



POLITENESS STRATEGIES AS STYLISTIC DEVICES: PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF HONORIFICS AND MODALITY ENGLISH VS. UZBEK ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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ANNOTATION

Academic writing constructs scholarly authority through culturally specific politeness strategies. This study compares how English and Uzbek research articles employ these strategies to balance credibility with interpersonal sensitivity. Analysis of 200 articles (100 per language) reveals a key contrast: English academic discourse relies on epistemic modality-modal verbs (may, might, could) and hedging-to express tentativeness and mitigate face threats. Uzbek academic writing, by contrast, encodes respect through formal address pronouns, kinship-based terms, and morphological honorifics that reflect hierarchical, collectivist norms. These differences highlight how politeness functions as a stylistic device shaped by cultural pragmatics. The topic raised in the article covers not only the fields of linguistics and pragma-stylistics, but also has relevance in the context of academic communication and intercultural education. Politeness strategies, in particular, modal and honorific means used in academic writing, form interactive and normative norms between students and members of the academic community. In this regard, the results of the article can be useful not only for comparison, but also in pedagogical and translation studies practice. For example, the incorrect use of epistemic modality and hedging by Uzbek students writing academic articles in a foreign language or the use of perfect hedging in English can lead to misunderstandings in assessing their academic status. At the same time, the article identifies, from a cultural perspective, the competencies necessary for effective communication in the global academic community by combining the epistemic and social functions of language tools. This approach also emphasizes the need to study international academic writing and take into account intercultural differences in academic translation. In addition, the article provides an analysis of the role and effectiveness of politeness strategies in the interactive part of academic writing (author-reader relationships, comments, and the peer-review process). This contributes to a deeper understanding of not only the grammatical and lexical aspects of academic writing, but also its pragmatic and cultural aspects.

Introduction. In addition to the linguistic and stylistic dimensions, politeness strategies in academic writing play a crucial role in shaping the cognitive and social interaction between writers and readers. These strategies do not merely reflect language conventions but also embody culturally informed epistemological perspectives on knowledge construction. For instance, the use of hedging and modal verbs in English reflects a commitment to intellectual openness and critical engagement, allowing writers to present claims tentatively while maintaining credibility. Conversely, in Uzbek academic discourse, honorifics and formal address encode social hierarchies and relational obligations, emphasizing collective responsibility and respect for established authorities.

Moreover, politeness strategies intersect with disciplinary norms, as different fields exhibit varying expectations regarding assertiveness, deference, and evidential support. Humanities and social sciences may tolerate more explicit hedging to encourage dialogic interpretation, whereas technical and medical sciences often require precise and cautiously modulated epistemic stance. Understanding these nuances is essential for cross-cultural academic communication, as failure to align with culturally and disciplinarily specific politeness norms can result in misinterpretation of scholarly intent, perceived arrogance, or unwarranted deference.

Examining politeness as a stylistic and pragmatic device illuminates the broader role of language in academic socialization. It highlights how writers negotiate identity, authority, and epistemic responsibility through linguistic choices, and underscores the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in teaching, mentoring, and evaluating scholarly writing across linguistic communities.

Literature review. Academic writing constitutes a highly specialized genre characterized by disciplinary conventions, epistemic

values, and interpersonal positioning strategies that extend far beyond mere information transmission. Scholars engage in complex rhetorical negotiation, balancing assertions of knowledge claims against acknowledgment of uncertainty, projecting authority while demonstrating humility, and positioning themselves within scholarly communities through carefully calibrated linguistic choices¹. Among the most subtle yet pervasive features of academic discourse are politeness strategies-linguistic devices that manage face relationships, mitigate imposition, and construct appropriate social distance between writers and readers.

Two prominent politeness mechanisms in academic writing are honorifics (forms encoding social hierarchy and respect) and modality (grammatical systems expressing speaker stance toward propositions). While these devices serve analogous pragmatic functions across languages-establishing credibility, expressing appropriate certainty levels, acknowledging colleagues contributions-their specific linguistic realizations vary dramatically according to language structure and cultural context. English academic writing predominantly employs modal auxiliary verbs, hedging expressions, and impersonal constructions to achieve politeness effects. Uzbek academic discourse, by contrast, utilizes morphologically complex honorific systems, formal pronouns, and elaborated respect markers reflecting Central Asian Turkic communication norms².

This comparative study examines politeness strategies as stylistic devices in English and Uzbek academic writing, addressing three central research questions: How do English and Uzbek academic texts employ honorifics to encode social relationships? What role does modality play in constructing epistemic stance and managing face threats? What cultural and linguistic factors account for cross-linguistic divergences in politeness strategy deployment?

¹ Hyland, K. (2009). Academic discourse: English in a global context. Continuum.

