

## Sociolinguistic Aspects of the Speech Act of Greeting in the Kazakh and English Languages

Assylbek Kairatbekovich Meirbekov

Bauyrzhan Koshkinbaevich Elikbayev

Akylbek Kairatbekovich Meirbekov

Bek Almasbekovich Temirbaev

*International Kazakh-Turkish University named Khoja Ahmet Yasawi  
Republic of Kazakhstan, 161200, Turkestan, B. Sattarkhanov street, 29*

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### Abstract

*The present study investigated the sociolinguistic aspects of the speech act of greeting and its differences with regard to expressing or producing forms of greeting in the Kazakh and English languages. Contrastive studies of speech acts of different languages could help to overcome the gap that can happen in interpersonal communication among the speakers of various languages. The focus of the study is on the descriptive sociolinguistic analysis of the speech act of 'greeting' in the Kazakh and English languages and the ways of exchanging greetings. Methods used in collecting data were a questionnaire, an observation, an interview, introspection and statistical analysis. The materials which were analyzed involved Kazakh greetings that took place in real-life, and English greetings occurred in audiovisual materials from the internet. The results showed that social contexts had their influence on expressing the speech act of greeting in both Kazakh and English languages, and that each language has its own peculiarities and some similarities. We have defined that how does greeting operate in our life.*

**Keywords:** *speech act of greeting, greeting forms, communicative competence, gender generation, social status.*

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to reveal the influence of generation, gender and social distance on the way how we express the speech act of greeting, and to discover the most frequently used verbal and nonverbal forms of greeting in the Kazakh and English languages. By giving complete answers to research questions, which were carefully formulated while research. They are:

1. How do social distance, generation and gender influence the speech act discourse of greeting in the Kazakh and English languages?
2. What kind of differences and similarities exist in the sociolinguistic dimensions of greeting forms in the Kazakh and English languages?
3. How can the results of this research work be useful in teaching English greeting forms to group of Kazakh students?

It leads to investigation of whether greeting forms diversify depending on relationship between discourses in English and Kazakh languages. Furthermore, we are going to use certain Qualitative and Quantitative research approaches to contrast these two languages, in order to reveal similarities and peculiarities in sociolinguistic aspects of the speech act of greeting in the Kazakh and English languages.

### 2. Material Studied and Area Descriptions

As a significant aspect of politeness phenomenon, greetings have been studied in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, yet there has been no systematic investigation of their use across different languages from both pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives (Li, 2010).

Sociolinguistics is one the new branches in linguistics, which highlights that a language can't be alive out of context. And also sociolinguistics states that a language changes according to speaker who utilizes it, according to place

where he used it and to time when he used it. The speaker discloses his life and identity in his speech besides his sociocultural, economic and geographical coordinates in the time and space.

In fact some scholars may highlight that since speech is unquestionably social concept, to research it without reference to society would be useless. Two basic cases substantiate this opinion. First, you cannot take the notion of language X for granted since this in itself is a social notion in so far as it is defined in terms of a group of people who speak X. Therefore, if you want to define the English language you have to define it based on the group of people who speak it. Second, speech has a social function, both as means of communication and also as a way of identifying social groups (Tagliamonte, 2006).

The speech act is one of the closely connected concepts to sociolinguistics. The term speech act was proposed by Austin (1962), and was further developed by his student Searle (1969). The speech act theory analyzes the functions of statements in accordance with the behavior of speakers and listeners in conversation. And Searle as one of the founders of this theory has proposed the mentioned below classification of speech acts into five major categories:

1. Commissive speech acts: those which influence the speaker to committing a particular action then.
2. Declarative speech acts: those which declare the reality.
3. Directive speech acts: those which impel the listener do a concrete operation.
4. Expressive speech acts: those which express the speaker's attitude and sensations towards the proposition.
5. Assertive speech acts: those which portray circumstance and commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.

According to Searle's categorization, greetings fall into the category of expressive speech acts (Searle, 1969).

The speech act of greeting is a particularly appropriate speech act to investigate in a culture because it acts as a reflection in the window through which we can find out what is valued in a particular culture. We cannot start our conversation without a greeting. Everyone can find himself trying to express pleasure each time when he meets a hearer. Consequently, "greeting" is one of the most repeating expressive speech acts in our life (Jibreen, 2010). Nemani and Nasekh (2013) mentioned that what we speak and the way how we do it can disclose how polite we are; moreover, the hearer learns a lot from it about our knowledge, personality, and social status than from the way we walk, eat and dress. By the forms of greeting which we use in conversation one can reach a conclusion about our attitude to him, about our politeness and about the way we were brought up.

