

Reinterpreting the Concept of Speech Etiquette in Digital Discourse

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Abstract: This article examines, from a linguopragmatic perspective, the interpretation of the concept of speech etiquette in digital discourse, the manifestation of traditional norms of communication in the online environment, and their fulfilment of new communicative functions. The study focuses on the question of whether speech etiquette is not merely a set of stable linguistic forms, such as greetings, forms of address, expressions of gratitude and apologies, but a pragmatic phenomenon shaped by the communicative situation, the relationship between addresser and addressee, the public nature of communication, and the characteristics of the digital environment. Materials published in Uzbek online media and examples of digital communication contained therein are considered through qualitative analysis. The analysis focuses on the capacity of speech-etiquette units to regulate communicative relations, mark social distance, manage the addressee's response, and influence the interpretation of a particular speech act. It also discusses how the same linguistic unit may acquire different pragmatic meanings in different digital contexts.

Keywords: Speech etiquette, digital discourse, internet discourse, linguopragmatics, politeness, communicative strategy, addresser, addressee, online media, digital communication.

Introduction: The development of digital communication is significantly affecting the conditions in which linguistic units are used, the relationships between communication participants, and the ways in which information is presented. Online media constitute a discursive space that not only disseminates information about socially significant events but may also affect how these events are interpreted. Under such conditions, speech-etiquette units, their use within a text, and their role in foregrounding a particular meaning in a headline acquire particular linguopragmatic significance.

In traditional communication, speech acts such as greeting, addressing, expressing gratitude, apologising and making requests serve to regulate relations between interlocutors. Their communicative function is determined by the speaker's intention, the addressee's social status, and the communicative situation. In online media, however, such units may appear in a mass-media text, in quotations taken from social networks, or in a headline. Therefore, their

analysis should consider not only linguistic form but also the genre and context of the text and the manner in which it is presented to the audience.

The headline occupies an important place in this process. Along with concisely expressing the main content of an article, it directs the reader's attention towards a particular event, person or conflict. In particular, units taken from direct speech, evaluative expressions, and words that create a discrepancy between their usual meaning and their interpretation in a particular situation can enhance the pragmatic potential of a headline. However, the effect of a headline cannot be determined conclusively from its linguistic structure alone; the relationship between the headline and the main text must also be analysed.

G. Yusupova's monograph *Korean and Uzbek Speech Etiquette* is an important source for elucidating the theoretical foundations of speech etiquette. It considers the linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of speech etiquette and its relationship with different communicative situations [1]. This

approach demonstrates the need to study speech etiquette not only as linguistic units but also in relation to the socio-cultural conditions of communication.

Z. Sultanova's dissertation *Speech Etiquette in Uzbek Macrotexts and Its Pragmatic Study* is likewise significant for examining etiquette units within a text and in connection with their pragmatic functions [2]. This line of research also helps substantiate the need to consider speech-etiquette units in the analysis of digital discourse not as isolated words or phrases, but as elements of a broader communicative context.

In international linguistics, the linguistic and social characteristics of computer-mediated communication are discussed in the collection *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by S. C. Herring [3].

The book *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions*, edited by Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, discusses the multimodality of digital communication, identity, social relations, and methods of discourse analysis [4]. Its relevance to this study lies in the possibility of viewing digital communication not merely as text, but as a phenomenon in which language, graphic means, social relations and context interact.

P. Trávníková's dissertation *Language of the Internet: Positive Politeness Strategies Claiming Common Ground in Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication* is devoted to the study of positive politeness strategies that help establish common ground in asynchronous digital communication [5]. This work provides a methodological direction for analysing politeness in digital communication not as a set of ready-made formulae, but as a means of establishing relations between participants.

The reviewed sources provide a theoretical basis for studying the socio-cultural foundations and pragmatic functions of speech etiquette, as well as the characteristics of digital discourse. At the same time, this article focuses on how speech-etiquette units are interpreted in real communicative situations in online media, which aspects they foreground in headlines, and how they may guide the addressee's reception of information.

The aim of the study is to analyse, on the basis of preliminary materials, the features of the use of speech-etiquette units in Uzbek online media, particularly the pragmatic relationship between headlines and the main text.

