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**Different approaches of using the  
concept of politeness  
(on the materials of Kazakh,  
English and Chinese)**

The paper represents different approaches to the analysis of politeness in languages. A deep understanding of the differences between the concept of politeness in Kazakh and Chinese languages are studied. In this paper, we propose their principles and origins, which are helpful for cross-cultural communication. Politeness is considered as an essential norm of behavior, which is used by a group of people in various ways. The main objective of the given article is to discuss the origin of politeness, analyze the reasons for intercultural communication and summarize the differences in Kazakh and Chinese cultures, learn the diverse usage of politeness by the people with different cultural background. We point out that people can put the politeness into right usage only if people understand correctly the usage of the politeness principles in different cultures.

**Key words:** politeness, different culture, use, communication.

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**«Сыпайылық» концептісін  
қолданудағы түрлі әдістер**

Мақалада тілдегі «сыпайылық» концептісін қолданудағы түрлі әдістер келтірілген. Қазақ және қытай тіл мәдениетіндегі «сыпайылық» түсінігінің айырмашылықтары қаралады. Бұл мақалада мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынасқа қажетті сыпайылық сақтау ережелерінің мысалдарын ұсынамыз. Сыпайылық әртүрлі нысанда көрінетін мінез-құлық ережесі ретінде қарастырылады. Ұсынылып отырған мақаланың негізгі мақсаты – сыпайылықтың пайда болуының негіздерін зерттеу, мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынастың себептерін талдау, қазақ және қытай мәдениетінің айырмашылықтарын ажырату, түрлі мәдениет өкілдерінің сыпайылық түсінігін қолдану әдістерін үйрену. Біз сыпайылық түсінігінің дұрыс қолданылуы үшін түрлі мәдениеттегі оның жүзеге асу қағидаларын дұрыс түсіну керектігін көрсетеміз.

**Түйін сөздер:** сыпайылық, әртүрлі мәдениет, қолданыс, қарым-қатынас.

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**Различные подходы к анализу  
концепта вежливости  
(на материале казахского,  
английского и китайского  
языков)**

В статье представлены различные подходы к анализу концепта вежливости в языках. Рассматриваются различия в понимании вежливости в казахской и китайской лингвокультурах. В данной статье мы предлагаем примеры соблюдения норм вежливости, которые необходимы для межкультурной коммуникации. Вежливость рассматривается как значимая норма поведения, проявляющаяся в различных формах. Основная цель представленной статьи – рассмотреть основы происхождения вежливости, проанализировать причины межкультурной коммуникации, выявить различия в Казахской и китайской культурах, изучить способы использования понятия вежливости представителями разных культур. Указывается на то, что для корректного использования понятия вежливости необходимо правильное понимание принципов функционирования вежливости в различных культурах.

**Ключевые слова:** вежливость, разные культуры, использование, коммуникация.

**DIFFERENT  
APPROACHES OF USING  
THE CONCEPT OF  
POLITENESS  
(on the materials of  
Kazakh, English and  
Chinese)**

The concept of politeness can be observed in all languages and cultures as a social phenomenon, and it has been an important object of study in linguistics. It can be expressed verbally and non-verbally, but in this study, the ways people expressing politeness verbally through their use of language is discussed. As a common social phenomenon, politeness is not only a universally highly valued virtue, but also a widely employed strategy to realize tactful and effective communication. We view politeness as one of the major social constraints on human interaction and it regulates participants' communicative behavior by constantly reminding them to take into consideration the feelings of the others. It is necessary to consider their feelings to establish levels of mutual comfort and promote understanding, which in turn accelerate and facilitate human communication. We maintain that politeness is a linguistic universal by which we mean:

- 1) Linguistic politeness exists in all languages.
- 2) Politeness considerations regulate every human speakers' verbal behavior in social interaction.

On the one hand, politeness pervades human interactions and plays an important role in the face-to-face communication. It is not simply a means of conveying information, but a more important means of establishing, maintaining and enhancing social relationships, it facilitates social interactions. On the other hand, with the rapid development of modern economy, science and technology, the globe seems to become smaller and smaller, and it is getting more and more frequent that people from different countries get in touch with each other. People, who meet together for the various purposes such as business, cultural exchanges, traveling, may come from different countries, for example, from China and from English-speaking countries. Then their knowledge of cultures, social norms, values, and customs and habits and soon are certainly different and their realizations of politeness strategies may be different. All these may bring them some misunderstandings in the process of communication, especially in application of politeness strategies. Therefore, a pragmatic perspective study of politeness in English and Chinese becomes rather more imperative. It is important that we should notice the universal politeness awareness among English, Kazakh and Chinese. Based on the universal significance of

the authors Brown and Levinson's «Face» Theory and the Leech's Politeness Principle, people should strengthen the awareness of the politeness use in our daily communication.

What is politeness? It seems that we have well understood this concept and that it is too easy for us to give mass of examples of polite behavior in our daily life. However, it is not easy to give a satisfactory definition for politeness. Skimming through the literature on the studies of politeness, we can find a lack of unanimous agreement to what is understood as linguistic politeness.

