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POLITENESS AS A PRAGMATIC CATEGORY: CONTEXT, INTENTIONALITY, AND COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract. In linguistic pragmatics, politeness transcends mere social etiquette or normative behavior; it functions as a core pragmatic category governing human interaction. This paper explores politeness as a dynamic mechanism through which speakers balance communicative efficiency, social relationships, and interpersonal goals. By examining foundational models—including Robin Lakoff’s politeness rules, Geoffrey Leech’s Politeness Principle, and Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson’s Face-Management Theory—this paper analyzes how contextual parameters, speaker intentions, and cultural norms interact during speech events. Furthermore, the paper highlights the crucial role of politeness within communicative competence, demonstrating that linguistic success relies not only on grammatical precision but also on sociopragmatic appropriateness. Finally, a comparative cross-cultural analysis of English and Uzbek pragmalinguistic realizations illustrates how positive and negative politeness strategies operate across distinct linguistic structures.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Politeness, Face Theory, Communicative Competence, Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), Context, English, Uzbek, Cross-Cultural Pragmatics.

1. Main part

Traditional formal linguistics long prioritized grammar, syntax, and semantics, treating language primarily as an abstract system of signs isolated from its situational contexts. Under structuralist and early transformational-generative paradigms, the ideal speaker-listener was studied in a homogenous speech community, focusing almost exclusively on grammaticality and propositional truth values. However, the pragmatic turn in language studies during the mid-to-late twentieth century radically shifted focus toward language in use—how utterances

acquire situated meaning within specific physical, social, cognitive, and psychological contexts.

Pragmatic politeness refers to the strategic encoding of linguistic forms to regulate social distance, soften potential interpersonal friction, maintain face, and establish mutual respect during verbal interaction. This paper examines the theoretical framework of politeness as a pragmatic category, analyzing its reliance on context and intention, its foundational connection to "face" and speech act theory, its cross-cultural pragmalinguistic realizations in English and Uzbek, and its role as a core component of communicative competence.

In everyday non-academic discourse, "politeness" is frequently equated with social etiquette, good manners, or deference (such as saying "please" and "thank you" or maintaining table manners). In pragmatic theory, however, politeness is defined as a systematic, strategic mechanism employed by interlocutors to achieve communicative goals without disrupting social harmony or causing interpersonal friction[19].

Early pragmatic formulations framed politeness as a necessary complement to H. Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP)[20]. Grice posited that conversation is governed by an overarching expectation of cooperation, articulated through four conversational maxims:

a) **Maxim of Quantity:** Make your contribution as informative as required, but not more informative.

b) **Maxim of Quality:** Do not say what you believe to be false or that for which you lack adequate evidence.

c) **Maxim of Relation:** Be relevant.

d) **Maxim of Manner:** Be perspicuous, clear, concise, and orderly.

While Grice's maxims assume an ideal state where efficiency and clarity are paramount, real-world human interactions regularly feature indirectness, hedging, hyperbole, and intentional vagueness. If communicative efficiency were the sole governing principle of human speech, indirect requests like "Would you mind opening the window if you get a chance?" would be inexplicably redundant compared to the direct imperative "Open the window." Pragmaticians recognized that Grice's model required an additional framework to explain why speakers routinely bypass maximum efficiency: the imperative to maintain social relationships.

Lakoff's Pragmatic Rules

Robin Lakoff was among the first to formalize politeness within a pragmatic framework, introducing the concept of "pragmatic competence" alongside grammatical competence[21]. Lakoff proposed two basic rules of pragmatic

[19] **Leech, G. N.** (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. Longman, p. 79.

[20] **Grice, H. P.** (1975). "Logic and conversation." In *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan. Academic Press, pp. 41–58.

[21] **Lakoff, R.** (1973). "The logic of politeness; or, minding your p's and q's." *Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, pp. 292–305.

competence: "Be Clear" (which aligned with Grice's maxims) and "Be Polite." To explain how politeness operates, Lakoff formulated three fundamental rules:

a) **Don't Impose (Distance):** Used in formal settings where social distance is wide. It involves avoiding intrusive inquiries, using passive structures, and respecting privacy.

b) **Give Options (Deference):** Allows the hearer to make their own choices, using indirect language, hedges, and softening expressions.

c) **Make the Hearer Feel Good / Be Friendly (Camaraderie):** Emphasizes closeness, intimacy, and solidarity, often employed in informal or peer-group settings.

Leech's Politeness Principle

Building upon Lakoff and Grice, Geoffrey Leech formulated the **Politeness Principle (PP)**, arguing that politeness is a necessary regulatory system that prevents the Cooperative Principle from breaking down. Leech maintained that people often flout Gricean maxims precisely because adhering strictly to them would result in impolite or socially disruptive behavior[22].

A central tenet of pragmatics is that an utterance's meaning is not fixed within its literal syntax or semantics. Instead, meaning is dynamically constructed through the interplay of context and speaker intention.

The pragmatic force of an utterance depends heavily on sociopragmatic variables. Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson identified three universal contextual parameters that speakers evaluate (consciously or subconsciously) before formulating a speech act[23].

These variables determine the overall weight of a speech act (W), which dictates the level of politeness required: Weight of Face-Threatening Act = D + P + R. Pragmatic politeness relies heavily on John Searle's theory of indirect speech acts[24]. In indirect speech acts, the speaker communicates to the hearer more than what is literally said. For instance, when a speaker says, *"It's getting a bit chilly in here,"* the literal **locutionary act** is an assertive statement about room temperature. However, within a specific context, the speaker's **illocutionary force** (or intention) is a polite request (*"Please close the window"*).

The most influential and widely debated framework for linguistic politeness remains Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's Face-Management Theory, built upon Erving Goffman's sociological concept of "face"[25]—defined as the public self-image that every adult member of society claims for themselves.

Brown and Levinson divide "face" into two distinct, universal aspects:

Positive Face: The desire of every individual to be liked, approved of, appreciated, validated, and included as a member of a group.

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[25] **Goffman, E.** (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Anchor Books, p. 5.

Negative Face: The basic claim to freedom of action, personal space, autonomy, and freedom from imposition.

Certain speech acts intrinsically run counter to the face wants of either the speaker or the hearer; these are termed **Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)**.

While Brown and Levinson's parameters (D, P, R) offer a universal theoretical framework, the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic mechanisms used to express politeness differ across cultures and languages.

Conclusion

Treating politeness as a pragmatic category demonstrates that human language functions as much more than an information delivery mechanism; it is a dynamic instrument for managing complex social relationships. Far from being decorative etiquette, politeness is a structured, strategic system that balances speaker intent, hearer expectations, and contextual norms. Ultimately, politeness is indispensable to communicative competence, bridging the gap between abstract grammatical structures and real-world human communication.

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ВИРТУАЛЬНАЯ ОБУЧАЮЩАЯ СРЕДА И РОЛЬ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЯ В УЧЕБНО-МЕТОДИЧЕСКОМ ПРОЦЕССЕ

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