



THE STUDY OF FORMAL SPEECH IN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract. Formal speech is a central area of investigation in linguistics, particularly in the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. It reflects how speakers adapt their language in accordance with social norms, institutional expectations, and communicative goals. This article provides a comprehensive overview of the linguistic features, social functions, and analytical approaches related to formal speech. Special attention is given to the contrast between formal and informal registers, the influence of context and power dynamics, and the relevance of studying formal speech in multilingual and multicultural societies.

Key words: formal, informal, linguistic features, morphology, word formation, nominalizations, pragmatics, phonology, sociolinguistic, intertextuality, multilingual, multicultural, cultural expectation, cross-linguistic.



ИЗУЧЕНИЕ ФОРМАЛЬНОЙ РЕЧИ В ЛИНГВИСТИКЕ

Аннотация. Формальная речь является центральной областью исследования в лингвистике, особенно в таких дисциплинах, как социолингвистика, прагматика и анализ дискурса. Она отражает, как говорящие адаптируют свой язык в соответствии с социальными нормами, институциональными ожиданиями и коммуникативными целями. В этой статье представлен всесторонний обзор лингвистических особенностей, социальных функций и аналитических подходов, связанных с формальной речью. Особое внимание уделяется противопоставлению формальных и неформальных регистров, влиянию контекста и властных отношений, а также значимости изучения формальной речи в многоязычных и мультикультурных обществах.

Ключевые слова: формальный, неформальный, лингвистические особенности, морфология, словообразование, номинализация, прагматика, фонология, социолингвистика, интертекстуальность, многоязычие, мультикультурализм, культурные ожидания, кросслингвистика.

LINGVISTIKADA RASMIY NUTQNI O'RGANISH MASALASI

Annotatsiya. Rasmiy nutq — lingvistikada, xususan, sotsiollingvistika, pragmatika va diskurs tahlili sohalarida markaziy tadqiqot obyekti hisoblanadi. U nutq so‘zlovchilarning ijtimoiy normalar, institutiyyaviy talablar va muloqot maqsadlariga muvofiq tilini qanday moslashtirishini aks ettiradi. Ushbu maqolada rasmiy nutq bilan bog‘liq lingvistik xususiyatlar, ijtimoiy funksiyalar va tahliliy yondoshuvlar to‘liq ko‘rib chiqiladi. Maxsus e’tibor rasmiy va norasmiy registrlar o‘rtasidagi farq, kontekst va hokimiyat munosabatlarining ta’siri hamda ko‘p tilli va ko‘p madaniyatli jamiyatlarda rasmiy nutqni o‘rganishning ahamiyatiga qaratilgan.



Kalit so‘zlar: rasmiy, norasmiy, lingvistik xususiyatlar, morfologiya, so‘z yasash, nominalizatsiyalar, pragmatika, fonologiya, sotsiollingvistika, intertekstualik, ko‘p tillilik, ko‘p madaniyatllilik, madaniy kutishlar, tilga oid o‘zaro ta’sir.

Introduction. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a reflection of social structure, identity, and context. Within linguistics, the study of **formal speech** occupies an important position because it highlights how language varies according to social situations, relationships, and cultural expectations. **Formal speech** refers to the type of language used in professional, academic, or official settings—contexts where politeness, correctness, and clarity are highly valued. It is characterized by the careful choice of words, grammatical accuracy, and the avoidance of slang or colloquial expressions.[1]

The study of formal speech in linguistics helps researchers understand how speakers adapt their language to fit specific contexts, audiences, and purposes. This area of research draws on fields such as **sociolinguistics**, **pragmatics**, and **discourse analysis**, exploring how social factors like age, status, education, and cultural background influence linguistic choices. For instance, a person’s speech at a job interview or during a presentation will differ significantly from casual conversation among friends.

Moreover, studying formal speech contributes to our understanding of **language standardization**, **register variation**, and **code-switching**—phenomena that reveal how speakers navigate between formal and informal modes of communication. It also plays a vital role in areas such as **language education**, **intercultural communication**, and **professional discourse**, where mastery of formal language is often linked to success and credibility.

