ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE ETIQUETTE AND ITS ROLE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Raxmatova Umida Solijon qizi
Uzbekistan State World Languages University
+998953705954
urakhmatova04@gmail.com
doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23037882

Abstract. The article examines language etiquette as a system of conventional verbal and non-verbal means through which speakers establish, maintain and close contact in accordance with the social norms of a given community. Drawing on politeness theory and the comparative analysis of etiquette formulas in English, Uzbek and Russian, the study identifies the main areas in which etiquette norms diverge and shows how these divergences give rise to pragmatic failure in intercultural interaction. The results indicate that differences in greetings, forms of address, requests, offers and apologies are rooted in deeper cultural values such as hierarchy, collectivism and the preferred degree of directness. It is argued that knowledge of etiquette conventions should be treated as an integral component of intercultural communicative competence rather than as an optional supplement to grammar and vocabulary.
Keywords: language etiquette, politeness, intercultural communication, pragmatic failure, speech act, forms of address, communicative competence.

Annotatsiya. Maqolada nutq etiketi muayyan jamiyatning ijtimoiy me'yorlariga muvofiq ravishda muloqotni boshlash, davom ettirish va yakunlash uchun xizmat qiluvchi an'anaviy verbal va noverbal vositalar tizimi sifatida tadqiq etiladi. Xushmuomalalik nazariyasi hamda ingliz, o'zbek va rus tillaridagi etiket formulalarining qiyosiy tahliliga tayangan holda etiket me'yorlari farqlanadigan asosiy sohalar aniqlanadi va bu farqlar madaniyatlararo muloqotda pragmatik muvaffaqiyatsizlikka qanday olib kelishi ko'rsatiladi. Salomlashish, murojaat shakllari, iltimos, taklif va uzr so'rashdagi farqlar ierarxiyaga munosabat, jamoaviylik va fikrni bevosita ifodalash darajasi kabi chuqurroq madaniy qadriyatlarga asoslanishi aniqlandi. Etiket qoidalarini bilish madaniyatlararo kommunikativ kompetensiyaning ajralmas tarkibiy qismi sifatida qaralishi lozimligi asoslab beriladi.
Kalit so'zlar: nutq etiketi, xushmuomalalik, madaniyatlararo muloqot, pragmatik muvaffaqiyatsizlik, nutqiy akt, murojaat shakllari, kommunikativ kompetensiya.

Аннотация. В статье речевой этикет рассматривается как система конвенциональных вербальных и невербальных средств, с помощью которых говорящие устанавливают, поддерживают и завершают контакт в соответствии с социальными нормами определённого сообщества. На основе теории вежливости и сопоставительного анализа этикетных формул английского, узбекского и русского языков выявлены основные сферы расхождения этикетных норм и показано, каким образом эти расхождения приводят к прагматическим неудачам в межкультурном взаимодействии. Установлено, что различия в приветствиях, формах обращения, просьбах, предложениях и извинениях обусловлены более глубокими культурными ценностями: отношением к иерархии, коллективизмом и предпочтительной степенью прямоты. Обосновывается положение о том, что знание этикетных конвенций является неотъемлемым компонентом межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: речевой этикет, вежливость, межкультурная коммуникация, прагматическая неудача, речевой акт, формы обращения, коммуникативная компетенция.

INTRODUCTION

Every act of communication involves more than the exchange of information. When people speak, they also signal how they regard one another: whether they see the interlocutor as a superior, an equal or a close friend, whether they wish to keep a distance or to reduce it. Much of this relational work is carried out by a relatively stable set of expressions and rules that linguists call language (or speech) etiquette. Greetings, farewells, words of gratitude, apologies, compliments and forms of address are the most visible part of this system, yet its influence extends to the choice of pronouns, the degree of directness in requests and even the length of pauses.

Within a single culture these rules usually operate below the level of awareness. Native speakers rarely think about why they say “Could you pass the salt?” rather than “Pass the salt”, or why they address a teacher as “domla” and not by first name. The situation changes when representatives of different cultures meet. Norms that seem natural to one side may appear cold, excessive or even rude to the other. As J. Thomas pointed out, grammatical errors are usually forgiven as signs of limited proficiency, whereas pragmatic errors tend to be attributed to the speaker’s personality [11].

In the context of Uzbekistan, where English is increasingly used in education, business and tourism alongside Uzbek and Russian, the question of how etiquette norms interact across languages has clear practical value. The aim of this article is to clarify the concept of language etiquette, to compare selected etiquette conventions in English, Uzbek and Russian, and to determine the role these conventions play in the success or failure of intercultural communication.

