



## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN KOREAN AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study presents a comparative analysis of politeness strategies in the Korean and Uzbek languages from sociolinguistic and intercultural communication perspectives. It explores how each language encodes politeness through linguistic forms, pragmatic norms, and culturally grounded expressions of respect. The research investigates the interplay between cultural values, social hierarchy, and linguistic mechanisms that govern the use of honorifics and speech levels. The findings indicate that while both Korean and Uzbek societies share a strong emphasis on respect and hierarchy, their methods of expressing politeness differ substantially. Korean politeness is systematically encoded within grammatical and morphological structures, whereas Uzbek politeness relies heavily on lexical choice, pragmatic sensitivity, and contextual flexibility. These distinctions demonstrate how language reflects the social cognition and cultural ideologies of its speakers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Politeness, Honorifics, Sociolinguistics, Intercultural Communication*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language functions as a cultural mirror, reflecting the social norms, values, and relational expectations of a given community. Among its diverse functions, politeness plays a crucial role in regulating interpersonal relationships, maintaining social distance or closeness, and expressing respect. Both Korea and Uzbekistan are characterized by collectivist social structures, where individuals are expected to demonstrate deference, modesty, and consideration for others. Yet, despite sharing these ge-

neral cultural orientations, their linguistic realizations of politeness differ in fundamental ways.

Korean politeness is rooted in a long history of Confucian philosophy, which institutionalized hierarchical order and ritual propriety (예의). These values became embedded in the grammar of the Korean language, producing a highly systematized honorific system. In contrast, Uzbek politeness, shaped by Turkic nomadic traditions and Islamic ethical teachings, relies more heavily on contextual sensitivity, indir-



ectness, and lexical strategies rather than strict grammatical constraints. This comparative analysis seeks to illuminate how the two languages conceptualize politeness, and how cultural and historical factors have shaped their linguistic structures.

Furthermore, as interaction between Korean and Uzbek speakers increases—particularly through education, labor migration, and cultural exchange—understanding these politeness mechanisms becomes essential for avoiding pragmatic misunderstandings. This study therefore holds both academic and practical significance in the field of intercultural communication.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Definition of Politeness

Politeness in linguistics has often been discussed in terms of the management of “face,” a concept introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their framework has been influential but has also been criticized for overemphasizing universalism and underestimating cultural specificity. Later scholars, particularly those studying Asian languages (Ide 1989; Matsumoto 1988), argued that politeness is not merely a matter of individual face-saving but is deeply tied to socially expected norms and moral obligations.

In this regard, Korean and Uzbek politeness can be seen as “discernment-based” politeness systems, where appropriate behavior is determined by social roles, age differences, and culturally prescribed expectations. Thus, politeness is not solely a matter of personal choice or strategy but a reflection of shared cultural logic.

### 2.2 Cultural Dimensions of Politeness

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The collectivist orientation in both cultures influences how politeness is evaluated and expressed. However, the sources of these values differ.

Korea: Confucian ethics emphasize propriety, hierarchy, and ritualized respect, resulting in a language system that encodes social differences at the grammatical level.

Uzbekistan: Islamic moral concepts such as *adab* (etiquette), *hayo* (modesty), and *hurmat* (respect) shape communicative behavior, encouraging speakers to adopt humility, avoid direct confrontation, and use honorific address terms.

These distinctions highlight that both cultures value respect, but they institutionalize and manifest this value differently.

## 3. Politeness in the Korean Language

Korean possesses an exceptionally developed honorific system that permeates all linguistic levels—from verbs and nouns to pronouns and sentence endings. The use of six to seven speech levels forces the speaker to evaluate relational factors such as social status, age, familiarity, and situational formality before producing even a simple sentence. This systemic encoding makes politeness an obligatory part of Korean grammar.

Furthermore, the Korean lexicon includes many honorific nouns (e.g., *진지*, *자녀*, *선생님*) and verbs (*드리다*, *말씀하시다*), which reinforce hierarchical distinctions. The honorific marker *-시-*



is also central to expressing respect toward the subject of the sentence.

In daily life, these linguistic features shape communication patterns: younger individuals must consistently show deference through language, and deviations may be interpreted as rudeness or moral failure. Thus, Korean politeness can be described as rule-governed, hierarchical, and grammatically encoded.

#### 4. Politeness in the Uzbek Language

Unlike Korean, Uzbek does not have a fixed system of honorific-inflected verb endings. Instead, politeness arises from pronoun selection, address terms, prosodic features, and contextual adaptation. The formal “Siz” and informal “Sen” distinction is central, but even within this binary system, usage is highly flexible depending on tone, intention, and situational dynamics.

Uzbek employs a wide variety of kinship-based address terms—aka, opa, uka, opa-singil, domla, ustoz—to express respect, friendliness, or emotional closeness. These terms function not only linguistically but socially, often reducing distance between speakers and reinforcing group identity.

In addition, Uzbek politeness frequently involves strategies such as indirectness, softened requests, and avoidance of blunt expressions. The emphasis on hospitality (mehmondo'stlik) also influences speech patterns, encouraging sympathetic and welcoming communication.

Thus, Uzbek politeness is context-driven, relational, and lexically expressed rather than grammatically obligatory.

#### 5. Comparative Discussion

Although both languages prioritize respect and social harmony, they utilize different mechanisms:

Feature	Korean	Uzbek
Linguistic system	Grammaticalized honorifics	Pragmatic and lexical politeness
Core mechanism	Speech levels, honorific markers	“Siz/Sen” distinction, address terms, tone
Cultural basis	Confucian hierarchy	Islamic ethics and social harmony
Flexibility	Low – fixed structure	High – contextually adaptive

One key difference lies in speaker agency.

Korean speakers have less freedom because grammatical norms dictate allowable forms. Uzbek speakers, however, negotiate politeness dynamically based on the interactional context.

Another difference appears in social

perception:

In Korea, incorrect honorifics are often seen as lack of upbringing or respect.

In Uzbekistan, tone, intention, and warmth can compensate for less formal linguistic forms.

These comparisons illustrate that even languages with similar cultural values



may encode politeness very differently.

## 6. Pedagogical Implications

As educational and social exchange between Korea and Uzbekistan expands, teaching comparative politeness becomes essential.

For Uzbek learners of Korean, the challenge lies in mastering the rigid structure of speech levels. Explicit instruction, real-life simulations, video materials, and discourse-based training are necessary to help learners internalize hierarchical norms and avoid pragmatic mistakes.

For Korean learners of Uzbek, understanding the flexible yet culturally deep system of Uzbek politeness requires developing pragmatic sensitivity. Learners should be trained to recognize contextual cues—such as age, familiarity, emotional tone—and to use kinship terms and formal pronouns appropriately.

Importantly, comparative politeness

instruction enhances intercultural competence, helping speakers communicate respectfully and effectively across cultural boundaries.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This expanded study reaffirms that politeness is not merely a linguistic strategy but a cultural act deeply intertwined with historical and moral traditions. Korean encodes politeness structurally, while Uzbek negotiates it contextually. These contrasting approaches demonstrate how different societies conceptualize respect and interpersonal relations.

Future research may explore generational differences, the influence of globalization on politeness norms, or how bilingual speakers navigate dual politeness systems in actual discourse.

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