

PRAGMATIC AND CROSS-CULTURAL TYPOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF SPEECH ACTS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH,
UZBEK, AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract.

This research explores the pragmatic and cross-cultural aspects of communication by comparing speech acts and politeness strategies in English, Uzbek, and Russian. The study focuses on five key areas: (1) forms of address, (2) etiquette expressions, (3) apology strategies, (4) complimenting and criticizing patterns, and (5) direct and indirect speech acts. Through discourse analysis and questionnaire-based data collection, the study aims to identify cultural norms and pragmatic tendencies that shape interpersonal communication in each language. The findings highlight how linguistic politeness reflects cultural values such as individualism and collectivism, respect for hierarchy, and degrees of formality. This comparative typology contributes to understanding intercultural pragmatics and enhances communicative competence in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Keywords : Pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, politeness, speech acts, English, Uzbek, Russian, directness, address forms, apology strategies.

Introduction

Language is not just important for communication — it also reflects the culture, values, and social norms of its people. Both pragmatic and cross-cultural typology gives information about how people from different cultural backgrounds use language to express politeness, respect, and social relationships. This study compares English, Uzbek, and Russian to understand how cultural norms influence forms of address, etiquette, and various speech acts and so on. The goal is to highlight both similarities and differences in communication styles and to improve better intercultural understanding.

The forms of address are a particular expressions used to call or refer to other people, revealing social relationships, degrees of politeness, and cultural values. In English, address forms generally show a preference for both equality and informality. People usually use first names even in professional or educational settings, which reflects the values of individualism and low power distance typical of different cultures. Formal titles for example, Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., or Professor are reserved for more formal or polite occasions. English politeness tends to illustrate personal space and autonomy, often expressed through neutral and friendly address forms.

Etiquette expressions are another key element of politeness and respect in communication. A good example is the English word ‘please’ and its Russian equivalent ‘пожалуйста’ (pozhaluysta). In English, ‘please’ is used mainly in requests to sound polite and respect. (e.g., Please help me). It softens the command and shows consideration for the listener’s freedom to select, avoiding an impression of rudeness or imposition. Therefore, English politeness is closely linked to neutrality and equality between speakers. As Johanson points out, ‘languages of the Eurasian area, including Russian and Uzbek, demonstrate both contact-induced similarities and typological contrasts’[1]

However, in Russian, ‘pozhaluysta’ has a wider range of meanings — it can mean please, you’re welcome, or here you are, depending on the context. While it depicts

respect and friendliness, Russian communication tends to be more direct than English. According to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), politeness is an effort to "redress the affronts to a person's self-esteem or face." In Russian culture, this "face" is maintained differently; *pozhaluysta* may appear less frequently or be used in contexts where English speakers would feel it necessary to include please.

Apologies are another crucial type of speech act, expressing regret and restoring social harmony after an offense. The way people apologize often reveals deeper cultural values.

In English, apologies are typically direct which include expressions such as I'm sorry, I apologize, or Excuse me. Speakers often take personal responsibility and may add explanations or promises of repair, such as 'I'm sorry I'm late' — it won't happen again. This reflects an emphasis on sincerity, equality, and individual accountability.

In Uzbek, apology strategies demonstrate respect, modesty, and the restoration of social balance. Common phrases include *Kechirasiz* (excuse me/forgive me) and *Uzr so'rayman* (I ask for forgiveness). Uzbeks often add honorifics or explanations to show humility, particularly when speaking to elders or superiors. Apologies are also shaped by social hierarchy and age, with younger or lower-status individuals expected to apologize first. In addition to this, according to Payne, 'in agglutinative languages like Uzbek, grammatical relations are expressed through regular and transparent suffixation'[2]

Compliments and criticism also vary significantly across cultures. In English, compliments are usually direct and explicit, for example: You did a great job or I like your dress. Typical responses include modest acceptance or reciprocity, such as Thank you or returning a compliment. Criticism in English, on the other hand, is often softened with hedges or indirect phrasing — for instance, Maybe you could try... or It might be better if... — to avoid sounding harsh or hurting the listener's feelings.

In Uzbek, compliments are closely related to social relationships and respect. They may be expressed indirectly or through kinship terms, such as *Siz juda aqlli*

ekansiz, opa (“You are very smart, sister”). Criticism is usually indirect and softened with polite language, especially toward elders or higher-status individuals.

It is common to include praise before pointing out a problem, which reflects the cultural emphasis on harmony and respect.

Speech acts, for instance, requests, commands, or statements, also differ across cultures in terms of directness and politeness. In English, direct speech acts are acceptable in informal cases—for example, Close the window. However, indirect forms like Could you close the window? or Would you mind closing the window? are used to sound more polite and considerate. Indirectness in English often signals respect of higher status. A speaker might say Iltimos, derazani yoping (“Please, close the window”), often accompanied by the polite pronoun siz or an honorific title. Direct commands are typically reserved for close friends, peers, or younger people. In conclusion, speech acts and politeness can be different in English, Russian and Uzbek.

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