

## THE ROLE OF PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES IN THE EXPRESSION OF SPEECH ETIQUETTE IN DIGITAL MEDIA

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**Abstract:** *This thesis examines the linguocultural features of speech etiquette in English and Uzbek mass media, with particular attention to politeness strategies, addressing forms, and paralinguistic resources in traditional and digital media. The study aims to identify similarities, differences, and transformations in the realization of speech etiquette under the influence of digitalization and globalization. Comparative linguocultural, pragmatic, and discourse analysis methods are employed to examine selected English and Uzbek media texts and examples of digital communication. The findings demonstrate that speech etiquette in both languages reflects culturally specific patterns of interpersonal communication. English media tend to employ more direct and neutral forms of address, while Uzbek media demonstrate a stronger use of honorifics, kinship terms, and culturally established expressions of respect. The study also reveals that digital communication has expanded the resources of speech etiquette through usernames, abbreviations, emojis, punctuation, and other paralinguistic elements. These resources may support, strengthen, modify, or, depending on context, undermine politeness. The research concludes that digital media do not eliminate traditional speech-etiquette norms but transform their forms of realization and interpretation within different linguocultural environments.*

**Keywords:** *speech etiquette, politeness, linguoculturology, mass media, digital media, addressing forms, paralinguistic resources.*

The development of computer-mediated communication has transformed conventional patterns of speech etiquette and politeness. In face-to-face interaction, politeness is commonly conveyed not only through verbal expressions such as greetings, requests, apologies and forms of address, but also through non-verbal cues, including facial expressions, gestures, intonation and eye contact. Digital communication reduces access to many of these cues, creating a need for alternative resources through which interpersonal attitudes and communicative intentions can be expressed. In this context, emojis have emerged as important paralinguistic and pragmatic resources in digital interaction.

The relationship between speech etiquette and politeness is particularly relevant to the study of digital communication. Speech etiquette can be understood as a culturally and socially established set of communicative conventions governing appropriate interaction, including greetings, farewells, requests, gratitude, apologies, congratulations and forms of address. Politeness, meanwhile, concerns the ways speakers manage interpersonal relationships, social distance, respect and the participants' social face. Consequently, politeness can be realized through speech etiquette formulas, while speech etiquette provides culturally recognizable forms through which politeness is conventionally expressed.

The transition from face-to-face communication to digital communication has resulted in the emergence of netiquette, which may be viewed as a set of socially recognized expectations concerning appropriate behaviour in online environments. Research on netiquette demonstrates that digital communication involves norms of appropriateness, politeness, civility and acceptable interaction, although these norms may vary according to communicative context and online community. Thus, netiquette extends the broader principles of interpersonal etiquette into digitally mediated environments.

Within this framework, emojis should not be regarded as speech-etiquette formulas in themselves. Rather, they can function as paralinguistic and pragmatic resources that support, modify or sometimes contradict verbal expressions of

politeness. Li and Yang's corpus-based study of emoji use in Internet communication demonstrates that emojis perform several pragmatic functions, including modifying illocutionary force, managing interaction, signalling attitudes and emotions, facilitating turn-taking and maintaining interpersonal rapport. The authors also relate emoji use to politeness strategies and face-saving practices.

This finding is particularly significant for digital speech etiquette because the absence of facial expressions, gestures and prosodic information can make written messages more ambiguous. Emojis may compensate for some of these missing contextual signals. For example, an emoji accompanying a request may make the message appear less abrupt, while an emoji following a greeting or expression of gratitude may reinforce friendliness and interpersonal warmth. Consequently, the pragmatic interpretation of a digital message may depend not only on its lexical content but also on the paralinguistic resources accompanying it.

The relationship between emojis and politeness has also been demonstrated directly in research on computer-mediated communication. Kavanagh's study of American and Japanese online blogging communities examines emoticons as resources for expressing politeness strategies and demonstrates that their use can contribute to positive-politeness behaviour. This comparative perspective is especially relevant to linguocultural research because it indicates that visual digital resources do not necessarily have identical pragmatic meanings across cultures.

More recent research further demonstrates that emoji interpretation is dependent on social and contextual factors. Yang and Qian's experimental study of Chinese computer-mediated communication, for example, found that the smiling-face emoji could actually decrease perceived politeness in particular contexts. Its interpretation was influenced by the identity of the interlocutors and the communicative situation. This finding is important because it challenges the assumption that emojis universally make messages more polite. Instead, their pragmatic meaning is culturally and contextually conditioned.

