



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICON OF “ETIQUETTE” IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK (EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT)

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Abstract

This study presents a corpus-based comparative analysis of the semantic and functional features of etiquette lexis in written English and Uzbek. Focusing on common polite expressions – greetings, farewells, thanks, apologies, requests, and honorifics – the analysis draws on large text corpora and existing literature to uncover how each language encodes politeness. The results show that both English and Uzbek employ conventionalized formulas to fulfill similar social functions, yet cultural values shape their usage in distinctive ways. English written etiquette tends toward brevity and indirectness, reflecting an emphasis on individualism and negative politeness (minimizing imposition). In contrast, Uzbek etiquette lexis is often more elaborate and expressive, reflecting the language’s collectivist orientation and respect-based norms. Uzbek writings frequently incorporate honorifics, kinship terms, and even blessings as part of polite expressions, underscoring the importance of hierarchy and sincerity in Uzbek culture. Similarities were observed in the core functions of etiquette expressions (e.g. maintaining social harmony), but differences abound in form, frequency, and context of use. These findings highlight how deeply cultural and social factors are embedded in language use. By understanding the comparative pragmatics of English and Uzbek politeness formulas, linguists and language learners can better appreciate the interplay between language, culture, and society in shaping courteous communication.

Keywords: Politeness; Etiquette Lexis; English; Uzbek; Corpus Linguistics; Sociolinguistics; Cross-Cultural Pragmatics.



Introduction

Polite expressions – greetings, farewells, expressions of thanks, apologies, requests, and honorific address terms – are a fundamental part of language etiquette, serving as “the basic oil of social relations”. Every language has a repertoire of such formulas, but their usage and nuances are deeply influenced by cultural norms and social context. English and Uzbek provide an illuminating contrast in this regard. English, a Germanic language used in predominantly Western individualistic societies, and Uzbek, a Turkic language of Central Asia with strong collectivist and Islamic cultural influences, exhibit both universal and culture-specific politeness strategies. This study focuses on written forms of etiquette lexis in these two languages – for example, how politeness formulas appear in letters, literature, and other written communications – to uncover semantic and functional patterns.

Politeness has been a key topic in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Classic theories by Brown and Levinson [1] distinguish negative politeness (strategies aimed at not impinging on the addressee’s autonomy) and positive politeness (strategies that seek to establish friendliness or solidarity) in language use. English is often characterized as a negative-politeness oriented language, where speakers/writers prefer indirectness and formality to avoid imposing. Uzbek, on the other hand, is observed to prioritize respectful and heartfelt expressions – a form of positive politeness tempered by clear social hierarchies. Previous comparative studies have noted that each language’s politeness formulas are shaped by its “national-cultural peculiarities”. For instance, greeting rituals in Uzbek tend to be extended and inquiry-rich (asking about one’s health and family), reflecting a tradition of warmth and concern, whereas English greetings are typically brief and formulaic. Similarly, forms of address differ: Uzbek commonly uses kinship terms like aka (“older brother”) or opa (“older sister”) for polite address to unrelated people, embodying a view of society as an extended family, while English relies on neutral titles like Mr., Ms., Sir, Madam.

Despite the growing interest in cross-cultural pragmatics, direct corpus-based comparisons of English and Uzbek politeness formulas have been scarce. Studies in Uzbek linguistics have emphasized the rich system of xushmuomalalik (“politeness”) in Uzbek speech culture, and English politeness has been extensively documented in pragmatics literature, but systematic data-driven comparisons are



limited. This research aims to fill that gap by leveraging corpus evidence to compare how written English and Uzbek encode etiquette. By examining real usage examples and frequencies in large text collections, we can move beyond anecdotes to a more empirical understanding of similarities and differences. The insights from this study have practical relevance for translators, language educators, and anyone involved in English Uzbek intercultural communication, shedding light on why certain polite phrases “don’t translate” neatly and how cultural values manifest in language choices.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The theoretical foundation for analyzing etiquette lexis comes from pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory remains influential, proposing that speakers universally attend to “face needs”: the desire to be liked (positive face) and the desire not to be imposed upon (negative face). However, different cultures prioritize these needs differently. English politeness strategies strongly emphasize negative face – hence the prevalence of phrases like “Could you please...?” or apologetic prefaces (“I’m sorry to bother you, but...”), which minimize imposition. In contrast, Uzbek politeness is deeply intertwined with showing respect and cordiality – aligning with positive face in terms of friendliness, but also invoking what we might call deference strategies to acknowledge status differences. Uzbek scholars often use the term *xushmuomalalik* to denote courteous conduct, and it encompasses respectful terms of address, honorific pronouns, and gracious formulaic phrases.

