

**SPEECH ETIQUETTE IN TOURISM: BARRIERS AND
SOLUTIONS IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Abduxalilova G.K.

Phd. senior teacher., UzSWLU

Abstract

Speech etiquette is a vital component of the tourism industry, serving as the linguistic bridge between diverse cultures. However, when the cultural codes of a tourist and a service provider (guide, hotelier, or agent) do not align, communication barriers arise, leading to pragmatic failure and negative tourist experiences. This article explores the linguistic and cultural obstacles in tourism-related discourse. It analyzes how polite forms, speech acts, and non-verbal cues differ across cultures and proposes practical solutions for enhancing intercultural communicative competence among tourism professionals.

Keywords: Speech Etiquette, Intercultural Communication, Tourism Discourse, Pragmatic Failure, Politeness Strategies, Cultural Barriers.

Introduction

Tourism is inherently a communicative phenomenon. Beyond the visiting of physical locations, it involves a continuous exchange of meanings, values, and social norms. Speech etiquette—the system of socially accepted linguistic signs used to establish and maintain contact—plays a decisive role in this exchange. In an intercultural context, what is considered polite in one culture (e.g., the high-context culture of Japan) may be perceived as evasive or overly formal in another (e.g., the low-context culture of the USA).

As the tourism industry strives for personalization and high-quality service, understanding the nuances of speech etiquette has become a professional necessity. This paper examines the barriers that occur during

intercultural encounters and suggests pedagogical and professional strategies to mitigate these conflicts.

Barriers and linguistic nuances.

The primary barrier in tourism communication is **Pragmatic Failure**, which occurs when a speaker produces an utterance that is grammatically correct but socially inappropriate. For instance, the use of imperatives (e.g., "Give me the key") might be a direct translation from a language where this is acceptable, but in English-speaking tourism contexts, it lacks the necessary "politeness markers" (e.g., "Could you please..."). Such failures often lead to the stereotyping of tourists or staff as "rude" or "unprofessional," when in reality, the issue is a lack of pragmatic equivalence.

Another significant obstacle is the **Degree of Formality and Address Forms**. In many European languages, there is a clear distinction between formal and informal pronouns (e.g., *Tu* vs. *Vous* in French, *Sen* vs. *Siz* in Uzbek). English, lacks this grammatical distinction but compensates through titles and honorifics. A tourism professional who fails to navigate these levels—by being too informal with a guest from a hierarchical culture or too stiff with a "Gen Z" traveler—creates a psychological barrier that diminishes the service experience.

High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication also creates friction. In low-context cultures (Germany, Scandinavia), speech is explicit and direct. In high-context cultures (Middle East, East Asia), much of the meaning is carried by the context, silence, and non-verbal etiquette. A tourist guide who provides only literal, direct answers to a high-context traveler may be perceived as cold or unhelpful, while a low-context traveler may find the indirectness of a high-context host frustrating and confusing.

Non-Verbal Etiquette and Paralinguistics are inseparable from speech. The distance between speakers (proxemics), the intensity of eye contact, and even the volume of speech are culturally coded. In Mediterranean cultures, loud

and animated speech signals enthusiasm, whereas in Nordic or East Asian cultures, it may be interpreted as aggression or a lack of self-control. When these paralinguistic features clash in a hotel lobby or during a tour, the linguistic message often gets lost in the emotional discomfort caused by the non-verbal mismatch.

To overcome these barriers, the tourism industry must move beyond basic language training toward **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**.

Pragmatic Awareness Training: Tourism professionals should be trained not just in "English for Tourism," but in the "Pragmatics of English." This includes learning the "hedging" strategies (e.g., "I'm afraid that...", "It might be better if...") that are essential for polite refusal or suggestion in international settings.

Cultural Mapping: Staff should be briefed on the "cultural profiles" of their primary target markets. Understanding that a "Yes" from a Japanese tourist might only mean "I hear you" rather than "I agree" can prevent significant operational misunderstandings.

Active Listening and Clarification: Encouraging the use of "checking questions" (e.g., "Just to make sure I understood you correctly...") helps bridge the gap between high and low-context communicators.

The "Universal Etiquette" Foundation: While respecting specific cultures, establishing a baseline of "universal hospitality etiquette"—characterized by active listening, smiling (where appropriate), and the use of the guest's name—acts as a safety net in ambiguous situations.

Conclusion

Speech etiquette in tourism is far more than a set of "magic words" like *please* and *thank you*. It is a complex tool for managing social relationships and cultural perceptions. While linguistic barriers are inevitable in a globalized industry, they are not insurmountable. By fostering pragmatic sensitivity and cultural empathy, tourism professionals can transform potential conflicts into

moments of genuine intercultural connection. Ultimately, the goal of speech etiquette is to create a "third space" where both the host and the guest feel respected, heard, and valued.

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