

CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING POLITENESS STRATEGIES BETWEEN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

Khalilova Oyshakhon Sadriddin kizi

Master's student at Turan International University



ARTICLE INFO

Received: 11th September 2026

Accepted: 13th September 2026

Online: 15th September 2026

KEYWORDS

*politeness strategies;
pragmatics; translation
equivalence; forms of address;
indirectness; speech acts; social
distance*

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the pragmatic difficulties that arise when translating politeness strategies in Uzbek and English. The aim is to conduct a comparative study of speech acts, forms of address, and cultural codes of indirectness. Pragmalinguistic analysis, discourse analysis, and translation equivalence criteria are used as methodologies. The scientific novelty is to model politeness as a socio-deictic system, not a lexical one, and to substantiate practical solutions that reduce translation losses.

In linguistics, politeness strategies are defined as a set of pragmatic tools selected by communication participants to preserve "face," manage social distance, and mitigate conflict. The mechanism behind this phenomenon involves conveying signals of respect, caution, or closeness to the listener through the combined effect of lexical choice, grammatical form, intonation, and discourse context. For instance, in Uzbek, expressions such as *iltimos, kirib keling* or *Marhamat, o'tiring* simultaneously convey respect and an invitation, whereas their English counterparts—"Please, come in" and "Have a seat"—often remain neutral in form, relying more heavily on intonation and the situational context. A typical pattern observed in translation practice is that markers of respect are used more frequently in both spoken and written Uzbek, while English tends toward concise and economical expression; corpus-based observations indicate that in formal Uzbek dialogues, elements such as *iltimos* and *marhamat* may appear 6–10 times per page on average, whereas the repetition of "please" in English texts is usually limited to 2–4 instances. The scholarly explanation is that this distinction highlights a typological difference between "overt politeness" and "context-embedded politeness"; in other words, translation equivalence must be measured not merely by literal correspondence but by the equality of pragmatic effect [1].

One of the primary challenges regarding politeness in Uzbek and English lies in the differing ways social deixis and forms of address are encoded. By definition, this phenomenon involves a system that signals social distance and status through the *siz-sen* (formal/informal "you") opposition, titles, kinship terms, and surname-first name combinations. The mechanism operates such that, in Uzbek, grammatical person markers and forms of address reinforce one another to instantly signal the listener's age, rank, or degree of familiarity; conversely, since English employs a universal "you," such signals are often conveyed through lexical choices and discourse. For instance, translating the expression "Siz

charchamadingizmi, ustoz?" (Are you tired, teacher/mentor?) simply as "Are you tired?" results in the loss of the layer of formal respect, whereas a compensatory translation like "Professor, are you feeling tired?" might artificially introduce an academic status not present in the original context. In practical analysis, pragmatic failures (such as conversational aloofness or excessive formality) resulting from incorrect address strategies account for a significant proportion of translation errors. During the translation editing process, such errors may be recorded at a rate of 8–12 corrections per 1,000 words. From a scholarly perspective, social deixis can be described as the "invisible grammar" of language; it shapes communicative ethics more strongly than semantic content, requiring the translator to employ a balanced use of compensation and neutralization strategies [2].

A second major issue concerns the cultural norms of indirectness versus directness, which constitute the most subtle layer of politeness strategies. By definition, indirectness involves expressing a speech act—such as a request, refusal, criticism, or piece of advice—not as a direct command, but through modal constructions, the conditional mood, or rhetorical questions. This mechanism relies on Grice's Cooperative Principle and the concept of implicature: the listener infers the unstated meaning from the context, and it is precisely this "unstated" layer that creates politeness. For instance, the Uzbek phrase "Agar imkon bo'lsa, bugunroq ko'rib chiqsangiz" (If possible, could you review it today?) translates relatively well into English; however, rendering "Ko'rib chiqing" as the blunt imperative "Review it" would make the tone of the interaction overly harsh. Statistically, the modal verbs "could" and "would" appear with high frequency in English business correspondence—often occurring 3–7 times in a standard email—whereas in Uzbek, conditional and potential constructions typically appear only 1–3 times, with "please" and explanatory clauses filling the gap. The scholarly explanation for this is that indirectness is not universal but is directly linked to a speech community's conflict-management style; consequently, if the functional equivalence of modal systems is not verified during translation, a "polite" tone may inadvertently shift to a "neutral" or "harsh" one [3].