In accordance with this aim, the following tasks were established:

- to distinguish between the linguistic form and

communicative function of speech-etiquette units;

- to analyse the contextual features of units associated with gratitude and public address;

- to consider which aspects of an event are emphasised through the use of an etiquette-related word in a headline;

- to identify the relationship between the headline, the main text and the communicative situation;

- to demonstrate the possibility of analysing speech etiquette through the unity of linguistic, pragmatic and discursive layers.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses descriptive, contextual, pragmatic and discursive methods of analysis. In addition to identifying the formal characteristics of speech-etiquette units, these methods make it possible to explain their function in a communicative situation, the addresser's purpose, and their effect on the addressee.

The research material comprised publicly available materials published in Uzbek-language online media that contain examples of digital communication. For the preliminary analysis, three items published by Kun.uz were used: a 2016 report concerning an expression of gratitude on a social network, a 2023 report containing a blogger's public address, and a 2025 report reflecting the interpretation of the word "thank you" in a particular legal situation. These materials were selected according to the principle of purposive sampling. The presence of units related to speech etiquette, the possibility of identifying the communicative situation, and the openness of the source were taken into account in their selection. The preliminary stage of the analysis is qualitative in nature; therefore, the observations obtained are not generalised to all Uzbek online media or their audiences.

The analysis was based on the following criteria:

- linguistic form: the lexical and grammatical expression of a unit related to speech etiquette;

- communicative purpose: expressing gratitude, providing an explanation, apologising, mitigating a relationship, or substantiating one's position;

- communicative relationship: the distance and social relationship between the addresser and addressee, and the characteristics of the audience;

- contextual interpretation: the meaning conveyed by a unit in a particular situation;

- discursive function: the role of a speech unit in shaping or managing relations in public communication.

RESULTS

When analysing speech-etiquette units, it is important to distinguish between their dictionary meaning and the communicative function they perform in a particular situation. For example, the word “thank you” usually expresses gratitude. However, its pragmatic meaning may differ depending on who uses it, to whom, in what situation, and for what purpose.

In the Kun.uz article of 16 February 2016 entitled “Shahzoda Muhammedova Hinted That Someone Had Asked for Her Hand”, the units “very pleasant” and “thank you”, which express gratitude and a positive evaluation, are cited from the actress’s Instagram post [6]. These units complement each other semantically: the expression “very pleasant” provides a positive evaluation of the event, whereas “thank you” expresses the speech act of gratitude.

In this example, the function of the etiquette unit is not limited to its separate dictionary meaning. The joint use of positive evaluation and gratitude serves to express a holistic attitude towards the event. The fact that the post was published on a social network makes it possible to consider it not only as private communication with the direct addressee, but also as a communicative situation visible to other users.

In the headline of this material, however, it is not “thank you” or another conventional etiquette formula that is foregrounded, but the units “asking for her hand” and “hinted”, which convey the content of the event. Thus, this report is important not because speech etiquette is used directly in the headline, but because it enables the communicative function of an etiquette-related unit in the main text to be compared with the headline’s way of presenting the event.

The Kun.uz report of 11 May 2023, entitled “I Am Free; I Have Not Died: the Author of the Activist Project Appeared in Public for the First Time after Being Jailed for 15 Days”, quotes Hojiakbar Nosirov’s views expressed through social media [7]. The report describes how he informed readers about his situation, explained his earlier silence, and expressed his attitude towards those who supported him.

The sentence in the address, “Therefore, I hope that you will understand correctly”, may be analysed as a communicative form that takes account of the addressee’s possible response. The expression “I hope” conveys the thought as an expression of hope rather than as a firm demand or command. The expression “you will understand correctly” is directed towards the addressees’ interpretation of the situation in a particular way.

The pragmatic feature of this sentence lies not so much

in exerting a direct influence on the addressee as in anticipating their response and expressing a desire to achieve understanding. Such an analysis does not seek to make a judgement about the author’s inner intention; rather, it describes the sentence’s communicative potential within the text.