In summary, the study of formal speech in linguistics provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, society, and context. By examining how



speakers use formal language to express respect, authority, or professionalism, linguists gain a deeper understanding of the social dimensions of communication.[2]

Literature Review. The study of formal speech in linguistics has long attracted attention from researchers interested in how language varies across different social contexts. Formal speech, often referred to as the formal register **or** formal style, is typically used in professional, academic, or ceremonial situations where respect, politeness, and clarity are required. Scholars have explored formal speech through various subfields of linguistics, including sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis, each offering unique perspectives on how and why people adjust their language use in formal contexts.[3]

One of the foundational studies in this area is **Dell Hymes' (1974) "Ethnography of Speaking"**, which emphasizes that language use must always be understood in relation to social context. Hymes proposed the **SPEAKING model**, outlining factors—such as setting, participants, ends, act sequence, and norms—that influence how formal or informal a speech situation may be. Building on this, **William Labov (1972)** in his work on **sociolinguistic variation** showed that people adjust their linguistic behavior depending on social class, audience, and formality level. Labov's studies in New York City demonstrated how pronunciation and grammar shift toward more standardized forms in formal settings, suggesting that formality is a key dimension of linguistic variation.

In the realm of **pragmatics**, scholars such as **Brown and Levinson (1987)** explored formal speech through the lens of **politeness theory**. They argued that speakers use formal language as a strategy to maintain “face” and show respect to others in socially distant or hierarchical relationships. Similarly, **Leech (1983)** in his *Principles of Pragmatics* proposed that politeness and formality are governed by social conventions that aim to reduce interpersonal friction. Thus, the use of formal



speech is not only a matter of linguistic structure but also of **social appropriateness** and **relationship management**.[4]

Further contributions come from the field of **register and style analysis**. **Halliday (1978)** and **Biber (1995)** described how formal and informal language differ in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and cohesion. For example, formal registers tend to use more complex sentence structures, passive voice, and nominalizations, while avoiding contractions and colloquialisms. Biber's *Multidimensional Analysis of Register Variation* empirically confirmed that formal speech features higher levels of informational density and lower degrees of personal involvement compared to conversational language.

Recent studies have extended the investigation of formal speech to **intercultural communication and digital discourse**. For instance, **Crystal (2001)** noted that the rise of digital communication has blurred the boundaries between formal and informal styles, as emails, social media, and online meetings combine elements of both. However, researchers like **Hyland (2009)** have shown that in academic writing and professional communication, formal speech remains essential for establishing credibility, authority, and expertise.

In educational contexts, the study of formal speech has been particularly relevant. **Bernstein's (1971)** theory of “elaborated and restricted codes” suggested that mastery of formal or elaborated language forms is linked to educational achievement and social mobility. Later scholars have examined how formal language instruction can empower students to access academic and professional domains more effectively.

Overall, the literature reveals that formal speech is not a fixed or universal phenomenon but a **context-dependent linguistic practice** shaped by social norms, power relations, and communicative goals. From classic sociolinguistic theories to modern studies of digital discourse, researchers agree that understanding formal



speech provides crucial insights into how language reflects and reinforces the structure of society.[5]

Research methodology.

1. Research Approach. The present study employs a qualitative research approach complemented by limited quantitative elements to examine the linguistic and social characteristics of formal speech. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for a deeper understanding of how speakers produce and interpret formal language within specific social contexts. The study focuses not merely on grammatical structures but also on pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions, such as politeness, power relations, and context-driven language variation.[6]

2. Research Design

This study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to describe how formal speech operates in different communicative situations and analyze its linguistic components. The research is guided by the following objectives:

1. To identify the main linguistic features that characterize formal speech.
2. To explore how social variables (age, status, education, and setting) influence the degree of formality.
3. To compare formal and informal language use across different contexts.
4. To interpret the role of formal speech in maintaining politeness, professionalism, and respect in communication.

The study draws upon theoretical frameworks from sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and register theory, particularly the works of Halliday (1978), Labov (1972), and Brown & Levinson (1987). These frameworks provide tools for analyzing how linguistic choices are shaped by context and social interaction.

3. Participants



The participants were purposefully selected to represent speakers who frequently engage in formal communication. The sample includes approximately **25 individuals** divided into three groups:

- University lecturers and academic staff (10)
- Undergraduate students (10)
- Professionals from administrative and business sectors (5)

This diverse group ensures that variations in speech style can be analyzed across different professions and social hierarchies. The participants' age range was between **22 and 55 years**, with both male and female speakers included to account for gender-based language variation.[7]

4. Data Collection Methods

To obtain comprehensive and authentic data, three primary methods were used:

a. Observation and Audio Recording

Real-life formal situations were observed and recorded, including classroom lectures, conference presentations, and business meetings. This method provided spontaneous, naturally occurring examples of formal speech.

b. Structured Interviews

Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured format to elicit information about their perceptions and use of formal language. The interviews explored questions such as:

- In what situations do you use formal speech?
- How does your tone or word choice change in formal settings?
- What features do you associate with formal or professional language?

c. Document and Text Analysis

Written forms of formal language—such as official letters, speeches, and academic texts—were analyzed to compare spoken and written registers. This provided insight into how formal language norms are maintained across modes of communication.[8]



5. Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in multiple stages:

- Transcription: Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim using standardized linguistic transcription conventions.
- Coding: Utterances were coded based on linguistic features such as vocabulary choice, sentence structure, modality, politeness markers, and tone.
- Categorization: Each instance of speech was categorized as *highly formal*, *moderately formal*, or *neutral* according to contextual indicators like setting and audience.
- Comparative Analysis: The features identified in formal contexts were compared to informal speech samples to highlight linguistic contrasts.
- Interpretation: The findings were interpreted within the theoretical frameworks of register variation and politeness theory to explain the social meaning of formal speech.

6. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is informed by three major theoretical perspectives:

- Halliday's Register Theory (1978): Focuses on how field, tenor, and mode affect the degree of formality in language.
- Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987): Explains how formal speech is used to maintain face and express social respect.
- Labov's Sociolinguistic Variation Theory (1972): Demonstrates that linguistic style shifts depending on audience, setting, and social status.

These theories collectively guide the interpretation of data, helping to link linguistic patterns with social meanings.[9]

7. Reliability and Validity

To ensure the credibility of the findings:

- Triangulation was used by combining data from multiple sources (recordings, interviews, and written texts).



- Inter-coder reliability was established by having two independent researchers analyze the same speech samples and compare results.

- Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with a subset of participants to verify accuracy and interpretation.

8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and written **informed consent** was obtained before recording or interviewing them. All data were anonymized, ensuring that no participant's identity could be revealed. Recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.[10]

9. Limitations of the Study

Although the research provides valuable insights into formal speech, it is limited by the relatively small sample size and focus on English speakers within academic and professional settings. Further research could expand the study to include cross-cultural comparisons or analyses of formal speech in multilingual contexts.

In conclusion, this methodology combines **qualitative linguistic analysis** with **sociolinguistic interpretation** to explore how formal speech functions across different social and communicative settings. Through observation, interviews, and textual analysis, the study aims to reveal not only the structural features of formal speech but also its social purposes—how it conveys politeness, authority, and respect within human interaction.

Analysis and Results

1. Overview of Data Collected

The data collected for this study consisted of audio recordings of 20 formal interactions, semi-structured interviews with 25 participants, and written documents including official letters, speeches, and academic presentations. The spoken data included classroom lectures, job interviews, and conference presentations. The



analysis focused on identifying the linguistic features of formal speech, as well as the social and pragmatic strategies employed by speakers.[11]

2. Linguistic Features of Formal Speech

The analysis revealed several consistent linguistic patterns across formal speech contexts:

a. Vocabulary and Lexical Choice

- Participants consistently used specialized, precise, and context-specific vocabulary.
- Slang, contractions, and colloquial expressions were rarely used.
- Example: In a classroom lecture, a participant said: *“It is imperative to consider the implications of these findings on future policy formulation.”*

compared to informal speech:

“We really need to think about how this affects what we do next.”

This finding aligns with Biber's (1995) register theory, which suggests that formal registers favor lexical density and precise terminology.

b. Sentence Structure and Syntax

- Formal speech often employed complex sentences, passive voice, and nominalizations.
- Coordinating conjunctions were more frequently replaced with subordinating clauses to create elaborate syntactic structures.
- Example:
 - Formal: *“The results were analyzed by the research team before drawing any conclusions.”*
 - Informal: *“We looked at the results and then made some conclusions.”*

c. Politeness and Pragmatic Markers



- Politeness strategies were heavily used in professional interactions, including hedges, modal verbs, and honorifics.
- Example: “*Could you please provide your perspective on this matter?*” versus informal: “*What do you think about this?*”
- This confirms Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, showing that formal speech maintains social distance and respect.

d. Prosody and Tone

- Audio analysis showed that formal speech often had a steady, measured pace with clear enunciation.
- Participants reduced the use of fillers such as “um” and “like,” which are common in informal conversations.
- Formal speech also exhibited a slightly higher pitch variation at sentence boundaries to indicate emphasis and clarity.

3. Social and Contextual Factors

The study also examined how social variables influenced formality:

- **Education and Professional Status:** Higher-educated participants (lecturers and professionals) consistently used more formal structures than students in similar contexts.[12]
- **Audience.** Speakers adjusted their speech according to the audience; when addressing peers, they used moderately formal language, while addressing superiors or external audiences elicited highly formal speech.
- **Setting.** Institutional contexts (lectures, conferences, meetings) naturally elicited more formal language than casual office conversations.

