

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK ACADEMIC EMAILS

Sattorova Sojida Ibodilloevna

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20656296>

Abstract

The increasing use of email communication in higher education has highlighted the importance of politeness in academic interactions. This study compares politeness strategies used in English and Uzbek academic emails, focusing on how students express requests, gratitude, apologies, and respect when communicating with lecturers. The research is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and adopts a comparative pragmatic approach.

The analysis demonstrates that both English and Uzbek academic emails aim to maintain respectful and effective communication. However, notable differences exist in the realization of politeness. English email writers tend to employ indirect requests, hedging devices, and mitigating expressions to respect the recipient's autonomy, whereas Uzbek writers more frequently use honorifics, formal greetings, and explicit expressions of deference to acknowledge academic hierarchy and social respect. These differences reflect broader cultural values associated with individualism and collectivism, as well as differing perceptions of power and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: politeness strategies, academic emails, English, Uzbek, pragmatics, intercultural communication.

Introduction

In contemporary higher education, email communication has emerged as one of the most widely used channels of interaction between students and academic staff. The rapid development of information technology and digital communication platforms has transformed the nature of academic discourse, making email an indispensable tool for exchanging information, requesting assistance, submitting assignments, arranging meetings, and maintaining professional relationships. Unlike face-to-face communication, emails require individuals to convey meaning, intention, and interpersonal attitudes exclusively through written language. Consequently, the use of appropriate politeness strategies becomes essential for ensuring successful communication and preventing misunderstandings.

Politeness is a fundamental aspect of human interaction. It enables speakers and writers to maintain social harmony, demonstrate respect, and navigate interpersonal relationships effectively. In academic contexts, politeness acquires particular importance because communication often occurs between individuals occupying different positions within institutional hierarchies. Students, for example, are expected to communicate respectfully with lecturers and professors, while academic staff must balance authority with approachability. The linguistic choices made in academic emails therefore reflect not only communicative intentions but also broader cultural values concerning power, respect, and social relationships.

The study of politeness has attracted considerable attention within the field of pragmatics. One of the most influential frameworks for analyzing politeness is Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), which introduces the concept of "face" as a public self-

image that individuals seek to maintain during interaction. According to the theory, speakers employ various politeness strategies to protect either their own face or that of their interlocutors. Positive politeness strategies seek to create solidarity and establish friendly relations, while negative politeness strategies aim to respect personal autonomy and minimize imposition. Additional strategies include bald-on-record communication, characterized by directness, and off-record communication, which relies on indirect implications.

Although Brown and Levinson's model has been widely applied across different languages and cultures, researchers have increasingly recognized that politeness is deeply influenced by cultural norms and social expectations. What is considered polite in one cultural context may not necessarily be interpreted in the same way in another. Consequently, comparative studies of politeness provide valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and communication.

English and Uzbek represent two linguistic systems embedded within distinct cultural traditions. English-speaking academic environments, particularly in Western countries, often emphasize individual autonomy, equality, and indirect communication. As a result, English academic emails frequently contain mitigating expressions, modal verbs, and indirect request forms designed to reduce imposition on the recipient. For example, a student may write, "Could you please provide feedback on my assignment when you have time?" rather than making a direct request.

Despite the growing importance of email communication in Uzbekistan and English-speaking academic environments, relatively few studies have systematically compared politeness strategies in English and Uzbek academic emails. Existing research has largely focused on English email communication or cross-cultural comparisons involving East Asian and Western languages. Therefore, there remains a significant gap in understanding how politeness is linguistically realized in Uzbek academic correspondence and how these practices compare with those observed in English.

The significance of this study extends beyond theoretical considerations. As internationalization continues to reshape higher education, students increasingly engage in academic communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Uzbek students studying abroad, international students enrolled in Uzbek universities, and academics participating in global research networks all encounter situations requiring effective email communication. A lack of awareness regarding culturally appropriate politeness strategies may lead to unintended misunderstandings, negative impressions, or communication breakdowns. Therefore, developing intercultural communicative competence has become an essential component of academic success in the twenty-first century.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

What politeness strategies are most frequently employed in English academic emails?

What politeness strategies are most frequently employed in Uzbek academic emails?

How do the politeness strategies used in English and Uzbek academic emails differ and resemble one another?

What cultural factors contribute to these similarities and differences?