Different linguists and scholars give their different interpretations of politeness. On the one hand, all the discussions between different linguists and scholars confirm the universal feature of politeness. Speakers of all languages and members of all cultures universally hold the notion of politeness. It can be observed in all human interactions. On the other hand, this discussion also shows the differences in defining or perceiving politeness. On the whole, Western linguists tend to regard politeness as a way to avoid offenses and maintain social distance as well as social phenomenon of reducing interpersonal contact, while Chinese scholars have a tendency to stress the association of politeness with social and moral values. This difference is owing to different cultural backgrounds between the Western and Chinese researchers. More specifically, politeness admits strong cultural characteristics since the value orientations of a culture used dynamic influence on its members' attitudes and speech acts. That is to say, politeness is defined, realized and judged differently in different cultures.

#### ***Categories of politeness language.***

According to the different occasion where the conversation start, people often put the politeness use in some categories as following: *Forms of Address, Greeting, Compliment, Closing of an Encounter, Compliment, Agreement, Refusal and Apology and Thank*. For author's ability and the lack of original reference, it is impossible to cover all the aspects of politeness. Here two patterns politeness language is used, for example, namely Greeting, and Compliment as how to greet each other and how to respond to compliments. When acquaintances meet in the street and when strangers have an intention of starting a conversation, all of them have to find some appropriate and polite words to greet each other. Greeting is a sign of social norm. In China, it is intolerable to go straight ahead without saying anything to an acquaintance. That kind of behavior may be regarded as a provocation. If speaker wants to build up the relationship with hearer, he/she

must recognize the importance of greeting as an influential factor in interpersonal relationship. Greeting performs phonic function of a language and it is a kind of politeness strategy to maintain positive face and understanding between social beings. A compliment is a speech act, which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone for something, which is valued positively by the speaker and hearer (Holmes, 1986). Compliments are usually intended to have a positive effect on interpersonal relations.

#### ***Theoretical framework on politeness***

Brown and Levinson's «Face» theory Brown and Levinson propose «face» theory to explain the politeness phenomenon and the relationship between politeness and «face» in Universals in Language Usage: ***Politeness Phenomenon***. Later they revised the original framework, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* in which they give further illustration of the view of politeness. The main idea almost has not been changed. They define «face» as follows: «the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself» (Brown and Levinson, 2003). In their view, «the face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction» (Brown and Levinson, 2003). The participants in communication all have «face» wants, which are their basic needs. Brown and Levinson also (2003) state «We treat the aspects of face as basic wants, which every member knows every other member desires, and which in general it is in the interests of every other member to partially satisfy». According to Brown and Levinson, everyone's face depends on everyone else's being maintained or enhanced, so the participants should take each other's face into consideration in communication. «Face» consists of two specific constituents: negative «face» and positive «face». The former means people want to be approved of, praised or complimented; the latter means the basic claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Brown and Levinson think that some acts by their nature threaten the «face» wants of the speaker or hearer, such as advising, promising, criticizing, etc.

#### ***Leech's politeness principle***

Another influential theory concerning politeness is Leech's Politeness Principle, which adapts and expands on Grice's theory. Geoffrey Leech (1983) suggests a detailed framework. He proposes two sets of conversational principles: «interpersonal rhetoric» and «textual rhetoric». The former consists of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP), his Politeness Principle (PP) and his Irony Principle

(IP). Although CP enables the hearer to arrive at what the speaker really means or implies, the CP in itself fails to give a reason why people are frequently so indirect in conveying what they mean underlying their literal words, and PP is used to explain why such indirectness is used. Leech thus concludes: «It is for this reason that the PP can be seen not just as another principle to be added to the CP, but as a necessary complement, which rescues the CP from serious trouble» (1983). Leech distinguishes relative politeness from absolute politeness. The former emphasizes the fact that politeness is often relative to some norm of behavior for specific cultures and situations. The latter refers to the degree of politeness inherently associated with a speech act. Leech primarily focuses on the study of absolute politeness. Leech divides the PP into a number of maxims, each of which has two sub-maxims as detailed below:

(1). *Tact maxima*: minimize cost to other / b: maximize benefit to other

(2). *Generosity maxima*: minimize benefit to self / b: maximize cost to self

(3). *Approbation maxim* a: Minimize praise of self / b: maximize dispraise of self

(4). *Modesty maxima*: minimize praise of self / b: maximize dispraise of self

(5). *Agreement maxima*: minimize disagreement between self and other /

b: maximize sympathy between self and other

(6). *Sympathy maxima*: minimize antipathy between self and other /

b: maximize sympathy between self and other

According to the above, politeness is essentially asymmetrical: what is polite with respect to other / hearer or to some third party will be impolite with respect to self/speaker, and vice versa. Leech also points out that different cultures may give different importance to the politeness maxims. For example, English-speaking country (particular British) gives prominence to the Maxim of Tact, and Mediterranean cultures place a higher value of the Generosity Maxim and a lower value of the Modesty Maxim. Some eastern cultures (China and Japan) tend to value the Modesty Maxim much more highly than Western Countries. These observations, being the general functional imperatives of human communication, are more or less universal, but that their relative weights will vary from one culture, social or linguistic milieu to another (Leech, 1983)

