

## A COMPARATIVE PRAGMALINGUISTIC STUDY OF POLITE REQUESTS IN THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the pragma linguistic features of polite requests in English and Russian within the framework of intercultural communication. The research focuses on how speakers of both languages formulate requests in different social and communicative situations and how politeness is expressed through linguistic forms. The study analyzes the influence of context, social distance, and level of formality on the choice of request strategies. Special attention is given to indirectness, mitigation devices, and culturally specific politeness patterns that characterize each language. The comparative approach allows identifying similarities and differences in the structure and function of polite requests.

The findings show that English speakers tend to use more indirect and softened request forms, while Russian speakers often employ more direct constructions that still follow culturally accepted norms of politeness. These differences may lead to misunderstanding in intercultural interaction if pragma linguistic competence is insufficient. The study highlights the importance of teaching pragma linguistic aspects of politeness in foreign language learning. Understanding how polite requests function in different languages helps learners communicate more appropriately and effectively in real-life situations.

**Key words:** polite requests, pragma linguistics, speech etiquette, intercultural communication, politeness strategies, English language, Russian language, comparative analysis

**Аннотация.** Данное исследование посвящено прагмалингвистическому анализу вежливых просьб в английском и русском языках в рамках межкультурной коммуникации. Основное внимание уделяется тому, как носители данных языков формулируют просьбы в различных коммуникативных ситуациях, а также тому, каким образом выражается вежливость с помощью языковых средств.

В работе анализируется влияние контекста, социальной дистанции и степени формальности на выбор стратегий просьбы. Особое внимание уделяется косвенности, средствам смягчения и культурно обусловленным моделям вежливости, характерным для каждого языка. Сравнительный подход позволяет выявить сходства и различия в структуре и функционировании вежливых просьб.

Результаты исследования показывают, что носители английского языка чаще используют косвенные и смягчённые формы, тогда как в русском языке более распространены прямые конструкции, которые при этом соответствуют нормам вежливости. Данные различия могут приводить к недопониманию в межкультурной коммуникации при недостаточном уровне прагмалингвистической компетенции.

Исследование подчеркивает важность обучения прагмалингвистическим аспектам вежливости в процессе изучения иностранных языков, поскольку это способствует более эффективному и адекватному общению в реальных ситуациях.

**Ключевые слова:** вежливые просьбы, прагмалингвистика, речевой этикет, межкультурная коммуникация, стратегии вежливости, английский язык, русский язык, сравнительный анализ.

## Introduction

Language is not only a system of grammar and vocabulary but also a social tool used to build relationships between speakers. In everyday communication, people must consider politeness, social roles, and context in order to avoid misunderstanding and maintain cooperation. For this reason, the study of speech etiquette plays an important role in modern linguistics and foreign language learning. In today's globalized world, where people from different cultures communicate more often, understanding how politeness works in different languages becomes especially important.

One of the most sensitive elements of speech etiquette is the request. A request may limit the listener's freedom of action; therefore, speakers usually try to soften it using polite linguistic forms. A request is defined as a directive speech act through which a speaker asks someone to do something. These forms depend on factors such as social distance, status relations, degree of imposition, and level of formality. These aspects are studied in pragmatics, particularly in pragma linguistics, which examines how language forms are used in real communicative situations. Politeness refers to strategies that help reduce conflict and maintain social harmony in communication.

Different languages express politeness in different ways. Even when speakers intend to be polite, the same communicative strategy may be interpreted differently in another linguistic culture. English is generally characterized by indirectness and mitigation strategies, while Russian often allows more direct forms that are nevertheless socially acceptable. Such differences frequently cause difficulties for language learners and may lead to pragmatic failure in intercultural communication.

Many learners who possess sufficient grammatical knowledge still experience problems in real interaction because they transfer request strategies from their native language into a foreign language. As a result, their speech may sound unnatural, overly direct, or inappropriate for the situation. This shows the importance of studying polite requests not only grammatically but also pragma linguistically and comparatively.

The theoretical basis for studying requests comes from Speech Act Theory. Austin (1962, p. 6) introduced the idea that language is used not only to describe things but also to perform actions. According to him, when we speak, we do something through words: "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action". [1, 6]

Searle (1969, pp. 66–67) developed this theory and classified speech acts into different types. He defined requests as directive speech acts because they are used to make someone perform an action: directives are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. [10, 66]

Goffman (1967, p. 5) introduced the concept of "face" as a person's public self-image, which laid the groundwork for later politeness theories. He emphasized that social interaction involves constant face-work to maintain or restore face. [4, 5]

Leech (1983) proposed the Politeness Principle. He explained that speakers try to minimize cost to others and maximize benefit in communication: "Minimize (other things

being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs” and follow maxims such as the Tact Maxim. [6, 132]

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the concept of “face,” which means a person’s public self-image. They explained that requests are face-threatening acts (FTAs) because they impose on the listener. Therefore, speakers use politeness strategies such as indirectness to reduce this threat: “FTAs are acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker”. [2, 165]

Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) studied requests from a cross-cultural perspective in the CCSARP project. They showed that languages differ in their levels of directness and indirectness, and that politeness strategies are culturally specific and may cause misunderstanding in intercultural communication. [3,17]

Watts (2003) criticized universal models and emphasized “first-order politeness” — how ordinary speakers themselves understand and negotiate politeness in interaction rather than purely theoretical constructs. [11, 28]

House and Kasper (1981) and later works on contrastive pragmatics highlighted differences in request realization across languages, particularly in the use of internal and external modification. [5, 157]

Ogiermann (2009) specifically compared requests in English, German, Polish and Russian, noting that Russian allows more direct forms while still maintaining cultural politeness norms. [8, 260]

Mills (1993) analyzed pragma linguistic requestive strategies in Russian and English, pointing out differences in negative interrogatives and conventional indirectness.

However, despite the large number of studies on speech acts and politeness, comparative pragma linguistic research focusing specifically on polite requests in English and Russian remains limited. Most studies examine requests in only one language or discuss politeness in general. There is still a need for a systematic comparison of how polite requests are formed and used in these two languages. [7, 94]

Therefore, the present study focuses on a comparative analysis of polite requests in English and Russian. The aim of the research is to identify similarities and differences in their pragma linguistic features and to analyze how cultural norms influence the choice of politeness strategies. The novelty of this study lies in its comparative approach and in combining theoretical models of politeness with practical analysis of linguistic examples from both languages. The results may contribute to intercultural communication studies and help improve pragmatic competence in foreign language teaching.

### **Method**

This study employs a quantitative comparative research design to examine politeness strategies in English and Russian requests. The method was chosen in order to allow a systematic comparison of linguistic forms used in similar communicative situations.

The main research instrument was a *scenario-based questionnaire*. This method was chosen because: -It simulates real communication situations; - Participants respond naturally; -It allows comparison between languages; -It helps to analyze pragmatic differences.

The questionnaire included a set of everyday situations, such as *interactions in a café, at school, and on public transport*. Each situation was presented in both English and Russian, and the content was kept identical to ensure consistency and comparability of responses. The following examples are given:

1. In a crowded café, a person at the next table says: "Excuse me, could you pass the sugar, please?" A. Sure, here you go. B. Of course. (pass it) C. Here it is. D. No problem at all. E. None — I would say something else.

1. В кафе за соседним столиком человек говорит: «Передайте, пожалуйста, сахар». А. Пожалуйста, держите. В. Конечно. (передаёшь) С. Вот, пожалуйста. D. Без проблем. E. Нет — сказал(а) бы по-другому.

2. At school or university, a classmate says: "Hey, can I borrow your pen for a second?" A. Yeah, sure. Here. B. Of course, take it. C. No worries, go ahead. D. Happy to help. E. None.

2. В школе/университете однокурсник говорит: «Можно твою ручку на секунду?» А. Да, держи. В. Конечно, бери. С. Без проблем. D. Пожалуйста. E. Нет.

3. In a bus someone wants to get off and says: "Excuse me, stop here please" (to the driver, but you're standing nearby). A. Sure, I'll let them know. (or move aside) B. No problem. C. Got it. D. Of course. E. None.

3. В автобусе или маршрутке кто-то хочет выйти и говорит: «Остановите, пожалуйста» (водителю, но ты рядом стоишь). А. Сейчас скажу. (или отходишь) В. Хорошо. С. Понял(а). D. Конечно. E. Нет.

Participants were offered several response options representing different politeness strategies. These strategies included *directness*, *indirectness*, *mitigation*, and *social distance*. Each option was designed to reflect one of these categories, which allowed for a clearer comparison of how speakers of English and Russian express requests in similar communicative contexts.

For each situation, participants were offered several response options representing different politeness strategies, including directness, indirectness, mitigation, and the influence of social distance. This structure made it possible to compare how speakers of the two languages express requests in the same context.

The participants of the study were teachers who are familiar with both English and Russian. They were selected as a convenient sample. Teachers were chosen because of their experience in communication and language use, which increases the reliability of the data.

The procedure of the study consisted of several stages. First, the questionnaire was designed based on real-life communicative situations. Then, the same situations were presented in both languages. Participants were asked to choose the responses they would most likely use in each situation.

After the data collection, the responses were grouped according to the identified politeness strategies. The data were analyzed using percentage distribution, which allowed the researcher to identify patterns and differences in the use of politeness strategies in English and Russian.

This method was chosen because it allows the simulation of real-life communication and provides structured data for comparison. The use of identical situations in two languages ensures that the analysis is consistent and reliable.

*Results.* The results of the study, as illustrated in Figure 1, show clear and consistent differences in the use of politeness strategies in English and Russian. English speakers more frequently chose indirect and mitigated forms, such as "Could you...?" and "Would you mind...?", which reduce the level of imposition and make the request sound politer and less intrusive.