Goffman (1971) preferred to describe greeting acts as "access rituals:" composed of two patterns, passing greetings and engaging greetings. Rite is determined as a "conventionalized act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value". The functions of above-mentioned patterns of greeting are similar, both of them opens or closes relations. Greetings also have other observable physical behavior. "A selection from a set of behavioral displays is involved". Moreover, "a verbal salutation is likely provided along with a term of address". Briefly, greetings are consisted from the number of related behaviors:

- (1) "salutation"/ verbal form.
- (2) term of address.
- (3) gestures and mimics.
- (4) social context.

Firth (1973) also referred to greeting act as rite with verbal and non-verbal forms. The first one can occur in one of the three stated below linguistic unit forms:

- (1) In question forms ("How do you do?", "What's up?", "How are you?" and so on.)
- (2) In interjection forms ("Hello", "Hi" and so on.)
- (3) In affirmation forms("Good morning", "Good day", "Good evening" and so on.)

And the last one can be expressed by the gestures and mimics or in other words by body language.

The study done by Duranti (1997) shows us that greeting forms have their correlation with the culture of the speaker. He is one of the scholars who underlined the speech act of greeting as the speech act that helps us to reveal more cultural, personal and historical information about the person who utters it or about the nation who use that particular greeting forms than other speech acts. We can say that his works are the basic foundations off all research works concerning the speech act of greeting. Jibreen (2010) also noticed that forms of greeting vary extensively, and that we have different forms of greeting for each type or status of person. That is the point where we agree with them. And we will try to reveal such correlations between the Kazakh and English speech communities according to different gender, generation and social status.

A large-scale research work about greetings was carried out by Kirvonos and Knapp (1975) to find out the most recurrent verbal and non-verbal behavior linked with them, and to discover how does verbal and non-verbal behavior alter according to relationships between interlocutors. Accordingly 64 young men were chosen in order to conduct the analysis

and all greeting forms gathered were videotaped and transcribed. The result of the research stressed the fact that verbal greeting forms were less frequent between strangers. And they classified greetings into verbal-nonverbal forms.

Halliday (1973) proposed his own variant of classifying greeting forms according to their relation with time (period of the day when speaker greeted the hearer). He called them time-free greeting forms and time-bound greeting forms. Theoretically and practically we will use the above classifications in order to divide the Kazakh and English analyses of greeting forms into these classes and we will continue their work by arranging verbal greeting forms into subclasses.

Recent studies in the speech act of greeting considered the sociolinguistics of greeting forms. For example, Dezhara and Rezaei (2012) compared greeting forms used by native Persian speakers, who were representative of different gender. And they had come to the conclusion that males and females differences in terms of the linguistic forms used in different situation revealing the fact that man prefer using more informal expressions and feel greater power in comparison to female speaker in conversation between Persian interlocutors. By using their work as a background we will do our best to embrace even more different types of speech communities in the Kazakh and English languages.

Akindele (2007) conducted socio-pragmatic analysis of Sesotho greeting forms. He investigated sociolinguistic aspects of greeting in the Basotho's sociolinguistic community. He proposed several types of classification of Sesotho greeting forms. Akindele's work in this field is one importance. But he focused his attention only on one speech community while our work is going to provide contrastive analysis of sociolinguistic aspects of the speech act of greeting in two very different speech communities. And we need such research works to be done because they will facilitate difficulties which can appear in interpersonal communication between English and the Kazakhs.

Agyekum (2008) describes Akan greetings as the basic oil of social relations that sets the tone and establishes the relationship between the interlocutors. The relationship could be such that may show affirmation of equality or enact social inequalities. Thus, greetings can be used to indexicalize the social relationship between and among the interlocutors.

### **3. Method**

#### *3.1 Participants and instruments*

In order to achieve the goal of such large-scale research we divided participants and instruments into several groups according to methods of analyzing. The first group consisted of students at the International Kazakh-Turkish University in Kazakhstan. We observed their everyday conversations and paid attention to turn-taking and gender difference. We asked them to fill questionnaires according to their preference for exact greeting forms. Also we observed them in a process of statistical analysis. The second group consisted of elder teachers of the International Kazak-Turkish University who were involved in the same processes as their students. Students and teachers with other participants were grouped according to young and elder generations. The third group consisted of a group of instruments. There were approximately 100 videos and audio tapes that we observed. The participants provided a great deal of information concerning the speech act of greeting by referring to their personal practice and internalization of the customs of greeting.

