



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS DEVICES IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract: Politeness has been among the most extensively researched issues in pragmatics and sociolinguistics because it plays a role in facilitating harmonious human interaction across cultures. This article presents a comparative analytic analysis of politeness devices between Uzbek and English, analyzing lexical, morpho-syntactic, discursive, and pragmatic strategies. The study places its analysis within three long-standing frameworks: Lakoff’s politeness principles, Leech’s Politeness Principle, and Brown and Levinson’s Face Theory, coupling these with more contemporary approaches, including Watts’ discursive framework, Culpeper’s model of impoliteness, and Spencer-Oatey’s rapport management model. Empirical evidence is drawn from corpora, authentic dialogue, and previous research. The findings point both to universal and culture-specific processes: English is found to prefer syntactic and pragmatic devices such as modal verbs, hedges, and indirectness, whereas Uzbek uses politeness in conjunction with pronoun distinction, honorifics, blessings, and formulaically dense displays of a cultural kind. The analysis emphasizes the intercultural relevance of the differences, underscoring the risk of pragmatic failure and miscommunication in cross-linguistic communication. Pedagogical recommendations are proposed for encouraging intercultural competence in English and Uzbek learners.

Keywords: politeness devices; contemporary approaches; intercultural relevance; cross-linguistic communication; pragmatic failure; miscommunication; discursive framework.

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a cornerstone of human communication. Every society develops devices for evading potential conflict, expressing respect, and facilitating cooperative interaction. Universally, these functions are attained through linguistic and cultural devices. Scholars have long known that politeness research reveals not just language-particular organization but also socio-cultural values beneath the surface. English and Uzbek offer fertile ground for contrast because they represent two divergent cultural orientations. English, particularly in Anglo-American varieties, is subject to individualistic patterns of culture such as autonomy, privacy,

and egalitarianism. Consequently, English politeness tends to manifest itself in terms of indirectness, hedging, and modal verbs that mitigate the power of imposition. Uzbek, on the other hand, belongs to a hierarchical and collectivist culture where politeness expresses respect for authority, age, and harmony in the community. Politeness strategies thus rely on honorifics, pronominal contrasts (sen vs. siz), blessings, and formulaic greetings. The significance of these differences extends beyond theoretical linguistics. During an era of international mobility, Uzbek speakers are increasingly interacting with English speakers in educational, business, and internet environments. Politeness mismatched expectations can lead to pragmatic breakdowns: an Uzbek learner of English can sound too formal or distant, and an English speaker can be too blunt in Uzbek communication. Therefore, comparative pragmatics of politeness are needed in order to explain intercultural communication, second-language teaching, and cross-cultural diplomacy. The objectives of this article are:

1. To determine the major politeness devices of Uzbek and English.
2. To contrast their similarities and differences at lexical, morpho-syntactic, and discursive levels.
3. Consider their broader intercultural and pedagogical consequences.

By grounding the analysis in classical and modern theories of politeness, the research contributes to ongoing debates in pragmatics and intercultural communication. The theory of politeness has developed in many stages. This study combines classical models with more recent developments in an attempt to encourage analytical distinction and cultural sensitivity. Robin Lakoff (1973) proposed three maxims of conversation: (1) do not impose, (2) provide choices, and (3) make the hearer feel good. These rules frame politeness as a principle of conversation that regulates interaction. Geoffrey Leech (1983) augmented Grice’s cooperative principle with six politeness maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. These reflect the tendency to avoid impolite beliefs and encourage polite ones. Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed the most prevailing model, centering on “face” – the public self one wishes to present. The politeness strategies are positive (showing solidarity), negative (reducing imposition), bald-on-record, or off-record. Watts (2003) objects to static conceptions of politeness, arguing that politeness must be viewed as discursively negotiated rather than fixed. The approach emphasizes how participants evaluate behaviour as polite or impolite in situation. Spencer-Oatey (2008) develops face theory by focusing on relational management. Her theory differentiates face (identity), rights and obligations, and interactional goals, and provides a more dynamic account of politeness. Politeness cannot be addressed in a vacuum, divorced from its counterpart – impoliteness. Culpeper (1996, 2011) focuses on strategies that intentionally aim at face. Incorporating considerations of impoliteness allows for a more balanced consideration. By combining these models, this study positions politeness not just as a universal rule set but as a discursively normed culture-sensitive practice.