#### ***Analysis for politeness in greeting***

Greeting is a common politeness phenomenon existing in all societies. Greeting is a symbol of

people's beginning to communicate. A talk, whatever it is simple or serious like a business talk, cannot start without greeting each other first. Greeting can help to establish and maintain the interpersonal relationships. As an influential factor and a social norm in interpersonal relationships, greetings should be paid high attention to. Not only those who meet for the first time and the acquaintances encounter each other in the street, but also those who are intimate should use appropriate and polite language to greet each other. If someone goes straight ahead without greeting the acquaintances, he or she would be considered rude, and have threatened the other's positive «face». From this point, we can see that greetings serve as a phatic function of language to establish and maintain the social contact instead of transferring information, so the standard expressions are often used. Greeting is a kind of politeness strategy to save the hearer's positive «face». Greetings are common both in English and Chinese cultures. In English, the greetings in the following are commonly used:

1) How are you?

2) Hello.

3) Hey. (British English)

4) Hi. (American English)

These expressions listed above are rather common. In Chinese, there is a similar set of phrases as follows:

1) Chi guo le ma? 吃过了吗 (Have you had your meal?)

2) Qu na li? 去哪里 (Where are you going?)

3) Shang jiequ? 上街去 ((Are you going shopping?)

There is a similar set of phrases as follows in Kazakh:

1) Сәлеметсізбе? Hello?

2) Сәлем? (Hi)

3) Қалайсыз? (How are you?)

Hearing such utterances, most English-speaking people will feel puzzled and surprised. Due to knowing little about the Chinese culture, they will react: «It's none of your business», «Are you going to invite me to dinner?» The reason for such embarrassment is that there are different stereotyped thinking existing in western countries and China. «In the Chinese culture, to show warmth and concern for others is considered as a polite act. That's why when two Chinese meet each other even for the first time; they might begin asking about each other's age, marital status, offspring, occupation, and even income. The Chinese people think that they are being polite by showing concern for the other person, and asking all these questions will help



shorten the distance between themselves and their interlocutors.» (He Zhaoxiong, 1995:7). For those who have learned about the Chinese culture, they will just smile without any words, although it seems strange to them.

Generally speaking, Chinese ways of greetings have such features, which are different from those in English cultures. Greetings seem to show the Speaker's concern and warmth to the Hearer both in English and Chinese there. These greetings show attitudinal warmth to the hearer. In you?); if he comes across his neighbor who is taking a walk in the street, he will greet him or her, «San buya? 散步呀 (You are taking a walk, aren't you?). Usually, the hearer will only nod with a smile on his/her face as a response. This kind of greetings, whose contents rely on the real-time situation, would be uttered and responded numerous times a day, for people, may do different kinds of things every day. In English, there are also such greetings. Du Xuezheng says that he has ever had such experience. Once when he was running, he met a foreign friend who greeted him, «Doing some running? (跑步呢?). However, compared with Chinese, this kind of greetings is rather few in English, for the English-speaking people usually do not like to greet others or be greeted in this way. Zhang Laixiang gives us an example. Once one of his colleagues, a foreign teacher, complained to him, «Why do some students ask me what I am doing, though, they see I am working on the computer? And all the time they ask me where I am going or where I have been? Are you Chinese over-inquisitive? I think it's none of their business» (Zhang Laixiang, 2005). In fact, such greetings «what are you doing?» or «Where are you going?» are nothing more than a Chinese way of saying «Hello!» or «How are you?» in English culture. In most cases, the English-speaking people are likely to take weather or traveling as their topic of greetings, such as «It's a fine day, isn't it?», «It's hot, isn't it?». Du Xuezheng argues (1998) that such English greeting is also the kind of conversing. The

reason why the English-speaking people like to talk about weather is that weather is a neutral subject, which involves no personal matters, which also returns to Brown, and Levinson's negative «face» want in western cultures.

## Conclusion

This paper aims to draw a contrastive analysis on politeness use between English, Kazakh and Chinese. Firstly, describes the relation between pragmatic, culture circumstance and politeness use in a simple way. Then a review of the fundamental politeness theories is made. In the end, under the Brown and Levinson's «Face» Theory and the Leech's Politeness Principle from cross-culture pragmatic perspective, a contrastive study on greetings and responding to compliments is carried out. The following are some points that have been summed up.

First, culture plays an important role in influencing the use of politeness in Kazakh, Chinese and English culture. Through comparing the theories of different scholars, the author chose the Brown and Levinson's «Face» theory and the Leech's Politeness Principle to analyze the differences of two speech acts: greetings and responding to compliments between English and Chinese.

Second, through contrastive analysis, the author find out that whatever in the English culture or Chinese culture when two people greeting or responding to the compliment, «face» is all cared thing. The speaker and the hearer both care their «face», negative face or positive face; no matter they adopt the Agreement Maxim or Modesty Maxim. So if we put our attention on this problem, people may have a successful conversation or communication with other person whatever is in the same country or different country. We want to make people aware the possibility of the conversation going successful between these people from different cultures.

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