

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICON OF "ETIQUETTE" IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

Hatamova Yulduz Raxmatulla qizi

Termez University of Economics and Service

Master student

+998915157873

hatamova776@gmail.com

Supervisor, Uralova Oysuluv Poyan qizi

PhD associate teacher of

Termiz University of Economics and service

+998919119292

Abstract: This paper presents a comparative analysis of the lexicon of "etiquette" in English and Uzbek, focusing on how cultural norms shape linguistic expressions of politeness. Using a qualitative method based on dictionary sources, literary texts, and real-life discourse, the study identifies key lexical items and strategies used in both languages to express politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. While English etiquette emphasizes clarity, individual autonomy, and indirectness through modal verbs, Uzbek etiquette highlights social harmony, age-based respect, and elaborate euphemisms. Drawing on theories of politeness by Brown & Levinson and cultural linguistics, the research finds that although the communicative goal is shared, the lexical realization differs significantly due to contrasting cultural values. The paper concludes that a deeper understanding of these differences is essential for successful cross-cultural communication and for avoiding pragmatic failure in intercultural interactions.

Keywords: etiquette, lexicon, Uzbek, English, politeness, culture, pragmatics, comparative linguistics.

Introduction

Language is a vessel of culture, and the lexicon of "etiquette" reveals how societies regulate human interaction. In both English and Uzbek, etiquette governs speech behavior, respect, and interpersonal communication, yet it does so through differing conceptual lenses. As David Crystal points out, "Every language has its own etiquette, as part of the unspoken rules of communication [1]".

According to U. Karimova's experience as bilingual speakers, We have often noticed how the same intention—to be polite—can be expressed with very different words and strategies in English and Uzbek. For example, the simple act of saying "no" politely in Uzbek often requires several mitigating phrases, while in English, a direct "I'm sorry, I can't" is often sufficient [2]. This observation inspired a deeper analysis of how the concept of etiquette is lexically encoded in these two languages.

The aim of this paper is to provide a comparative linguistic and cultural analysis of the lexicon of etiquette in English and Uzbek, drawing from both academic research and experiential insights.

Methods

This study employs a comparative-descriptive method and draws on both primary and secondary sources. The following resources were used:

English and Uzbek explanatory dictionaries

Selected literary texts in both languages (e.g., Austen, Abdulla Qodiriy)

Real-life discourse examples from conversations and media

Scholarly articles by Uzbek and Western linguists

Native speaker observations and reflections

Lexical units were categorized based on their function: greeting, apology, request, refusal, gratitude, and address. Semantic connotations and pragmatic features were analyzed, particularly in terms of formality, directness, and social hierarchy.

Results

Lexical Items of Etiquette

English politeness is largely built around individualism. Common terms include:

please, thank you, sorry, excuse me, may I, polite, courteous, respectful.

In contrast, Uzbek etiquette lexis reflects collectivist and family-centered values:

iltimos, rahmat, uzr, kechirasiz, mumkinmi, odob, hurmat, kamtarlik, or-nomus

[3].

Hierarchy and Age in Addressing In Uzbek, age and social status are linguistically encoded. The use of aka, opa, domla, otaxon, onaxon shows not only politeness but recognition of social roles. English is moving toward more informal and egalitarian forms of address—titles are less frequently used in casual settings.

Request and Refusal Strategies

English employs indirectness through modal verbs and hedging: Could you possibly...?, Would you mind...?

Uzbek often uses empathic and extended phrasing: Agar bezovta qilmaydigan bo‘lsam..., Bir iltimosim bor edi...

In our observation, Uzbek speakers often avoid flat refusal by using culturally coded deferrals, e.g., “Qaraysiz, hali aniqlashtiraman” even if they mean “no”.

Apology and Gratitude

English speakers say sorry and thank you frequently—even for minor inconveniences.

In Uzbek, rahmat and uzr may be expressed less often but more emotionally loaded, often accompanied by non-verbal cues like lowering the head or using body language.

Non-verbal Lexicon and Cultural Norms

Etiquette in Uzbek includes gesture-based lexicon—putting the hand on the chest, nodding, or using terms like hamisha bor bo‘ling. These forms are rare in English, where verbal expression often suffices.