² Liu, X., Qin, X., Li, X., & Zhou, T. (2024). A comparative study of honorific systems in Chinese, Uzbek, and Russian from the perspective of intercultural communication. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 12, 305-319. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2024.127020>

In academic writing, negative politeness predominates, manifested through hedging, mitigation, and impersonalization that minimize imposition on readers intellectual territory. Hedging—expressing propositions with calculated tentativeness—serves multiple functions: protecting against falsification, opening dialogic space for alternative perspectives, and demonstrating appropriate scholarly caution. However, politeness theory has faced substantial critique regarding non-Western cultural contexts. Research on Asian languages reveals culturally specific politeness orientations emphasizing hierarchy, group harmony, and context-dependent norm adherence³.

For Uzbek, limited research suggests politeness operates within collectivist frameworks prioritizing hierarchical respect (*hurmat*) and modesty (*hayo*) over individual autonomy. Academic discourse employs elaborate honorifics and deferential language to position writers within scholarly hierarchies and demonstrate appropriate respect for knowledge authorities. This orientation contrasts sharply with English academic writing emphasis on individual scholarly contribution and peer equality.

Honorifics are grammatical or lexical forms encoding relative social status, formality, and deference. They function as social deixis, requiring contextual understanding of participant relationships for appropriate use. In academic writing, honorifics serve multiple pragmatic functions: acknowledging scholarly authority, establishing writer credentials, and positioning research within disciplinary hierarchies. English employs limited honorific resources—primarily professional titles and formal address—while relying more heavily on other politeness devices. Uzbek integrates extensive honorific marking through morphological affixes, formal pronouns, and kinship-based address terms even in written academic discourse⁴.

Modality refers to grammatical systems expressing speaker attitude toward propositional content—degrees of certainty, necessity, permission, or ability. Epistemic modality, concerned with knowledge and belief, proves particularly salient in academic writing where establishing appropriate certainty levels constitutes a central rhetorical challenge. Modal auxiliary verbs in English (may, might, could, would, should, must) provide graduated epistemic strength, enabling writers to calibrate commitment to claims. Hedging through modal expressions protects writers against falsification, demonstrates scholarly caution, opens dialogic space for debate, and mitigates face threats when critiquing others work⁵.

Methodology. This study employs a mixed-methods comparative design combining quantitative corpus analysis with qualitative pragmatic-stylistic interpretation. The research examines politeness strategies across 200 academic research articles: 100 English-language and 100 Uzbek-language texts published 2018-2024 in peer-reviewed journals. Articles span four disciplines (linguistics, education, medicine, engineering) with 25 articles per language per discipline, ensuring cross-disciplinary representation while maintaining genre consistency.

English-language articles were selected from high-impact international journals. Uzbek-language articles were drawn from leading national journals registered in Uzbekistan Higher Attestation Commission database. The resulting corpus comprised approximately 1.2 million words (600,000 per language), providing sufficient data for quantitative pattern identification while remaining manageable for qualitative analysis.

Analysis proceeded through three stages. First, quantitative corpus analysis identified modal verbs and honorific forms through automated searches using AntConc concordance software. For English, target forms included modal auxiliaries and lexical hedges. For Uzbek, searches targeted honorific morphemes, formal pronouns, professional titles, and modal particles. Frequency counts were normalized per 10,000 words to enable cross-corpus comparison.

Second, pragma-stylistic analysis examined representative examples for pragmatic functions, stylistic effects, and contextual variation across text sections and disciplines. Third, comparative cross-linguistic analysis synthesized findings to identify similarities and divergences in politeness strategy deployment. Inter-coder reliability

was established through independent coding achieving Cohen kappa of .87 for honorific identification and .84 for modal classification.

Results. Corpus analysis revealed substantial differences in politeness strategy deployment between English and Uzbek academic writing. English exhibits nearly double the frequency of modal verbs (127.3 vs. 64.8 per 10,000 words) and substantially more epistemic hedges (89.6 vs. 41.2), reflecting reliance on epistemic modality for politeness. Conversely, Uzbek demonstrates dramatically higher honorific usage (153.7 vs. 18.4), formal pronoun deployment (87.5 vs. 3.2), and professional title frequency (66.2 vs. 15.2). These patterns confirm divergent politeness orientations: English emphasizes epistemic stance management through modality, while Uzbek prioritizes social relationship encoding through honorifics.

Detailed analysis of English modal usage revealed sophisticated epistemic calibration across text sections. Discussion sections exhibit highest modal density, particularly epistemic hedges (may, might, could) used when interpreting findings and proposing explanations. Methods sections show reduced hedging, reflecting procedural description requiring less epistemic qualification. Strong hedges (might) appear predominantly in Discussion and Conclusion sections where speculation and future implications are addressed.

Qualitative analysis revealed nuanced pragmatic functions. Modal verbs create interpretive space for alternative hypotheses while tentatively advancing preferred explanations. For example, combinations of epistemic lexical verbs with weak modals soften criticism substantially, maintaining collegial face relationships while raising legitimate concerns about prior research.