Cross-cultural studies underscore that what counts as polite can differ markedly. Wierzbicka [2] argues that speech acts like thanking or apologizing carry culture-specific “scripts.” For example, saying “thank you” in English is a routine act even for small favors, whereas in some cultures gratitude might be shown through reciprocation or elaborate blessings. In the Uzbek context, research has noted that gratitude is frequently expressed through effusive or hyperbolic phrases rather than a simple thanks. One study by Jo‘rayeva [3] observed that Uzbek greetings often involve asking about the addressee’s family and well-being in detail, reflecting cultural norms of hospitality and care. The same study pointed out that English greetings like “How are you?” are generally perfunctory and not literally inquiring



about one's health – a difference that can confuse learners if cultural context is ignored.

Comparative research specifically on English and Uzbek politeness has begun to emerge in recent years. Avilova [4] conducted a contrastive analysis of politeness formulas and found that although both languages have expressions for common etiquette functions, their usage diverges due to cultural context. For instance, English tends to use a single, short expression where Uzbek might use a compound of phrases. A simple English “Thank you” may correspond to Rahmat katta, tashakkur! (“Big thanks, thank you”) in Uzbek if the situation merits extra warmth. Similarly, Khamidjonova [5] noted that direct requests are avoided in English business correspondence (favoring conditional or question forms), whereas Uzbek requests often include the word iltimos (“please”) plus an imperative – a combination of direct ask with a polite marker. She suggests that while English speakers mitigate requests to avoid encroaching on one's freedom (negative politeness), Uzbek speakers strive to uphold respect and solidarity, sometimes even offering blessings or thanks in advance when asking a favor. For example, an Uzbek letter might say Oldindan rahmat (“thanks in advance”) as part of the request, a strategy less common in English.

Honorifics and terms of address form another point of contrast highlighted in the literature. In English, apart from titles like Dr., Prof., or honorifics like Your Majesty in very formal contexts, the language lacks a grammatical honorific system; everyone is addressed as “you.” Uzbek, by comparison, preserves a T/V pronoun distinction (sen for intimate ‘you’ and Siz for polite ‘You’), much like the tu/vous in French. Children are taught from a young age to address elders with Siz and never sen. Additionally, Uzbek has a rich set of respectful kinship terms used for strangers – calling an older man otaxon (“father”), an older woman xonim or onaxon (“madam” or “mother”), a peer slightly older aka (“older bro.”), etc., as documented by Zamira Jo‘rayeva in 2022. This practice reflects the high value placed on showing deference and the culturally ingrained idea that one should treat others with the same respect as family elders. Fox [6], studying English etiquette, remarks that English polite conversation tends to maintain a certain distance (e.g., using last names with titles in formal writing) and even uses neutral small talk (like discussing the weather) as a strategy to avoid prying or discomfort. Uzbek communication, conversely, is noted for its muzokara (dialogue) rituals that



emphasize finding common ground – it’s common to ask about family or make benign comments to establish a personal connection. Such differences underscore that etiquette lexis is not just a linguistic phenomenon, but a sociocultural one.

In summary, previous work suggests that while the functions of etiquette expressions (to greet, part, thank, apologize, request politely, show respect) are universal, their forms and pragmatic nuances are culture-bound. English politeness lexis tends to be concise, indirect, and standardized, aligning with values of personal autonomy and formal efficiency. Uzbek politeness lexis tends to be rich, explicit, and steeped in social hierarchy and warmth, aligning with values of community and respect. What remains to be established through corpus-based analysis is the extent and frequency of these features in authentic written usage, which this study aims to explore.

To investigate etiquette lexis in written English and Uzbek, a corpus-based approach was adopted. Corpora: For English, the British National Corpus (BNC) was used as a primary reference, as it comprises 100 million words of written (90%) and spoken (10%) British English from diverse genres. This provides a broad snapshot of English usage in formal and informal texts. For Uzbek, we utilized the Uzbek Web Corpus (uzWaC), a corpus of about 18 million words of Uzbek text collected from the Internet. The UzWac includes contemporary written Uzbek from news, blogs, and other online sources, offering a relevant dataset for modern usage. In addition, the study consulted the emerging Uzbek National Corpus where available, and dictionaries or glossaries (e.g., Guerin’s Uzbek Glossary) for confirmatory examples of specific phrases.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis revealed both commonalities in the functions of polite expressions and pronounced differences in their form and usage frequency between English and Uzbek written language. Below we summarize the findings by category, highlighting key similarities and differences with illustrative examples from the corpus data and literature:

Greetings: In written English, greetings are typically brief and formulaic. Common openings include “Dear [Name],” in letters or a simple “Hello/Hi” in less formal correspondence. These serve to acknowledge the recipient without delving into personal matters. English greetings like “How are you?” or “How do you do?” are



generally ritual questions not expecting detailed answers, but rather functioning as polite starters. In Uzbek, greetings are more elaborate and often carry literal good wishes. The most prevalent written greeting is Assalomu alaykum (literally “Peace be upon you”), to which the response is Va alaykum assalom (“And peace be upon you as well”). This Islamic greeting is ubiquitous in Uzbek, used in formal writing and literature to convey respect and goodwill. Moreover, an Uzbek written greeting may continue with inquiries or wishes: it is not uncommon to see something like Assalomu alaykum, hurmatli ustoz, ishlaringiz yaxshimi? (“Peace be upon you, dear teacher, are your affairs well?”) when a student writes to a teacher, thus immediately expressing respect (hurmatli = respected) and concern for the person’s well-being. This reflects Uzbek cultural norms where asking about one’s health and family is an ingrained part of saying hello. By contrast, an English letter to a professor would likely start simply “Dear Professor [Last Name], I hope you are doing well.” – a single polite hope for well-being, rather than a series of questions. Overall, both languages use greetings to establish a polite tone, but Uzbek greetings tend to be longer and more reciprocal, often initiating a brief “small talk” exchange even in writing, whereas English greetings stay short and conventional.

Farewells: Polite leave-taking also shows differences. English written farewells in letters or emails use set phrases usually placed before the signature, such as “Sincerely,” “Best regards,” or “Yours faithfully.” These are formulaic and do not explicitly reference the addressee’s well-being, aside from occasionally “Take care” in informal notes. In more personal writing or dialogue, one might see “Goodbye” or “See you soon,” but these remain succinct. Uzbek farewells, on the other hand, frequently include wishes for the addressee’s health or success. A very common parting phrase in Uzbek letters is Hurmat bilan (literally “with respect”), akin to “Sincerely,” but one also finds expressions like Xayr, salomat bo‘ling which combine a basic goodbye (xayr) with a blessing “may you be healthy”. Indeed, Sog‘ bo‘ling (“Be well/healthy”) or Salomat bo‘ling (“Stay safe”) are often used where English would simply say “Goodbye”. This difference is illustrated in dialogues: an English character might depart with “Goodbye, take care,” while an Uzbek character might say Xayr, omad yor bo‘lsin (“Farewell, may luck be with you”) or Ko‘rishguncha, sog‘ bo‘ling (“Until we meet, stay healthy”). The inclusion of a positive wish (for health, luck, peace) in Uzbek farewells is a cultural hallmark, reflecting the value placed on harmonious and positive parting. English



farewells are polite but generally non-expressive beyond the courtesy of form, whereas Uzbek farewells often double as a moment to express sincere regard or prayers for the other person's welfare.

Expressions of Thanks (Gratitude): Both languages have a range of thanking formulas, but Uzbek exhibits a richer variety with higher levels of intensity and formality available. In English, the core expressions are "Thank you," "Thanks," and stronger variants like "Thank you very much" or "Thanks a lot." These phrases are used in writing from emails to published acknowledgments. They tend to stand alone or be followed by a statement of what the thanks is for (e.g., "Thank you for your help."). Uzbek's basic equivalent is Rahmat ("thank you"), but there are several ways to elevate or nuance a thank-you. One common intensifier is Katta rahmat! which literally means "big thanks" – essentially "Thank you very much." Uzbek speakers also employ Persian-derived terms for thanks, such as Minnatdorman (literally "I am indebted") or phrases like Sizga minnatdorman ("I am grateful to you") to convey a deeper sense of gratitude. In more formal writing or speeches, one might encounter Minnatdorlik bildiraman ("I express gratitude") as a performative statement. Uniquely, Uzbek has culturally specific gratitude expressions that invoke blessings: for example, Xudo rozi bo'lsin – "May God be pleased with you" – is a heartfelt way to thank someone for a significant favor, carrying the sense of "May God reward you" for what you've done. Such an expression has no direct parallel in routine English usage, which rarely uses religious invocations in thanking (aside from informal "Bless you" in certain dialects or contexts). Uzbek gratitude can also be hyperbolic in a way English typically isn't: e.g., Rahmat, umrlaringiz uzoq bo'lsin – "Thank you, may your life be long," essentially "thank you, live long!". English would consider that an exaggerated or poetic register, while in Uzbek it can be an earnest, polite expression. Corpus data indicate that rahmat by itself is extremely frequent in Uzbek texts, but writers often expand it to juda rahmat ("thank you very much") or katta rahmat for emphasis. In formal documents (like acknowledgments or dedications), Uzbek thanks may pile on multiple terms: e.g., Cheksiz minnatdorchilik bildiraman ("I express boundless gratitude"). Meanwhile, English tends to stick with one "Thank you" and perhaps an intensifier. In summary, both languages use thanks to acknowledge kindness, but Uzbek offers a broader palette



of gratitude expressions, often combining thanks with prayers or emphasizing indebtedness, whereas English keeps thanks efficient and restrained.