METHODS

The study is qualitative and comparative in design. Its theoretical basis consists of the face-based model of politeness developed by P. Brown and S. Levinson [3], G. Leech’s politeness principle [9], H. Spencer-Oatey’s concept of rapport management [10], and the dimensions of cultural variation proposed by E. Hall [5] and G. Hofstede [6]. The Russian linguistic tradition, particularly the work of N. I. Formanovskaya [1], was used to define the scope of speech etiquette as a functional-semantic field.

The material consisted of conventional etiquette formulas in five communicative situations: greeting, addressing, requesting, offering and refusing, and apologising. Examples were collected from dictionaries of set expressions, published cross-cultural pragmatics research [2; 12] and from the author’s observation of everyday communication in Uzbek-, Russian- and English-speaking settings. The following methods were applied: descriptive analysis to characterise the formulas in each language; contrastive analysis to establish similarities and differences; and interpretive analysis to relate the identified differences to underlying cultural values. Since the study does not rely on statistical sampling, its findings are presented as tendencies typical of standard usage rather than as quantitative generalisations.

RESULTS

Defining language etiquette. The analysis of existing definitions allows language etiquette to be described as a nationally specific system of stable communicative formulas and rules that are socially prescribed for establishing contact, maintaining it in the desired tone and bringing it to an end. Three features of this system proved to be essential. First, it is conventional: the meaning of a formula such as “How do you do?” lies not in its literal content but in its social function. Second, it is situationally regulated: the choice of form depends on the age, status and familiarity of the participants and on the setting. Third, it is culturally specific: although all communities greet, thank and apologise, they do so with different frequency, in different forms and with different expectations about the response.

Comparative findings. The contrastive analysis revealed consistent differences across the three languages. The main results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Etiquette conventions in English, Uzbek and Russian

Speech act	English	Uzbek	Russian
Greeting	Brief, phatic ("Hi, how are you?"); no detailed reply expected	Extended sequence of inquiries about health, family and work; hand on chest	Moderate; greeting form depends on ty/vy choice and time of day
Address	Early switch to first names; titles in formal settings	Kinship terms (aka, opa), honorific -jon, domla; siz as default	Name + patronymic in formal contexts; ty/vy distinction
Request	Highly indirect, conventionalised modal questions	Politeness through respectful pronouns, blessings and softeners (iltimos, marhamat qilib)	Imperative with pozhaluysta widely acceptable
Offer / refusal	Offer accepted or declined once	Ritual initial refusal; host repeats the offer	Insistence moderate; repeated offer common among close people
Apology	Frequent, also for minor intrusions ("sorry")	Kechirasiz as attention-getter; strong apologies reserved for real offence	Izvinite as attention-getter; fuller apology for real offence

In greeting, English usage favours brevity. The question "How are you?" functions as a phatic signal and normally receives a formulaic reply. The Uzbek greeting, by contrast, often develops into an extended exchange: "Assalomu alaykum! Yaxshimisiz? Charchamayapsizmi? Uydagilar yaxshimi?" Each question expresses attention to the interlocutor and to his or her family, and omitting them may be perceived as coolness. Russian occupies an intermediate position, although the form of the greeting depends heavily on the choice between the familiar ty and the polite vy.

Forms of address showed the sharpest divergence. English speakers move quickly to first names, which signals friendliness and equality. In Uzbek, age and status are marked almost obligatorily: kinship terms such as aka and opa are extended to non-relatives, the suffix -jon adds warmth, and the pronoun siz remains the default even among colleagues of long standing. Russian formal communication relies on the combination of first name and patronymic, a pattern that has no direct equivalent in English.

In requests, English displays a strong preference for conventional indirectness ("Would you mind…", "I was wondering if you could…"). Uzbek and Russian allow more direct constructions, but politeness is expressed through other means: respectful pronouns and verb forms, the words iltimos and pozhaluysta, and in Uzbek, blessings and wishes that accompany the request. Offers and refusals demonstrated a further contrast. In Uzbek hospitality, a guest is expected to decline food or assistance at first, and the host is expected to insist. An English speaker who accepts the first refusal at face value may unintentionally appear inhospitable, while an Uzbek guest who is not asked twice may remain hungry out of politeness.