Politeness research is vast, crossing languages and approaches. Research consistently shows that English employs indirectness and modal shading (House & Kasper, 1981; Blum-

Kulka, 1989). Requests, for example, often take the shape of modal questions: Could you open the window? Hedging devices (sort of, maybe, I think) make assertions less forceful. While formal titles still hold within institutions, Anglo-American English’s drift is egalitarian address. Uzbek pragmatics indexes collectivist norms. Differences between pronouns (*sen* vs. *siz*) signal levels of respect, and honorifics and formulaic blessings reinforce positive politeness (Kadyrova, 2023). Deferring to older people and people in authority is the center of attention of traditional values, which is expressed through high frequency of use of respectful lexical markers such as *hurmatli* (respected), *marhamat* (please go ahead), and *rahmat* (thank you). Contrastive studies (Thomas, 1983; Wierzbicka, 1991; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993) exhibit universal strategy with culture-specific realization. English and Uzbek, for example, have indirectness in common, but Uzbek packages politeness within intricate lexical formulae, whereas English invests in syntactic mitigation. Few studies make systematic, multi-level contrasts between politeness strategies in English and Uzbek. The focus of earlier research has been on requests or forms of address. This article addresses this gap by covering lexical, morpho-syntactic, and discursive strategies for all.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative comparative approach.

- Data Sources
 - English material: British National Corpus samples, internet discussion board data, and everyday interaction in classroom and workplace settings.
 - Uzbek corpus: Transcriptions of speech, media language, and written language (letters, speeches, newspapers).
 - Secondary sources: Peer-reviewed articles on politeness in both languages.
- Analytical Procedure
 - Step 1: Classify examples as lexical, morpho-syntactic, and discursive.
 - Step 2: Apply theoretical models (Lakoff, Leech, Brown & Levinson, Spencer-Oatey) to account for strategies.
 - Step 3: Comparative analysis to establish similarities, divergences, and intercultural implications. Use of authentic data and theoretical inquiry ensures validity and scholarly rigor.
- Lexical Politeness Devices
 - English: The politeness markers that are most often used are please, thank you, sorry, excuse me, and I’m afraid. Softening tags (I was just wondering, if you don’t mind) help to make it indirect. Compliments (That’s a great idea) are solidarity-building.
 - Uzbek: Uzbek politeness vocabulary includes *iltimos* (please), *rahmat* (thank you), *uzr* (sorry), *marhamat* (please continue), and blessings such as *omad tilayman* (I wish you success). These are usually present in rich cultural forms of address (*aziz do’stim*, dear friend; *hurmatli ustoz*, respected teacher).

Both languages make use of politeness vocabulary, yet Uzbek uses more complex formulaic vocabulary associated with collectivist cultural norms, and whereas English likes to be concise.

- Morpho-Syntactic Devices
- English: Politeness in English is syntactically expressed through modals (might, could, would), indirect questions (I was wondering if), and passive forms (It would be appreciated if...).
- Uzbek: Uzbek employs pronominal contrast (sen vs. siz), verb morphology, and honorific suffixes. For example, *Siz borsangiz yaxshi bo'lardi* (It would be good if you went) expresses respect both in pronoun and verb form.

English politeness is primarily syntactic and pragmatic, and Uzbek politeness is morphological and lexical.

- Discursive and Pragmatic Devices
- Hedging: English hedges are such as *maybe, sort of, kind of, I think*. Uzbek hedges are *balki, ehtimol, shekilli*.
- Compliments and Small Talk: English compliments are primarily based on looks and competence. Uzbek compliments involve blessings (*Yashavor, barakalla*) or social values.
- Speech Acts: Requests, apologies, and thanks are universal, yet their expressions differ. English requests favor indirectness; Uzbek requests favor respect and formulaic politeness.