Uzbek academic discourse demonstrates pervasive honorific deployment across multiple linguistic levels. The high frequency of formal pronouns (*siz*) reflects obligatory respect marking in Uzbek academic writing. Unlike English where second-person address rarely appears in formal academic prose, Uzbek scholarship maintains hierarchical relationships through pronominal choices even in written contexts. Professional titles consistently accompany proper names, rarely appearing bare as in English academic writing. Arabic-Persian honorifics function as adjectival modifiers intensifying deference, particularly when referencing established authorities or deceased scholars.

Discussion. The fundamental divergence between English and Uzbek politeness strategies reflects contrasting cultural orientations toward individualism versus collectivism, egalitarianism versus hierarchy. English academic discourse, embedded within Western intellectual traditions emphasizing individual scholarship and peer debate, employs modality to manage epistemic stance—treating knowledge as provisional, contestable, and requiring careful evidential support⁶. Hedging through modals protects individual scholars face while acknowledging community standards for empirical claims.

Uzbek academic discourse, by contrast, operates within collectivist frameworks prioritizing group harmony, hierarchical respect, and relational positioning. Islamic scholarly traditions emphasizing teacher-student relationships, Central Asian cultural values stressing elder reverence, and Soviet-era academic hierarchies all contribute to honorific-centered politeness systems. Writers position themselves within scholarly lineages through elaborate honorific marking, demonstrating appropriate deference to knowledge authorities rather than primarily managing epistemic uncertainty.

Beyond cultural factors, typological differences between Germanic and Turkic languages create distinct affordances for politeness encoding. English, as an analytic language with limited inflectional morphology, relies heavily on auxiliary verbs and syntactic constructions. The rich modal auxiliary system provides graduated epistemic and deontic distinctions ideal for academic hedging. Uzbek, as an agglutinative Turkic language, employs extensive suffixation for grammatical marking. This morphological richness enables multiple politeness-encoding strategies through honorific suffixes, formal verb endings, and complex derivational processes⁷.

³ Kádár, D. Z., & House, J. (2024). Politeness markers East and West: The relational work uses of honorifics in Chinese and beyond. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 219, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.11.011>

⁴ Sattorov, T. (2019). Persian and Arabic influence on Uzbek honorific vocabulary: A diachronic perspective. *Iranian Studies*, 52(3-4), 567-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2019.1609343>

⁵ Hinkel, E. (2009). The effects of essay prompts and topics on the uses of modal verbs in L1 and L2 academic writing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(4), 667-683. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.09.029>

⁶ Hyland, K. (2009). *Academic discourse: English in a global context*. Continuum.

⁷ Sattorov, T. (2019). Persian and Arabic influence on Uzbek honorific vocabulary: A diachronic perspective. *Iranian Studies*, 52(3-4), 567-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2019.1609343>

The documented differences in politeness strategies create potential for significant cross-cultural pragmatic failure in international academic contexts. Uzbek scholars writing in English may under-hedge, appearing inappropriately confident to Western reviewers expecting epistemic modesty through modal qualification. Conversely, excessive hedging by non-native English users from collectivist backgrounds may signal uncertainty rather than scholarly caution, undermining perceived expertise⁸. Honorific usage presents particular challenges: direct transfer of Uzbek respect-marking strategies into English academic prose may seem overly deferential, while absence of equivalent honorifics when writing in Uzbek may appear disrespectful.

These misunderstandings extend beyond stylistic preferences to substantive evaluation of research quality. Peer reviewers unconsciously judge scholarship partly through rhetorical presentation, with appropriate disciplinary voice signaling methodological competence and theoretical sophistication. Pragmatic failures in politeness marking may trigger negative evaluations despite sound empirical work. International publishing disadvantages scholars from non-Western rhetorical traditions who must simultaneously master content, methods, and culturally specific discourse conventions.

Conclusion. This comparative analysis of politeness strategies in English and Uzbek academic discourse reveals fundamental cross-linguistic divergences in how scholarly writers manage face relationships, express epistemic stance, and position themselves within disciplinary communities. While both languages employ politeness as

stylistic devices achieving similar pragmatic functions—establishing credibility, acknowledging uncertainty, demonstrating appropriate deference—linguistic realizations differ profoundly according to cultural orientations, typological structures, and epistemological traditions.

English academic writing prioritizes epistemic modality through modal auxiliary verbs, hedging expressions, and impersonal constructions. This modal-centered politeness system reflects individualist cultural values emphasizing personal autonomy and egalitarian peer relationships. Uzbek academic discourse employs elaborate honorific systems encompassing formal pronouns, professional titles, respect markers, kinship-based address, and morphological affixes. This honorific-centered politeness reflects collectivist values prioritizing hierarchical relationships and group harmony.

These divergences create significant challenges for cross-cultural academic communication. Uzbek scholars writing in English must master modal hedging conventions absent from their L1 rhetorical traditions. English-speaking researchers engaging with Uzbek scholarship need honorific literacy to interpret texts appropriately. The study contributes theoretically to understanding how universal pragmatic functions receive culturally and linguistically specific realizations, demonstrating limitations of universalist frameworks and necessity for culturally situated analysis in academic discourse studies.

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