#### *3.2 Procedure*

In the present article we tried to define the influence of gender, generation and some social status on the greeting forms of the Kazakh and English speech communities. This made our research work a large-scale one. So we used methods from both Qualitative and Quantitative research methods. They were the above-mentioned questionnaires, observation of discourse, descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis.

First we spent time on the process of observing how frequently both male and female members of the Kazakh speech community used different forms of greeting in order to reveal which gender preferred which greeting form and also why some women used non-verbal greeting forms when they meet elder ones. We examined these processes by employing descriptive and inferential statistic analysis. Also we used a lot of questionnaires to determine which gender prefers which greeting forms.

We conducted an observation of conversation between the members of one generation, and between men's and women's single-sex conversation. Then in order to find out the sequence of turn-taking in discourse we examined conversation between different generations, and different sexes.

When it came to the same aspects of English speech community we analyzed a number of video and audio materials with descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, as well as observing the conversations.

## 4. Results

The capability of people for expressing greetings based on gender diversities, social status, and educational background of the speaker were interesting to elaborate. We chose both the Kazakh and English languages as the object of this study because these speech communities have very different culture and ways of performing conversation.

### 4.1 *The speech act of greeting and greeting forms in Kazakh*

Greetings are particularly important for the Kazakh people. We have a lot of proverbs about the importance, the role and the traditions of greeting. We say that "Greeting is the mother of the word", that a "Well-mannered boy greets from a distance" and also that "To greet is a duty". Greeting is the specific part of the Kazakh's hospitality, tradition and the culture.

Kazakh language has a rich stock of both verbal and non-verbal greeting forms. According to the time orientation verbal Kazakh greeting forms can be classified into two basic sub-categories: time-free and time-bound. In this paper we have tried to divide all Kazakh greeting forms into these two sub-categories. And our classification of Kazakh greeting forms is mentioned below:

#### 4.1.1 *Time-free Kazakh greetings:*

- a. Amansyn ba? With its variants "Amansyz ba?", "Aman ba?". [How do you do?]
- b. Salem. With its variants "Salemetsizbe!", "Salamatsyzba!". [Hello/Hi]
- c. Qal Qalai? [How do you do?]
- d. Qalaisyn! [Hello/Hi]
- e. Armsyz! [Hello]
- f. Esensiz be? [How do you do]
- g. Deningiz sau ma? [Hope you are in a good health]
- h. Mal-zhan aman ba? [Hope everything is going well]
- i. As-salamu alaykum!
- j. Wa-alaykum as-salam!

#### 4.1.2 *Time-bound Kazakh greetings:*

Daily formal greetings:

- a. Qaiyrly tang! [Good morning]
- b. Qaiyrly kun! [Good day]
- c. Qaiyrly kesh! [Good evening]
- d. Qesh jaryq! [Good evening]
- e. Qaiyrly tun! [Good night]

As in English all daily formal Kazakh greetings expressed good wishes for a specific time of the day (Grzega, 2008).

Seasonal (in)formal greetings:

- a. Tuylgan kuninmen! [Happy birthday to you]
- b. Zhanga zhylinmen! [Happy New Year]

The most informal verbal Kazakh greeting forms were used in conversation between younger generations, friends, close relatives and interlocutors who had equal social status. They were "Salem" and "Qalai!" with its modifications, as follows:

- a. Salem [Hi]
- b. Qalaisyn? [How are you?]
- c. Qalai jagdain? [How do you do?]
- d. Qalai [abbreviated form of 'How are you?']
- e. Qal qalai? [How do you do?]

These forms of greeting were usually employed in the face to face conversation. It appears that nowadays the younger generation pays particular attention to non-verbal greeting forms. They interlinked verbal and non-verbal greeting forms to show their attitude towards the interlocutor. For example young people who had just got acquainted might only

interlink verbal greeting with hand shaking. But close friends if they were males could hug each other. If they were females they could kiss each other on the face. We observed the tendency of using a gesture of 'friendship' as a non-verbal greeting among the younger generation. They used this gesture as a means of showing that all was fine, which was the answer to the question form of greeting 'How do you do?'. They could just exchange answers to the question which was supposed to be asked in the form of a greeting. And such a tendency was popular among the younger generation of both Kazakh and English speech communities.