In contrast, Russian speakers demonstrated a higher preference for more direct expressions, including imperative forms with "пожалуйста". The graph clearly shows that

directness has a noticeably higher percentage in Russian responses. However, this does not indicate a lack of politeness, but rather reflects the norms of Russian communication, where direct forms can still be perceived as appropriate and respectful.

A closer analysis of the data also reveals that mitigation is significantly more common in English. This suggests that English speakers tend to pay more attention to the listener's comfort and are more likely to soften their requests in order to avoid possible discomfort or pressure. In Russian, mitigation is used less frequently, which indicates a different approach to expressing politeness.

Another important observation from the graph is the role of social distance. In English, the choice of request form appears to be more sensitive to the relationship between speakers, with greater variation depending on the level of formality. In Russian, this factor is present but less strongly reflected in the choice of linguistic forms.

Overall, the data presented in the graph confirms that English politeness strategies are more oriented toward indirectness and flexibility, while Russian communication relies more on clarity and context. These differences highlight that politeness is expressed through different linguistic means in each language, even when the communicative intention remains the same.

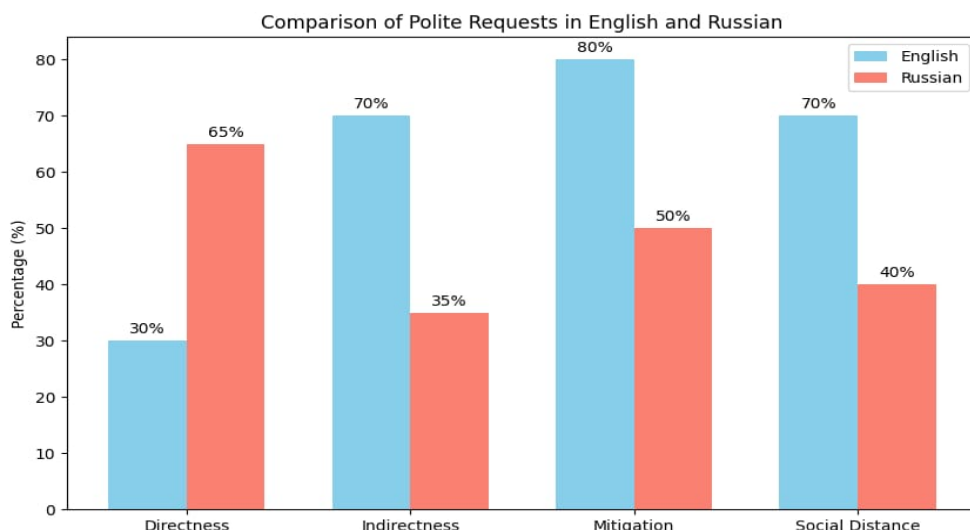


Figure 1. Comparison of politeness strategies in English and Russian

As illustrated in Figure 1, English demonstrates higher levels of indirectness and mitigation, while Russian shows a higher level of directness. This supports the findings of the study.

### Discussion

The results of this study show clear differences in the use of politeness strategies in English and Russian, and these differences can be explained by both linguistic and cultural factors. In English, politeness is often expressed through grammatical structures, especially through the use of modal verbs and indirect forms. Speakers tend to avoid direct requests in order to reduce imposition and make the interaction more comfortable for the listener.

In contrast, Russian politeness is less dependent on indirect grammatical forms and more connected to context, intonation, and shared social norms. Direct expressions are not necessarily considered impolite, as they are widely accepted in everyday communication. This explains why Russian speakers in the study more frequently chose direct forms while still maintaining politeness.

The results of the study are in line with the ideas of Searle (1969), [9, 67] Brown and Levinson (1987), [2, 166] and Blum-Kulka (1989), who emphasized the importance of

politeness strategies and cultural differences in communication. This confirms that requests can be sensitive speech acts and require careful use of language. [3, 18]

These findings support the idea that politeness is not universal, but culturally specific. The same request may be interpreted differently depending on the language and cultural background of the speakers. As a result, what sounds polite in one language may seem too direct or unusual in another.

This also helps explain why language learners often experience difficulties in real communication. Even if they know grammar well, they may transfer request strategies from their native language, which can lead to misunderstandings or inappropriate expressions.

Therefore, the results of this study highlight the importance of developing not only grammatical competence but also pragma linguistic awareness. Understanding how politeness works in different languages can help speakers communicate more effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the pragma linguistic features of polite requests in English and Russian and has revealed important differences in the way politeness is expressed in the two languages. The results show that English speakers more often use indirect and softened forms, while Russian speakers tend to use more direct expressions that are still considered polite within their cultural context. The aim of this research was to identify similarities and differences in polite request strategies, and the findings indicate that this aim has been achieved. The comparison made it possible to better understand how language and culture influence the choice of communication strategies.

In conclusion, effective communication in a foreign language depends not only on grammar, but also on the ability to use appropriate politeness strategies. Understanding these differences can help avoid misunderstandings and improve intercultural communication.

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