Similarly, research on emoji use as a form of digital non-verbal behaviour indicates that online interaction is governed by social norms concerning the

appropriate intensity and reciprocity of emoji use. Excessive emoji use in initial interactions may produce less positive interpersonal evaluations, while interlocutors tend to reciprocate the level of emoji use employed by their communication partners. These findings suggest that emojis themselves can become subject to emerging forms of digital etiquette or netiquette.

Therefore, emojis can be considered part of an evolving system of digital communicative conventions. Their function is not restricted to expressing happiness, sadness or other emotions. Depending on the context, they may soften a request, strengthen gratitude, signal friendliness, maintain rapport, indicate irony, modify the force of an utterance or provide a socially appropriate closing to an interaction. In this sense, emojis participate in the pragmatic realization of politeness without replacing conventional speech-etiquette formulas.

Recent research has also begun to examine emojis explicitly within politeness frameworks. A 2026 study of student interactions on Facebook, X and Reddit, for example, analyses emojis as multimodal pragmatic resources and reports their role in mitigating face-threatening acts, strengthening solidarity and reducing pragmatic ambiguity. Such findings reinforce the view that digital politeness should be examined as a multimodal phenomenon in which verbal and visual resources interact.

From a linguocultural perspective, this issue becomes particularly significant in comparative research. The same emoji may not necessarily communicate the same degree of politeness, intimacy, respect or irony in different cultural contexts. Digital etiquette is therefore not simply a universal replacement for traditional speech etiquette; rather, it represents an adaptation of existing communicative norms to new technological environments. This provides a basis for examining how English- and Uzbek-speaking users employ emojis and other paralinguistic resources to express respect, solidarity, emotional stance and interpersonal distance.

The matter of non-verbal signs and speech etiquette, the correlations between these two terms have been in the spotlight of many scientific researches.

No less important are they in the field of media linguistics and politeness, since they are indications of how much traditional and modern media vary. In the absence of face-to-face cues like intonation, facial expressions, and gestures, these elements function as substitutes that help users convey emotions, attitudes, and degrees of politeness. Their use is not universal but culturally conditioned, reflecting deeper communicative norms and values in both English and Uzbek digital environments. Therefore, analyzing paralinguistic features is essential for understanding how politeness is verbalized and perceived in online discourse.

In English digital communication, paralinguistic characters are widely used to create a sense of informality, friendliness, and emotional nuance. Emoticons such as 😊, 😂 or 🙌 often serve as markers of positive politeness, softening potentially direct or face-threatening statements. For example, a message like “I think you’re wrong 😊” mitigates disagreement by signaling friendliness and reducing the risk of conflict. Similarly, punctuation – especially exclamation marks (“Thanks!!!”) – is used to express enthusiasm and warmth. This reflects the broader cultural tendency toward informality, where emotional expressiveness is valued and helps maintain interpersonal connection. However, the misuse of such markers, such as excessive sarcasm conveyed through 😏 or the use of all caps, can signal impoliteness or aggression, thus violating speech etiquette norms.

In contrast, Uzbek Internet communication demonstrates a more restrained and context-sensitive use of non-linguistic elements, closely tied to cultural expectations of respect and hierarchy. While emojis are increasingly common, their function is often more supportive than central. They accompany, rather than replace, polite linguistic forms. For instance, a respectful message like “Rahmat sizga 😊” maintains its politeness primarily through the verbal marker “sizga” with the emoji serving only as an emotional signal. Importantly, the inappropriate use of emojis such as laughing 😂 in a serious or formal context can be perceived as disrespectful or insincere. This reflects the cultural emphasis on sincerity and appropriateness in communication.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that emojis occupy an intermediate position between non-verbal communication, digital pragmatics, politeness and netiquette. They are not conventional speech-etiquette expressions such as greetings or apologies, but they can accompany and modify such expressions and contribute to their pragmatic interpretation. Accordingly, the study of emojis within speech etiquette should focus not merely on their frequency or emotional meanings, but on their communicative functions, cultural interpretation and contribution to politeness and interpersonal relationship management in digital media.

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