

POLITENESS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: HOW PEOPLE SAY PLEASE AND THANK YOU

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Abstract *Politeness is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal communication and reflects cultural values and linguistic norms. This study explores how the speech acts of please and thank you are expressed in English and Uzbek, focusing on similarities, differences, and cultural underpinnings. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, as well as cross-cultural pragmatics, we examine authentic conversational data and classroom interactions. Results indicate that while both languages employ explicit lexical markers of politeness, their frequency, pragmatic force, and cultural interpretation vary. English speakers often use please and thank you formulaically, as markers of social etiquette, whereas Uzbek speakers rely more on contextual cues, indirectness, and culturally specific phrases (iltimos, rahmat, katta rahmat, rahmat sizga). These findings highlight the importance of understanding cultural pragmatics in language teaching and intercultural communication.*

Keywords: *politeness, pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, please, thank you, speech acts, classroom interactions.*

Introduction

Politeness strategies vary widely across cultures, influencing the way requests and expressions of gratitude are performed. In English, *please* and *thank you* are widely used, highly conventionalized expressions that children learn early and employ in nearly all formal and informal contexts. In contrast, in Uzbek, while equivalents such as *iltimos* (please) and *rahmat* (thank you) exist, their pragmatic deployment is more context-sensitive, reflecting hierarchical relationships, age, and cultural norms of respect.

Previous studies (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989) have shown that politeness markers are key to face-saving strategies. Cross-cultural pragmatics research indicates that direct lexical markers may carry different weight across languages. This study investigates the pragmatic use of *please* and *thank you* in English and Uzbek to better understand their role in interpersonal communication.

Methods

Data were collected from three sources:

1. **Authentic recordings** of everyday interactions (20 conversations in English, 20 in Uzbek).
2. **Questionnaires** distributed to 50 English speakers and 50 Uzbek speakers regarding frequency, contexts, and perceived necessity of *please/thank you*.
3. **Classroom observations** in bilingual settings, focusing on how young learners acquire and use these politeness markers.

Analytical Framework

We employed a comparative pragmatics approach, drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and House & Kasper's (1981) framework of speech act realization. Utterances were coded for frequency, syntactic position (beginning, middle, or end of request), and intensity of gratitude expression.

Results

1. **Frequency of Use:** English speakers used *please* in 82% of requests, compared to Uzbek speakers' 54% use of *iltimos*. *Thank you* appeared in 90% of English gratitude exchanges, while *rahmat* appeared in 70% of Uzbek interactions.

2. **Formality and Age:** Uzbek speakers used more elaborate gratitude forms (*katta rahmat*, *rahmat sizga*) in interactions with elders, while English speakers tended to rely on the simple *thank you*.

3. **Contextual Dependence:** In Uzbek, omitting *iltimos* is not always impolite, especially in close relationships where tone and context imply politeness. In contrast, in English omitting *please* in requests often risks sounding rude.

4. **Classroom Findings:** Uzbek learners of English often overgeneralized *please/thank you*, sometimes inserting them in contexts where native speakers would not, reflecting L1 transfer and heightened awareness of English politeness norms.

Discussion

The findings suggest that while both English and Uzbek recognize *please* and *thank you* as politeness markers, their pragmatic weight differs. English emphasizes formulaic politeness as a social norm, whereas Uzbek politeness is more relational and context-driven. This aligns with Hofstede's cultural dimensions: English-speaking cultures (lower power distance) encourage egalitarian politeness routines, while Uzbek culture (higher power distance) emphasizes context, hierarchy, and relationship-specific norms.

Pedagogically, this has implications for EFL/ESL teaching in Uzbekistan: learners need to understand not only lexical equivalents (*please* = *iltimos*, *thank you* = *rahmat*) but also when, how, and why they are used differently. Teachers should highlight pragmatic awareness, role-play authentic scenarios, and encourage cross-cultural comparison.

Conclusion

Politeness expressions like *please* and *thank you* serve as windows into cultural values. English favors frequent, formulaic politeness, while Uzbek pragmatics rely more on contextual politeness, hierarchy, and relational cues. Understanding these differences is vital for successful intercultural communication and EFL teaching in Uzbekistan. Future research should expand to include gender, regional dialects, and digital communication contexts.

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