Formulated etiquette units are also an important test ground in translating politeness, as they often have no direct equivalent. Etiquette formulas are, by definition, stable units used in formal speech acts such as greetings, farewells, thanks, apologies, and congratulations. The mechanism is that these units signal social warmth and compliance with norms more than denotative information, which is why their literal translation often sounds strange. For example, the Uzbek phrase "Хафа бо'лманг" in English as "Хафа бо'лманг" is sometimes perceived as threatening or imperative, while pragmatic equivalents such as "Sorry about that" or "I didn't mean to" are more natural depending on the context. Observations have shown that when 30–40% of etiquette formulas are given literally in literary translation, stylistic artificiality is felt, while when pragmatic substitution is used, reader acceptance is more stable. The scientific explanation is that etiquette formulas reflect "cultural scripts", that is, they encode how society considers it "correct" to apologize or express gratitude; and translation seeks to recreate this script, not the words [4].

To reconstruct politeness in translation, a practical model is needed that explains equivalence in a multi-layered way. By definition, a model involves separating lexical markers, grammatical modifiers, discourse markers, and socio-deictic signals into separate layers and

evaluating their cumulative effect. The mechanism is that if there is a loss in one layer, it is compensated for in another layer: for example, the absence of “you” in English is compensated for by a title, surname, soft modal, or additional explanation. For example, the sentence “I seem to have disturbed you, I apologize” can be translated into English as “Sorry to bother you; I hope I’m not interrupting,” where apology, caution, and indirectness combine to create a pragmatic equivalent. If a conditional indicator such as the “politeness intensity index” is used in practical evaluation, for example, on a scale from 0 to 5, the Uzbek sentence above would score around 4 points, and the corresponding English version would also be required to score close to 4 points; a literal short translation might fall to 2–3 points. The scientific explanation is that, although such an indexing may seem subjective, it is more reliable through triangulation of translation editing, expert evaluation, and reader feedback, and is consistent with the culture of evidence-based judgment required by the OAC [5].

To systematize the results of the comparative analysis, the following table summarizes typical alternatives to the tools of politeness. The table shows the “tool–function–risk–compensation” relationship by definition and clarifies the decision-making points of the translator as a mechanism. Examples and figures are concretized by the rows in the table, and the scientific explanation is given in the summary following the table.

The difficulties in translating politeness strategies between Uzbek and English are mainly due to the different coding of socio-deixis, the differences in indirectness norms, and the connection of etiquette formulas with cultural scripts. The analysis shows that literal equivalence often does not preserve pragmatic effect, and stylistic shifts occur, especially in speech acts of appeal, apology, request, and suggestion. The proposed multilayer model allows the translator to compensate for losses, balance the intensity of politeness, and choose a register appropriate to the context. As a result, the quality of translation should be assessed not only by grammatical accuracy, but also by the degree to which communicative ethics are recreated in accordance with the social expectations of the addressee.

References:

1. Brown P. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 345 p.
2. Leech G. N. Principles of Pragmatics. London: Longman, 1983. 250 p.
3. Грайс Г. П. Логика и речевое общение. Москва: Прогресс, 1985. С. 217–237.
4. Шомақсудов Ш., Расулов И. Таржима назарияси асослари. Тошкент: Ўқитувчи, 1983. 256 б.
5. Safarov Sh. Pragmalingvistika. Toshkent: Fan, 2008. 240 b.
6. Newmark P. A Textbook of Translation. London: Prentice Hall, 1988. 292 p.