In formal occasion young people said 'Salem' when they are greeting a person who was from the same generation. And then it could be continued by one of the next questions regarding how the addressee is filling himself ("Qalai jagdaing?"[How are you?], "Konil kuiyn qalai?" [How do you feel (yourself)?]). Also young people tended to use time-bound greeting forms as well as 'Salem' in formal occasions. Mainly it happened when interlocutors present were of the opposite sex. A man is supposed to say his addressee's name after a time-bound greeting in such conversational situations. In order to maintain a politeness strategy, this was established as a social convention. As mentioned above, in this case the time-bound greeting was followed by the personal name of the addressee. For example:

Example 1

*Young male: Qairly kesh, Aliya! [Good evening, Aliya!]  
Young female: Kesh zharyq! [Good evening!]*

Example 2

*Young male: Kesh zharyq, Gulnara! [Good evening, Gulnara!]  
Young female: Salem! [Hi!]*

In this examples 'Aliya' and 'Gulnara' were the personal names. And the use of personal names could reveal a close relationship between interlocutors. And we could see that the representatives of opposite sex meet each other, men seemed less informal and women more polite. Even in formal occasions, young people did not use honorific titles or personal pronouns in the Kazakh language, when they were expressing the speech act of greeting. However, English people did use honorific titles in formal meetings.

One of the special forms of greeting was "Armyszyl". It was a very old form of greeting. Our ancestors used this greeting form when a young male greeted a young female. But nowadays this greeting form is not widespread among the younger generation. It is a rarely used greeting form nowadays. Only a few people could greet each other using this greeting form. In our analysis only students who studied literature used it as a greeting form.

As for the conversation between interlocutors who represented different generations, young people were generally assumed to respect elder ones. And elder generation was also believed to keep a strategy of politeness. In such cases the gender did not influence to fact who greets first in Kazakh speech community. It was whoever considered his or her co-participant worthy of greetings that he or she offered to greet. Nevertheless, if the female interlocutor was an older woman and male was younger, it was the male who greeted first due to the age of the woman. The same, if the male interlocutor was an older than female interlocutor, it was the female who greeted first. In other words, in an adequate Kazakh speech society, a younger person was expected to initiate the greeting. But the context could also produce a variable that defined who should greet first. For an example, if a participant entered into a group of people, in that case he had to greet the group first. Further analysis of the results revealed that younger people used variations of the greeting forms like "Salem", "Amansynba" and "Qalaisyn". They were as follows:

- a. Salemetsizbe! [Hello]
- b. Salamatsyzba! [Hello]
- c. Qalaisyz? [How do you do?]
- d. Amansyz ba? [How do you do?]
- e. Deningiz sau ma? [Hope you are in a good health]
- f. As-salamu alaykum!
- g. And other time-bound Kazakh greeting forms

All above mentioned variations of greeting forms were polite greeting forms. First, three greeting forms were used when a young person greeted an elder man or woman. A young person could also greet an old man with fewer words. And as an answer to this greeting the old man could express the speech act of wish to his addressee by wishing him or her 'a long life'. We didn't notice such a thing in the English speech community. English elder man do not express a speech act of wish when a younger man greeted him because such respect and politeness was not valued in English speech community. For example:

Example 1

Young person: *Amansyzba, Ata!* [Ata, how do you do? Ata is a polite Kazakh word which means an old man]

Old man: *Omir jassyng uzaq bolsyn, qaragym! Amanbyz!* [Live a long life, my dear! I am all right!]

Example 2

Young person: *Amansyzba, Ata!* [Ata, how do you do?]

Old man: *Baqytty bol, qaragym!* [Be happy, my dear!]

Example 3

Young person: *Deningiz sau ma?* [Hope you are in a good health]

Old man: *Qudaiga shukir aman esen! Baqytty bol, shyragym!* [Thanks to God! Be happy, my dear!]

Example 4

Young person: *As-salamu alaykum?*

Old man: *Wa-alaykum as-salam!*

Mainly when young woman greets elder people they speak in a low level of a voice. And in some cases woman can bend her head as a non-verbal greeting. Young people ought to be able to greet elder one and ask not only about his or her welfare but also about the welfare of his or hers close relatives. This is the one of the some peculiarities of Kazakh speech act of greeting. The one more phenomena that attracts for the length of the greetings is time. People who are not in rush may use engaging greetings when they have free time. For example:

Example 1

Young person: *As-salamu alaykum, ata! Amansyz ba? Bala shaganyz aman ba?* [As-salamu alaykum, ata! How do you do? How about your family?]