RESULTS

Comparison of English and Uzbek politeness devices yields results at three general levels: lexical, morpho-syntactic, and discursive/pragmatic. At each level, similarity and difference patterns occur, which embody both universal face-mitigation strategies and culture-specific instantiations founded on sociocultural orientations. The results are reported according to the classification procedure outlined in the methodology. The corpus data show that both English and Uzbek rely most heavily on conventional politeness markers such as “please” and “iltimos”, “thank you” and “rahmat”, and “sorry” and “uzr”. These lexical cues function as universalized signals of respect and consideration. But Uzbek politeness markers illustrate high formulaic density. Lexical politeness in Uzbek is not limited to minimal forms but is often extended by blessings, compliments, and culturally rooted greetings. For example, in political speeches and everyday conversations, the speaker often uses such forms as *hurmatli domla* (dear teacher), *aziz do'stlar* (dear friends), and *barakalla* (well done) to enhance social harmony. These forms are not merely adornments but are pragmatic appropriateness.

English, by contrast, shows lexical minimalism. Politeness relies on short markers such as please, thanks, and sorry, often supplemented by pragmatic help such as tone or indirect syntax. While long compliments are employed (That was really helpful of you), they are less formulaic and occur less frequently than in Uzbek. English also cuts corners when it comes to honorific address, particularly in Anglo-American forms, where “Mr.” and “Mrs.” are increasingly replaced by first names in most contexts. Quantitative evidence from corpus comparison highlights this contrast. In the sample of British National Corpus used, “please” was encountered with a normalized frequency of 31 tokens per 100,000 words. In the Uzbek media corpus, “iltimos” was encountered only 15 tokens per 100,000 words; but honorific expressions

(*hurmatli, aziz, marhamat*) collectively exceeded 60 tokens per 100,000 words. This confirms that while English has one powerful marker (please), Uzbek distributes politeness across a larger lexical inventory.

English and Uzbek present strongly contrasting morpho-syntactic strategies at the level of the word and sentence. English’s most salient morpho-syntactic devices are modal verbs (could, would, might), indirect question structures (“I was wondering if you could...”), and the passive voice (“It would be appreciated if...”). These forms reduce imposition and make requests sound less direct.

For example:

“Could you send me the report by tomorrow?” (modal mitigation)

“I wondered if you could assist me with this.” (indirect question)

“All students are asked to attend the meeting.” (passive structure)

These forms correspond to negative politeness strategies in Brown & Levinson’s model, which guard the autonomy of the hearer by softening the force of the speech act.

Uzbek, however, utilizes pronominal contrast (*sen* vs. *siz*), verb morphology, and honorific suffixes as the carriers of politeness from the morpho-syntactic point of view. The selection of either *sen* (colloquial second-person singular) or *siz* (respectful second-person singular/plural) is central to this. Saluting an older person, superior, or stranger with *sen* is pragmatically unacceptable regardless of the speaker’s intention.

Examples from the Uzbek material illustrate the following:

Kitobni bering, iltimos. (“Give me the book, please.”) → polite because of the *siz*-form (bering)

Kitobni ber, iltimos. (“Give me the book, please.”) → polite only between equals; rude to a superior

Verb morphology also differentiates: constructions like *keling* (“please come” – respectful) are opposed to *kel* (“come” – mate).

Quantitative evidence again points to the trend: in the Uzbek data, forms of *siz* outnumbered forms of *sen* 4:1 in public and formal contexts. English lacks such a pronominal system; politeness is conveyed instead by means of syntactic modification. Discourse-level analysis reflects the greatest cultural variation. English speakers also employ hedges such as “maybe,” “sort of,” “kind of,” and “I think.” These are used to reduce certainty and soften face threat. For instance:

“I think we should depart soon.”

“Perhaps we may attempt another alternative.”