Apologies: Apologetic expressions show an interesting pragmatic contrast. In English, a straightforward apology usually involves the word “sorry” or phrases like “I am sorry” and “I apologize.” These can be intensified with adverbs (“I am truly sorry”) or followed by explanations, but the core term “sorry” remains central. English speakers also use phrases like “Excuse me” or “Pardon me” in writing (for example, if interrupting in a written message or acknowledging a minor fault). Uzbek has a set of apology expressions that parallel English in function but differ in formality and often come with an explanation or plea. The common spoken apology “Kechirasiz” (literally “You forgive,” effectively “excuse me”) appears in writing too, especially for minor transgressions or as a polite attention-getter at the start of a request. For more serious apologies, Uzbek writers use forms like UZR so‘rayman (“I ask for forgiveness”) or Meni kechiring (“Forgive me”). These correspond to English “I’m sorry” and “Please forgive me,” respectively, but tend to sound more formal or urgent in tone. Uzbek apologies often explicitly acknowledge the offense: e.g., Kechirasiz, bezovta qildim (“Forgive me, I disturbed you”) or Meni kechiring, xato qildim (“Forgive me, I made a mistake”). An English writer might just say “Sorry for the inconvenience” in a formal letter, whereas an Uzbek might write Yetkazilgan noqulayliklar uchun uzr so‘rayman (“I ask forgiveness for the inconvenience caused”), using the formal noun uzr (apology) and a more elaborate phrasing. One notable feature in Uzbek is the tendency to use conditional or deferential language when apologizing: Sizni ranjitgan bo‘lsam, uzr so‘rayman – “If I have hurt/offended you, I beg your pardon”. This conditional if clause softens the apology, showing humility and hope for understanding, a pattern less common in English apologies (which usually assume responsibility directly rather than hypothetically). Culturally, it’s observed that Uzbek apologies may extend beyond words – bowing or other gestures can be described in writing to indicate deep remorse. Moreover, similar to thanks, sometimes a short blessing or wish follows an apology to restore goodwill (for instance, apologizing and then wishing the person well, to show one’s contrition is sincere and benevolent). In essence, English apologies are generally succinct and focus on the speaker’s regret, whereas Uzbek apologies often emphasize respect and restoration of harmony, sometimes through added phrases that appeal to the



offended person's mercy or well-being (e.g., "please don't be upset"). Both languages recognize apology as a face-threatening act that needs mitigation; English mitigates by minimizing the imposition or fault ("I'm sorry if I was wrong"), while Uzbek mitigates by elevating the other's status ("I beg you for forgiveness") and by self-humbling and offering amends.

CONCLUSION

Through a detailed corpus-based comparison of English and Uzbek etiquette lexis, this study has highlighted how two languages accomplish the universal tasks of politeness in culturally specific ways. Both English and Uzbek have rich sets of fixed expressions for greetings, farewells, thanking, apologizing, requesting, and addressing others with respect. These expressions are not only linguistic niceties but are deeply woven into the social fabric and values of each speech community. In English, politeness in writing is characterized by conciseness, indirectness, and a relatively plain register. Writers tend to use minimal forms (a quick "Thanks" or "Sorry") and rely on context and tone to convey politeness, often adhering to a principle of not being overly imposing or emotional. In Uzbek, politeness is characterized by elaboration, direct but deferential language, and the inclusion of sincere well-wishes or honorifics. Writers are expected to be generous with polite phrases – multiple salutations, verbose thanks, and flowery honorific address are not just tolerated but often appreciated as signs of respect and refinement. Social factors such as the importance of age hierarchy, the value placed on hospitality and community, and lingering traditional (even religious) norms in Uzbekistan give rise to etiquette lexis that explicitly emphasizes respect and positive regard. Conversely, the more egalitarian and privacy-conscious norms in Anglophone culture yield a politeness style that is more restrained and implicitly understood.

The analysis, backed by examples from English and Uzbek corpora, confirms many intuitive cultural observations with linguistic evidence. It also sheds light on potential pitfalls for translation and cross-cultural communication. Similarities were found in that both languages use formulaic expressions to perform politeness and that in both cases these formulas can lose force if overused or used inappropriately (context matters in any language). Differences were stark in content (e.g., presence of religious or familial terms in Uzbek but not in English), in length



(Uzbek expressions often longer), and in strategy (English mitigating face-threats vs. Uzbek enhancing face via respect).

This study contributes to pragmatics by providing concrete comparative data on a less-studied language like Uzbek vis-à-vis English. It underscores the need for culturally informed language description: politeness cannot be fully understood without reference to cultural norms and social structures. While English and Uzbek were the focus here, the general lesson is applicable broadly – every language has its own etiquette code and comparing them enriches our understanding of the relationship between language and society.

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