The expression of gratitude towards those who offered support is also important in this address. In this situation, gratitude may express a relationship with a wider audience rather than a simple response to an individual interlocutor. The function of the speech unit is thus connected with maintaining a link between the addresser and addressee, responding to the preceding event, and shaping the overall content of the address.

In the headline of this material, the direct speech “I Am Free; I Have Not Died” is foregrounded. This expression directs the reader’s attention to the protagonist’s statement about his own situation. Such a structure presents the event through the person’s own words rather than as a formal piece of information. However, determining the actual effect of the headline on readers would require a separate audience study; on the basis of the available material, only its capacity to direct attention can be described.

The Kun.uz article of 3 March 2025, entitled “It Was Given as a Thank-You, Not as a Bribe: an Investigator of the Tashkent Internal Affairs Directorate Was Imprisoned for Taking a Bribe”, is particularly important for analysing the function of a speech-etiquette unit in a headline [8]. In the headline, the word “thank you” is contrasted with the negation “not a bribe”. Consequently, the reader’s attention is directed to how the money was named and how its meaning is being interpreted. Here, the etiquette-related unit appears not as a conventional expression of gratitude, but as a word used to explain a particular action.

In this case, the dictionary meaning of the word “thank you” must be distinguished from its interpretation in a legal situation. The fact that the word expresses gratitude does not in itself determine the legality of a particular action. On the contrary, the contrast between “not a bribe” and “as a thank-you” in the headline directs the reader to the main issue of the report.

The pragmatic potential of the headline is evident primarily in its concise presentation of a semantic contradiction. Although the word “thank you” is normally associated with a positive interpersonal relationship, in this headline it is presented as an explanation of a situation that gave rise to a legal dispute. Thus, the etiquette unit occurs in a discursive context different from its usual communicative

function.

This example shows that the use of speech-etiquette units in a headline may guide the interpretation of an event. At the same time, the effectiveness of a headline cannot be equated with its necessarily producing a particular attitude in the reader's mind. To substantiate such a conclusion, separate empirical data on readers' reactions, headline variants, or the process of reception would be required.

A comparative analysis of the three materials makes it possible to study etiquette-related units in the following three directions:

- expressing a relationship: displaying an interpersonal relationship through gratitude and positive evaluation;
- regulating a relationship: providing an explanation, seeking understanding, and taking account of the addressee's possible response;
- interpreting an event: foregrounding a semantic contradiction through the use of an etiquette-related unit in a headline.

These directions are based on the results of the preliminary analysis and should be examined using a broader, genre-diverse corpus.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that, in digital discourse, it is insufficient to interpret speech etiquette merely as the written repetition of conventional formulas of politeness. The pragmatic meaning of etiquette units emerges through their linguistic form, their communicative situation, and their relationship with the broader text. This conclusion is consistent with theoretical approaches that study speech etiquette as a socio-cultural and pragmatic phenomenon.

Studying speech etiquette in digital discourse first requires clarification of the relationship between the traditional linguistic understanding of this concept and the specific features of digital communication. Research into the linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of speech etiquette elucidates the use of etiquette units in particular communicative situations, their connection with interlocutors' social relations, and their relationship with national-cultural norms.

G. Yusupova's monograph *Korean and Uzbek Speech Etiquette* is an important source in this field. The author examines speech etiquette from a sociolinguistic perspective, considering its verbal and non-verbal forms, situations of greeting and farewell, and its relationship with such factors as age, place, time and gender [1]. It makes it possible to interpret speech etiquette not merely as linguistic formulas but as a phenomenon inseparably connected with socio-

cultural relations. Applied to digital discourse, this approach can provide a theoretical basis for studying how conventional forms of etiquette appear in electronic communication and the factors with which their communicative functions are associated.

In Uzbek linguistics, Z. Sultanova's dissertation *Speech Etiquette in Uzbek Macrotexts and Its Pragmatic Study* is of particular importance for examining the pragmatic features of speech etiquette [10-12]. The study is devoted to the pragmatic characteristics and speech-specific features of etiquette in Uzbek macrotexts, as well as etiquette-related aspects of athletes' speech. This work demonstrates the need to take account of the broader context of a text when analysing materials of digital communication. However, macrotext and digital discourse cannot be interpreted as identical phenomena: the public nature of online communication, the system of reciprocal responses, and the link with technological tools require separate analysis.