Uzbek hedges (*balki, ehtimol, shekilli*) do exist but are less frequently employed. Uzbek politeness, instead, inclines towards explicit positive evaluation and benediction and not uncertainty softening. English compliments are usually on looks (“You look nice today”) or skill (“Well done, that was a good presentation”). Uzbek compliments are in the form of blessings and culturally desired affirmations, e.g., *Yashavor!* (“Live long!”), *Omad tilayman* (“I

wish you success”), *Barakalla* (“Well done”). English small talk is centered on neutral topics (weather, hobbies, taste). Uzbek small talk includes questions about family, health, and well-being (*Qalaysiz? Yaxshi yuribsizmi?* – “How are you? Are you keeping well?”), which are ritualized markers of politeness rather than efforts to gather information.

The cross-cultural comparison of requests, apologies, and thanks confirms both universal patterns and culture-specific implementations.

Requests: English favors indirectness (“Would you mind opening the window?”), while Uzbek favors honorific marking (*Derazani ochib yuborsangiz bo’ladimi?* – “Would it be possible if you opened the window?”).

Apologies: English employs “I’m sorry” and “I apologize” in a wide variety of situations, even small inconveniences. Uzbek utilizes *uzr* and extends the formula of apology (*Kechirasiz, uzr so’rayman* – “Forgive me, I apologize”), which indicates higher ritual intensity.

Thanks: English “thank you” covers a broad range of situations, while Uzbek *rahmat* often has formulaic attachments (*katta rahmat* – “big thanks,” *rahmat sizga* – “thanks to you”).

The evidence shows that universal functions (respect, conflict avoidance, solidarity) are manifested differently in each language. English politeness is syntactically and pragmatically based, minimizing imposition through indirectness. Uzbek politeness is lexically and morphologically based, de-emphasizing hierarchy, respect, and community through formulae and honorifics. The evidence suggests the potential for pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication: English speakers might sound too blunt for Uzbek speakers if they omit honorifics and pronominal distinction. Uzbek speakers will sound too formal or obsequious in English if they bring their elaborate formulaic speech. Hence, the results lend empirical validation for intercultural communication training as well as second-language teaching.

DISCUSSION

Comparative politeness device study between Uzbek and English reveals convergences as well as divergences. Politeness has the same universal purposes – maintaining social harmony, mitigating potential conflict, and making cooperative interaction possible – but their realization through language is very different. In the discussion, the findings are examined in theoretical approaches, sociocultural directions, and intercultural communication concerns. Teaching implications also are framed for learners and teachers of both languages. Lakoff’s, Leech’s, and Brown & Levinson’s traditional theories are good foundations for politeness strategy analysis. However, the contrastive evidence between Uzbek and English shows that the aforementioned theories do not account for cultural variation. Lakoff’s three rules – do not impose, offer choices, and make the hearer feel good – are unmistakably present in English politeness. Indirect requests such as *Could you pass me the salt?* demonstrate avoidance of imposition. Uzbek politeness, however, complicates the model: it entails more than avoidance of imposition. It requires overt respect, ingrained in terms of pronouns and formulaic expressions. For example, the use of *siz* instead of *sen* not only avoids imposition but actually enhances the status of the addressee. Lakoff’s rules thus only describe half the picture. Leech’s

maxims also receive justification but require contextual adaptation. The tact maxim (minimize cost to other, maximize benefit to other) is extremely strong in English requests and offers. In Uzbek, however, the approbation maxim (maximize praise of other) and sympathy maxim (maximize concern for other) are much more salient. Compliments, benedictions, and good wishes are not peripheral politeness strategies in Uzbek; they are central to everyday talk. Consequently, while Leech’s maxims are generally applicable, their differential weighting is a matter of varying cultural importance.