Gratitude, compliments and non-verbal etiquette. Differences were also found in the expression of gratitude and in responses to compliments. English speakers thank frequently, including family members and service staff, and a simple "Thanks" is appropriate in most everyday situations. In Uzbek, gratitude is often expressed through extended wishes and blessings

("Rahmat, baraka toping", "Ko'p yashang"), and excessive thanking of close relatives may sound distant. A compliment in English is normally accepted with thanks, whereas Uzbek speakers tend to deflect praise or return it, which reflects the value placed on modesty.

Non-verbal elements form an inseparable part of the etiquette system. Among Uzbek men, a handshake is commonly accompanied by placing the right hand on the chest as a sign of sincerity and respect; younger people rise when an elder enters the room; and eye contact with seniors is usually softened. In English-speaking cultures, steady eye contact is associated with honesty, and a firm handshake is expected in professional settings regardless of age or gender.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that etiquette differences are not random but reflect deeper cultural orientations. The English preference for indirect requests and early use of first names corresponds to what P. Brown and S. Levinson [3] describe as a combination of negative politeness, respect for the other person's freedom of action, with an ideology of equality. Uzbek etiquette, with its elaborate greetings, kinship address and ritual insistence, is oriented more towards positive politeness and the maintenance of group harmony. This agrees with G. Hofstede's characterisation of Central Asian cultures as relatively collectivist and high in power distance [6], and with E. Hall's observation that high-context cultures convey much of their meaning through shared relationships rather than explicit words [5].

From the standpoint of intercultural communication, the most significant finding is that etiquette conflicts usually arise not from a lack of politeness but from different ideas about what politeness requires. The Uzbek speaker who asks an English colleague about his parents is being considerate; the colleague may interpret the same questions as an intrusion into private life. Conversely, the English speaker's quick use of a first name, intended as friendliness, can be read as a lack of respect for seniority. J. Thomas called such cases sociopragmatic failure [11], and they are especially damaging because neither side recognises that a linguistic convention is at stake. Instead, the misunderstanding is transferred to the level of personal and national stereotypes.

These observations support the view, expressed by D. Hymes [7] and later developed by M. Byram [4], that communicative competence includes knowledge of when, to whom and in what manner something may be said. For language teaching this has two consequences. First, etiquette formulas should be taught together with the situations and values that motivate them, not as isolated phrases. Second, learners benefit from explicit comparison with their native culture, since awareness of one's own norms is a precondition for understanding those of others [8].

The practical consequences of these differences are especially noticeable in business and academic communication. International projects, joint university programmes and tourism bring Uzbek specialists into regular contact with partners from English-speaking countries, and etiquette misunderstandings in these settings may affect trust and cooperation. Business correspondence is a typical example: an Uzbek writer may begin an English e-mail with lengthy wishes of health and success, while the English reader expects a brief greeting and a clear statement of purpose. Neither style is incorrect in itself, but awareness of the partner's expectations allows the writer to adapt the message without losing politeness.

CONCLUSION

Language etiquette is a culturally specific system of conventional means that regulate social relations in communication. The comparison of English, Uzbek and Russian has shown that the three languages differ considerably in greetings, forms of address, requests, offers and apologies, and that these differences reflect underlying values such as the attitude to hierarchy, the balance between individual autonomy and group belonging, and the preferred level of directness. In intercultural communication, unfamiliarity with these conventions leads to pragmatic failure, which is often misread as personal rudeness. Consequently, knowledge of etiquette norms and the ability to interpret the etiquette behaviour of others should be regarded as a core element of

intercultural communicative competence and given a systematic place in foreign language education.

REFERENCES

1. Формановская Н. И. Речевой этикет и культура общения. – М.: Высшая школа, 1989.
2. Blum-Kulka S., House J., Kasper G. Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies. – Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1989.
3. Brown P., Levinson S. C. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
4. Byram M. Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence. – Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997.
5. Hall E. T. Beyond Culture. – New York: Anchor Books, 1976.
6. Hofstede G. Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations. – 2nd ed. – Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
7. Hymes D. On communicative competence // Sociolinguistics / ed. by J. B. Pride, J. Holmes. – Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. – P. 269–293.
8. Kasper G., Rose K. R. Pragmatic Development in a Second Language. – Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
9. Leech G. N. Principles of Pragmatics. – London: Longman, 1983.
10. Spencer-Oatey H. (ed.) Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory. – 2nd ed. – London: Continuum, 2008.
11. Thomas J. Cross-cultural pragmatic failure // Applied Linguistics. – 1983. – Vol. 4, № 2. – P. 91–112.
12. Wierzbicka A. Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction. – 2nd ed. – Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003.