Q. Kaxarov's dissertation *A Comparative Study of Uzbek and German Speech Etiquette* is also an important source for taking national-cultural factors into account [9]. Its theoretical significance lies in the possibility of studying speech etiquette in relation to the communicative norms of a particular language community. In this article, however, comparative linguocultural analysis is not the main aim; it is viewed as a theoretical direction that helps explain the interpretation of etiquette units in Uzbek internet discourse.

The collection *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by S. C. Herring, is also an important source for studying the linguistic features of digital discourse [3]. It addresses the linguistic, social and cross-cultural characteristics of computer-mediated communication, the relationship between written and spoken communication, and issues of interaction on the internet.

In recent years, the methodology for studying digital discourse has also expanded. The book *Analyzing Digital Discourse: New Insights and Future Directions*, edited by Patricia Bou-Franch and Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, discusses the multimodality of digital communication, identity, social relations, and methods of discourse analysis [4]. Its relevance to this study lies in the possibility of considering digital communication not merely as text but as a phenomenon in which language, graphic means, social relations and context interact. At the same time, this article does not claim to offer a complete analysis of multimodality; it is treated as one of the factors that may influence the pragmatic

interpretation of speech etiquette.

Among foreign dissertations, Petra Trávníková's *Language of the Internet: Positive Politeness Strategies Claiming Common Ground in Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication* deserves particular attention. On the basis of a corpus formed from online discussion forums, the author analyses positive politeness strategies, the expression of common ground, and solidarity among community members. This dissertation is important for the present study in two respects. First, it demonstrates a methodology for studying politeness in digital communication on the basis of real language material. Second, it considers the function of etiquette units not as isolated forms, but in terms of their role in organising relations.

Overall, the reviewed sources provide a theoretical foundation for studying the socio-cultural bases and pragmatic features of speech etiquette, as well as the discursive nature of digital communication. The distinctive direction of this article is to connect and analyse these three aspects within real communicative situations covered in Uzbek online media.

On the basis of the examples considered in this study, it is proposed that speech etiquette be interpreted through three interrelated layers:

- linguistic layer: the formal expression of greetings, gratitude, apologies, requests and other etiquette units;
- pragmatic layer: the communicative purpose of a unit, its orientation towards the addressee, and the function it performs in a particular situation;
- discursive layer: the relationship of a unit with public communication, text structure, audience and event interpretation.

This model is a preliminary analytical proposal for describing the manifestation of speech etiquette in the digital environment. Its scholarly value lies not in placing all phenomena of digital communication within a ready-made triad, but in enabling the joint analysis of linguistic form, communicative purpose and the broader discursive context.

CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis show that it is insufficient to interpret speech etiquette in digital discourse merely as a set of conventional formulas. Its pragmatic meaning emerges through the interaction of linguistic form, communicative purpose and a particular situation. Therefore, when studying speech etiquette in digital communication, it is necessary not only to identify the dictionary meaning of individual units, but also to take account of their functions within the text and discourse.

A preliminary analysis of examples of digital communication covered in online media showed that speech units connected with gratitude, explanation and expressing an attitude towards a particular action may perform different functions in different communicative situations. In particular, an expression of gratitude may serve not only to convey a positive attitude but also to maintain a link with a public audience. Providing an explanation and seeking understanding are characterised by the addresser's expression of their own position and their consideration of the addressee's possible response. In some contexts, the use of an etiquette-related unit also affects how an event or action is interpreted.

The preliminary model proposed in the article, consisting of linguistic, pragmatic and discursive layers, may serve as a theoretical basis for the comprehensive study of speech etiquette in the digital environment. In this model, the linguistic form encompasses the external expression of a unit, the pragmatic layer encompasses its communicative function, and the discursive layer encompasses the relationship of that function with the broader text and social communication.

Overall, the reinterpretation of speech etiquette in digital discourse is not limited to the simple transfer of language norms into a technological environment. It is a linguopragmatic problem that requires reconsideration of the functions performed by etiquette units in conditions of communicative relations, context and public communication.

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