Brown and Levinson’s Face Theory must be re-evaluated. The distinction between positive face (wishing to be approved) and negative face (not wishing to be imposed upon) has been extremely influential. English politeness clearly works on negative face strategies such as not wishing to impose upon someone using indirectness. Uzbek politeness, however, is concerned with positive politeness –not as equality solidarity but as the display of hierarchical respect. Politeness in Uzbek is not so much a question of maintaining individual autonomy as it is of articulating social order. This calls into doubt the universality of Brown and Levinson’s theory because it underestimates the employment of collectivism and hierarchy in determining politeness. Subsequent theories present more adequate tools. Watts’ discursive approach emphasizes the fact that politeness is not a predefined set of strategies but a matter of participants’ assessments. It is particularly useful in cross-cultural situations, in which what will be viewed as polite in one culture may be perceived as stilted or even rude in another. Spencer-Oatey’s theory of rapport management is similarly useful because it can be applied to examine not only face but also rights, obligations, and goals of interaction. For example, in Uzbek, the use of *sen* on someone of higher rank would be a violation of rights and obligations regardless of the speaker’s intent. There is not this type of formal system of pronouns in English, so the rapport management model maintains the deeper socio-pragmatic variation.

Lastly, Culpeper’s impoliteness theory helps to highlight what happens when there is a violation of politeness norms. An English speaker deploying plain imperatives in the direction of an Uzbek elder may unconsciously produce impoliteness, while an Uzbek speaker who transfers rich honorifics across to English may be too formal. Such mismatches show how impoliteness does not result from purpose but from cultural misalignment. The findings show how profound is the impact of cultural orientation on politeness. In English-speaking cultures, which Hofstede (2001) describes as individualist, politeness manifests as a focus on autonomy and egalitarianism. Negative politeness prevails: speakers seek not to intrude on others using hedges, modals, and indirectness. Titles and honorifics exist but are comparatively restricted in range and are falling out of use in favor of first-name address. This is a symptom of larger cultural shifts towards informality and egalitarianism. Uzbek society is collectivist and hierarchical, on the other hand. Respect for elders, teachers, and those in charge is deeply ingrained in culture. This finds direct instantiation in language use. Politeness is not so much a question of avoiding imposition as of encoding relationships and hierarchies. The most obvious marker is the *sen/siz* pronoun distinction, but the system in fact works much more pervasively:

honorifics, blessings, and formulaic responses underpin deference and in-group solidarity. Not using these markers not only would be offensive but would be interpreted as a violation of cultural norms. These variations show that politeness is anything but a linguistic fact but a manifestation of culture. English politeness is rooted in individualistic values of independence and equality, while Uzbek politeness is rooted in collective values of respect and hierarchy.

The cultural division of politeness strategies has profound implications for intercultural communication. When the speakers simply transfer strategies from one’s native tongue to a non-native language, pragmatic failure ensues. For example, an Uzbek learner of English may use too many honorifics and ornate formulaic formulae in official contexts. Phrases like *Most respected and honorable professor, I beg your guidance* sound excessively formal, even obsequious, in English. While the meaning is to be polite, the pragmatic effect is stiffness. On the other hand, an English speaker communicating in Uzbek can use directness or very few politeness markers. Issuing *Sen ber kitobni* (Give me that book) to an older person without *iltimos* (please) or the honorific pronoun *siz* would not just sound rude – it would be taken as being rude and disrespectful. Mismatch here generates unintended rudeness. Such practical failure should not be underestimated. It can damage relationships, reinforce stereotypes, and disrupt effective communication. In business and diplomatic contexts, it can even be catastrophic. Intercultural competence thus requires explicit awareness that politeness is differently encoded across languages.

Variation within languages is another important factor. In English, generational change has led to increasing informality. Young speakers are more and more using first names on people in authority, and politeness is expressed more through tone and pragmatics than through honorifics or titles. Electronic communication’s brevity and speed takes this further. In Uzbek, traditional politeness rules are still strong, particularly in rural and formal contexts. However, urban youth speakers, who are exposed to international media and the internet, at times experiment with more overt variants. Nonetheless, pronoun distinction is still an important respect marker. In internet use, code-switching between Uzbek and Russian or English also has impact on politeness usage, leading to hybrid varieties. This variation demonstrates politeness to be dynamic, rather than static. Any comparative analysis must account for diachronic and generational shifts. What is polite at a moment in time may not be polite the next day.

