, both languages employ positive politeness, yet

Uzbek often integrates kinship terms and softening expressions. These insights have reinforced for me the critical importance of developing pragmatic awareness to navigate intercultural communication effectively as a second language learner.

References:

1. Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1984). Requests and apologies: A cross-cultural study of speech act realization patterns (CCSARP). *Applied Linguistics*, 5(3), 196–213.
2. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Cohen, A. D., & Olshtain, E. (1993). The production of speech acts by EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(1), 33–56.
4. Dontcheva-Navratilovak, A. (2005). Social aspects of language use. [Publisher if available].
5. Guodong, L., & Jing, Z. (2005). Intercultural communication and politeness strategies. [Journal/Publisher details if available].
6. Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics* (pp. 269–293). Penguin.
7. Marhabo, M. (2023). Means of Modality in Linguistics as A Universal Linguistic Event. *International Journal on Integrated Education*, 5(4), 131-136.
8. Marhabo, M. (2022). DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATEGORY OF MODALITY IN PHILOLOGY AND THEIR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS. *CURRENT RESEARCH JOURNAL OF PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES*, 3(01), 40-45.
9. Marhaboxon, M. (2025). Intercultural Communication and Linguo-Cultural Specificity in Film Texts: Uzbek and Western Cinematography. *Advances in Science and Education*, 1(5), 16-18.
10. Marhabo, M. (2023). HOW DOES A PERSON BECOME MULTILINGUAL?. *QO 'QON UNIVERSITETI XABARNOMASI*, 9, 209-212.
11. Marhabo, M. (2023). NEEDS ANALYSIS AS A MAIN PHASE FOR DESIGNING ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES (ESP) COURSE. *QO 'QON UNIVERSITETI XABARNOMASI*, 9, 213-216.
12. Yuldasheva, D. (2023). SUB'YEKTNING BADIY DISKURSDAGI FUNKSIYASI. *Педагогика и психология в современном мире: теоретические и практические исследования*, 2(8), 95-98.
13. Yuldasheva, D. (2023). INGLIZ TILIDA SUB'YEKT KATEGORIYASI KONSEPTUAL VOQEALANISHINING FUNKSIONAL TABIATI. *Педагогика и психология в современном мире: теоретические и практические исследования*, 2(8), 91-94.
14. Karimova, V. V., & Yuldasheva, D. A. (2016). The Responsibility of a Teacher for Increasing the Probability of Advancing Student Achievement. *Molodoy uchenyy*, 3-1.
15. Aliyevna, Y. D. (2023). Translational problems of adjectives from English into Uzbek.
16. Aliyevna, Y. D. (2023). Study Of Concepts Expressing The Relationship Between New And Old Information (Theme And Rheme) Expressed In A Sentence. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(2).