Discussion

The comparison between English and Uzbek etiquette lexis uncovers fundamental differences in worldviews shaped by culture, history, and social structure. These differences manifest not only in word choice but also in the underlying principles that guide speech behavior.

One notable aspect is the role of collectivism versus individualism. According to Rakhimov, M., in Uzbek, speakers often prioritize the group’s harmony over personal expression [4]. This is evident in the frequent use of collective-focused expressions like “Alloh rozi bo‘lsin,” “Yaxshi niyat bilan,” or “Ota-onangizni rozi qiling.” Such expressions serve a dual function: conveying politeness and reinforcing moral and familial expectations.

In English, on the other hand, there is a tendency to protect individual boundaries. Phrases like “I’m afraid I can’t,” or “I’d prefer not to,” are considered polite despite being refusals. This

reflects what Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (2001) describes as low power distance and high individualism in Western cultures.

Another important difference lies in ritual politeness and formulaic expressions. Uzbek contains a richer inventory of ritual phrases, especially in greetings and farewells. For instance:

Assalomu alaykum – Va alaykum assalom

Yaxshi boring – Xayr, siz ham

These exchanges are not just routine but carry deep cultural meaning. In English, greetings like "Hello" or "Goodbye" are more functional and less socially loaded.

Moreover, religious and spiritual language plays a subtle yet powerful role in Uzbek etiquette. Expressions such as "Inshaalloh," "Xudo xohlasa," "Alloh yor bo'lsin" are embedded in everyday politeness and cannot be directly translated into English equivalents with the same social function. This shows that Uzbek etiquette is deeply influenced by Islamic and traditional values, where respect is not only interpersonal but also spiritual.

Additionally, gender norms influence etiquette expression. In Uzbek, females are often expected to speak more softly, avoid direct refusals, and express gratitude or humility more frequently. In English-speaking cultures, gender differences exist too, but the expectations are increasingly neutralized, especially in professional contexts.

Finally, the speed of change in etiquette norms also differs. In English-speaking countries, politeness norms evolve rapidly with social trends (e.g., the decline of Sir/Madam). Uzbek etiquette is more conservative and resistant to change, especially in rural areas where traditional norms still dominate.

These insights demonstrate that a comparative lexical study of etiquette must consider not only linguistic structures but also sociocultural dynamics, belief systems, and historical development. The practical implication is that language learners and translators must pay attention to these deeper cultural scripts to avoid misunderstandings and to communicate effectively.

The results indicate that the lexicon of etiquette in both languages shares common ground in intent—maintaining harmony and showing respect—but differs significantly in linguistic and cultural realization.

Drawing on Brown & Levinson's politeness theory, English leans toward negative politeness—protecting personal space and freedom [5]. Uzbek, however, is a clear example of positive politeness, emphasizing group belonging, deference, and communal responsibility.

From our perspective, this distinction becomes most visible when English speakers appear too direct or "cold" to Uzbek speakers, while Uzbeks might seem overly elaborate or even evasive to English speakers. This mismatch can lead to pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication.

Furthermore, Professor U. Karimova rightfully claims that "O'zbek tilida odob me'yorlari tilshunoslikdan tashqarida – ular madaniyat, tarbiya, din va an'analar bilan bevosita bog'liq [6]". This suggests that Uzbek etiquette is not merely linguistic but deeply cultural and spiritual.

Nigel Leech supports this by noting that politeness in high-context cultures (like Uzbekistan) is part of a moral obligation, not just a communicative strategy [7]. In such cultures, failing to use proper etiquette can be seen as a personal offense, not just a social faux pas.

Conclusion



This study confirms that while the function of etiquette in English and Uzbek is largely universal—facilitating respectful and smooth interaction—the form and lexical realization are culture-specific. The English lexicon emphasizes clarity, personal autonomy, and efficiency, whereas the Uzbek lexicon is embedded in tradition, social structure, and emotional expression.

Our reflection is that understanding these differences is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication. As our world becomes more interconnected, learning the "unspoken rules" of another language is not just linguistic—it's a bridge to empathy.

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