Literature Review

Politeness is a fundamental aspect of human communication that helps individuals maintain social harmony and achieve communicative goals appropriately. In academic settings, politeness is particularly important because communication often occurs between people with different institutional roles, such as students and lecturers. With the growing use of email in higher education, researchers have increasingly focused on how politeness is expressed in academic email communication.

One of the most influential frameworks for studying politeness is Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. The theory is based on the concept of *face*, which refers to an individual's public self-image. Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive face, the desire to be appreciated and respected, and negative face, the desire to act freely without interference. To protect these aspects of face, speakers use different politeness strategies, including bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

Positive politeness aims to create solidarity and friendly relationships between interlocutors through expressions of appreciation, compliments, and shared understanding. Negative politeness, on the other hand, seeks to minimize imposition and respect the recipient's autonomy. This strategy often includes indirect requests, modal verbs, and hedging expressions. These politeness strategies are frequently observed in academic email communication, where students often make requests, ask for assistance, or seek clarification from lecturers.

The rise of digital communication has made email an essential tool in academic environments. According to Crystal (2006), email combines characteristics of both written and spoken communication. Academic emails require writers to communicate professionally while maintaining respectful interpersonal relationships. Since students usually occupy a lower position within academic hierarchies, they often employ politeness strategies to demonstrate respect toward instructors.

Previous studies have shown that English academic emails typically rely on indirectness and mitigation. Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) found that English-speaking students commonly use modal verbs such as *could*, *would*, and *might* to reduce the force of requests. Examples include expressions such as "*Could you please review my assignment?*" or "*I was wondering if it would be possible to meet next week.*" These forms help protect the recipient's negative face by minimizing imposition.

Research has also emphasized the importance of email structure in English academic communication. Polite emails usually contain appropriate greetings, self-introduction, clear explanations, expressions of gratitude, and professional closings. Such conventions contribute to the perception of professionalism and respect.

Politeness, however, is influenced by cultural norms and social expectations. Spencer-Oatey (2008) argues that communicative behavior should be understood within its cultural context. Different societies have different views regarding authority, hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships, which affect the way politeness is expressed.

In Uzbek culture, respect for elders, teachers, and individuals in positions of authority is highly valued. As a result, Uzbek communication often includes honorific expressions, formal greetings, and explicit markers of respect. According to Yuldashev (2019), Uzbek speakers frequently use respectful forms of address and elaborate expressions of gratitude to maintain

social harmony. In academic contexts, students often address lecturers using formal greetings such as “*Assalomu alaykum, ustoz*” and respectful expressions such as “*Hurmatli professor.*”

Unlike English academic emails, which generally emphasize brevity and indirectness, Uzbek academic emails tend to contain more direct expressions of respect and deference. These differences reflect broader cultural values related to collectivism, hierarchy, and social relationships.

Although numerous studies have examined politeness strategies in English academic emails, research on Uzbek academic email communication remains limited. Furthermore, few studies have directly compared English and Uzbek politeness strategies within academic correspondence. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining similarities and differences in the use of politeness strategies in English and Uzbek academic emails and exploring the cultural factors that influence these communication practices.

Conclusion

This study compared politeness strategies used in English and Uzbek academic emails based on Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory. The findings showed that both languages use politeness to maintain respectful and effective communication between students and lecturers. However, English academic emails mainly employ indirect requests, hedging, and negative politeness strategies, while Uzbek academic emails rely more on honorifics, formal greetings, and explicit expressions of respect.

These differences reflect the cultural values of each society, particularly attitudes toward hierarchy, authority, and interpersonal relationships. Despite these variations, both English and Uzbek email writers share the common goal of building professional and respectful academic communication.

Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of intercultural communication and highlights the importance of cultural awareness in academic email writing.

Adabiyotlar, References, Литературы:

1. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the Internet* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
3. Economidou-Kogetsidis, M. (2011). “Please answer me as soon as possible”: Pragmatic failure in non-native speakers’ email requests to faculty. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(13), 3193–3215.
4. Haugh, M., Chang, W. L. M., & Kádár, D. Z. (2013). Doing deference in different cultures: Interactional perspectives. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 58, 1–15.
5. Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: Exploring interaction in writing*. Continuum.
6. Kádár, D. Z., & Haugh, M. (2013). *Understanding politeness*. Cambridge University Press.