The findings have substantial implications for pedagogy. To Uzbek learners of English, it is worth noting that overuse of honorifics or highly elaborate turns may be inappropriate in English. Instead, what is to be acquired by learners is indirect requests, modal verbs, and hedging. Role-play and exposure to natural interactions can develop pragmatic competence. For the English learners of Uzbek, instruction must highlight the salience of pronoun choice and honorifics. Students must understand when to use *sen* or *siz* and how to embed politeness into informal expressions. Without it, learners risk being impolite despite their good intentions. Teachers should instruct clear descriptions of cultural values behind the strategies, not just the form. Intercultural training has to extend beyond grammar and lexis towards pragmatic

consciousness. This accords with applied linguistics arguments both for linguistic competence teaching as well as intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997).

The comparative figures also pertain to theoretical arguments in politeness theory. The differences between Uzbek and English challenge appeals to universality in Brown and Levinson’s model. They show negative face (autonomy) is not necessarily supreme in all cultures. Positive politeness aimed at respect and hierarchy can dominate collectivist cultures. This suggests politeness theory requires a more open, culture-based model. Spencer-Oatey’s rapport management model is one such direction, but it requires extension. Future theory must integrate learning from both universalist and relativist paradigms, recognizing shared functions but allowing culturally distinct realizations. Finally, the study has broader social and diplomatic ramifications. In international business, diplomacy, and education, politeness difference-induced miscommunication can hinder cooperation. Diplomats, foreign students, and businessmen should be trained with cross-cultural pragmatics modules as part of their modules. An understanding of the grammar as well as the pragmatics of a language is significant in establishing trust and avoiding unintended insult. In the internet age, all of these are more so. Online communication reduces contextual clues, and as such politeness markers become even more important yet potentially more prone to misinterpretation. Emojis, for example, occasionally stand in for politeness markers but are differently interpreted across cultures. Digital pragmatics, then, is a new area with possibilities for future research.

Summary:

1. Classical theories explain some but not all politeness strategies; newer frameworks better capture cultural specificity.
2. English politeness reflects individualist values of autonomy and egalitarianism, while Uzbek politeness reflects collectivist values of hierarchy and respect.
3. Intercultural miscommunication often arises from transferring politeness strategies directly across languages.
4. Generational and contextual variation demonstrates that politeness is dynamic.
5. Pedagogical approaches must integrate pragmatic awareness, not just linguistic competence.
6. Theoretical models must evolve toward a culture-sensitive framework.
7. The findings have broader implications for diplomacy, business, and computer-mediated communication.

Findings:

- Lexical devices: Both use “please”, “thank you”, etc. in English and *iltimos, rahmat, marhamat*, etc. in Uzbek. Uzbek relies more heavily on formulaic, culture-embedded forms that are linked with respect and hierarchy.
- Morpho-syntactic devices: English uses modal verbs, indirect question forms, and titles/honorifics comparatively sparingly. Uzbek resorts more to a distinctive system of pronouns (*sen* vs. *siz*), honorifics, verb forms involving respect, etc.

- Discursive/pragmatic devices: English uses hedging, softening of assertions, indirect speech acts; Uzbek employs blessings, polite address, compliments, formal speech formulas.
- Cultural orientations: English politeness is sensitive to individualism, autonomy, negative face preservation; Uzbek is hierarchical, collectivist, with positive face and respect safeguarded in terms of social esteem and relationship harmony.

Universals do exist (all languages have some means of countering face-threatening acts, showing respect, etc.), but realization of politeness strategies is culturally highly conditioned. Effective intercultural communication and teaching languages needs more than acquaintance with grammatical forms; it demands cognition of motivating social values. More effort is needed to construct corpora, analyze digital discourse, generation change, and to sharpen theory using culture-sensitive models.

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