4. Comparison Between Formal and Informal Speech

The comparative analysis revealed several key differences:

| Feature | Formal Speech | Informal Speech |
|------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Vocabulary | Precise, technical, professional | Everyday, colloquial |



| | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Sentence Structure | Complex, passive, nominalization | Simple, active, conversational |
| Politeness Strategies | Hedging, honorifics, modals | Direct, casual |
| Pronunciation & Prosody | Clear, measured, deliberate | Rapid, relaxed, less structured |
| Use of Fillers | Minimal | Frequent |

These findings confirm that formal speech is **context-dependent**, socially regulated, and governed by norms of correctness and politeness.

5. Results from Interviews

Interviews revealed participants' conscious awareness of formal speech:

- Awareness of Context: Most participants acknowledged consciously shifting language depending on situation.
- Perceived Professionalism: Formal speech was strongly associated with credibility, professionalism, and authority.
- Challenges: Some participants found maintaining formal speech challenging in long or spontaneous interactions, indicating that formal language requires cognitive effort and social awareness.[13]

6. Summary of Key Findings

- Formal speech is characterized by lexical precision, complex syntax, and politeness strategies.
- Social and situational factors strongly influence the degree of formality.
- Formal and informal speech differ significantly in vocabulary, structure, prosody, and pragmatic strategies.
- Speakers are generally aware of these differences and adjust their speech consciously.



These results highlight that formal speech is not merely a matter of grammar but also a social

Conclusion

The present study explored the linguistic and social characteristics of formal speech in English across academic, professional, and institutional contexts. The analysis revealed that formal speech is a complex linguistic and social phenomenon, shaped by both structural and contextual factors. Key conclusions include:

Linguistic Characteristics: Formal speech is characterized by precise vocabulary, complex syntactic structures, nominalizations, passive constructions, and minimal use of colloquial expressions or fillers. Politeness strategies, such as hedging, modal verbs, and honorifics, are consistently employed to maintain social respect. Prosodic features, including measured pace and clear enunciation, further distinguish formal speech from informal conversation.[14]

Social and Contextual Factors: The degree of formality is strongly influenced by social variables such as education, professional status, audience, and setting. Speakers consciously adapt their language to align with expectations of professionalism, credibility, and social hierarchy.

Awareness and Cognitive Effort: Participants demonstrated conscious awareness of formal language norms and reported cognitive effort when producing highly formal speech, highlighting the role of social and cultural knowledge in linguistic performance.

Differences Between Formal and Informal Speech: Comparative analysis confirmed substantial contrasts in vocabulary, sentence complexity, prosody, and pragmatic strategies between formal and informal registers. This aligns with established theories in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and register analysis, such as Halliday's register theory, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and Labov's sociolinguistic variation framework.



Overall, formal speech emerges as a socially regulated linguistic practice that functions not only to convey information but also to express professionalism, authority, and respect within human interaction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for educators, language learners, and professionals:

1. **Incorporation of Formal Speech Training in Education.** Language programs should include explicit instruction on formal speech features, including vocabulary, sentence structure, and politeness strategies. Activities such as formal presentations, debates, and professional role-plays can enhance learners' ability to produce formal language effectively.[15]

2. **Awareness of Contextual Appropriateness.** Speakers should be trained to recognize social and situational cues that determine the level of formality required. Understanding audience expectations, hierarchical relations, and institutional norms can improve communication efficacy.

3. **Development of Listening and Imitation Skills.** Exposure to authentic formal speech through lectures, seminars, and professional interactions can help learners internalize lexical, syntactic, and prosodic features. Transcription and analysis exercises can also reinforce formal speech patterns.

4. **Use of Technology and Digital Resources.** With the rise of online communication, formal speech skills can be practiced through video conferencing, recorded presentations, and digital workshops, where learners receive feedback on tone, clarity, and linguistic appropriateness.

5. **Promotion of Research in Multilingual and Cross-Cultural Contexts.** Future studies should investigate how formal speech operates in multilingual and intercultural settings, exploring how cultural norms influence the production and perception of formal language.



Formal speech plays a pivotal role in social interaction, professional communication, and academic achievement. By understanding its structural features and social functions, speakers can enhance clarity, authority, and respect in their communication. Educational programs, workplace training, and further research should continue to emphasize formal language competence, recognizing it as a key skill for personal and professional development.

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