Old man: *Tegis aman-esen! Qudaiga shukir! Ozin kalaisin?* [All is fine! Thanks to God! What about you?]

Example 2

Young person: *Amansyz ba, ata! Ui ishiniz kalai?* [How do you do, ata? How is your family doing?]

Old man: *Bar bol balam! Shukir bari jaksi!* [Live a long life, my dear! Thanks to God, all is good!]

That was all the information revealed during our research work about the speech act of greeting, communicative competence and its functions according to the speech act of greeting in Kazakh. For Kazakh people not replying to a greeting is more than impolite; it is seen as a sign of arrogance and animosity.

## 4.2 Speech act of greeting and greeting forms in English

As the Kazakh people, the English people also have their own ways and traditions of greeting and expressing the speech act of greeting. A lot of scholars have done their research on the theme of the English speech act of greeting. One of them was done by Grzega(2008). He examined the English speech act of greeting from the perspective of etymology and proposed a chronological development of greeting forms. But nowadays there are many people in Britain and in United States who come from various origins with regional and temperamental differences. It is especially difficult to make generalizations about American manners and traditions. And it is also the same about the ways of expressing speech acts. In the next section we will attempt to show a few characteristics of the greeting that are common enough to be employed in making generalization. In a time-free and time-bound categorization, English greeting forms may be divided into two main groups:

### 4.2.1 Time-free greetings:

- a. Hello!
- b. Hi!
- c. Hey!

- d. What's up?
- e. How do you do?
- f. How are you?
- g. Glad to meet you!
- h. Nice to see you!

#### 4.2.2 Time-bound greetings:

Daily formal greetings

- i. Good morning!
- j. Good afternoon!
- k. Good evening!
- l. Good day!
- m. Good night!

Seasonal formal/informal greetings

- a. Happy New Year!
- b. Happy Anniversary!
- c. Happy birthday!
- d. Merry Christmas!
- e. Happy Easter!

In informal occasions both British and American people they can just say "Hi" and show a smile to each other. But in some formal occasions they do shake hands. And women shake hands less frequently than men. But handshakes are not verbal; therefore they do not represent the speech act. Nowadays the young generation in America tends to use greeting forms like "What's up?" and "Hi!". The greeting speech act "What's up?" equates to "How are you?" (Vyas & Patel, 2009).

Greetings such as "Hi" and "Hey" may be followed by a person's given name. The greeting form "Hello" is going out of fashion. It is rarely spoken nowadays. You can hear it mainly at the beginning of the telephone conversation.

Also the younger generation does not pay attention to honorific titles when they greet each other on informal occasions. But when they greet elder persons they do not omit honorific titles after greetings. In such cases they mainly use time-bound greeting forms and some polite greeting forms. We can refer to the list of polite greeting forms greetings like "How do you do?", "Glad to meet you!" and "Nice to see you!". The sex variable does not have any important and noticeable influence on the speech act of greeting in English. English people like to make compliments after or before greeting. For example:

Example 1

*Max: Yeah! Oh man, you look fantastic. You haven't aged a day.*

*John: Thanks man!*

*Like Kazakh people, English people may also ask about the welfare of the interlocutor after greeting or the speech act of greeting.*

## 2. Discussion

Regarding the first research question which asked about the influence of some social variables on speech act of greeting in Kazakh and English languages, the results showed that social variable of generation influenced both language to a similar degree, but social variable of gender influenced the Kazakh greetings more than English.

With regard to the second research question both Kazakh and English greetings are mainly started by the interlocutor of lower status and responded to by the interlocutor of high status, but in some cases the interlocutors do not share this convention. In some greeting situations Kazakh people may express the speech act of wishing, in some cases English people may express the speech act of compliment. We have found out that Kazakh people put more importance on the process of greeting the elderly than English and American people. In addition the sex variable in Kazakh greeting is more noticeable than in English.

With regard to the third research question of this study, a pure contrastive analysis of the Kazakh and English speech act of greeting showed that there exist certain sociolinguistic peculiarities and similarities, which can be helpful as a learning material for Kazakh students to build their communicative competence for the English speech act of greeting.

### 3. Conclusion

As a speech act greeting is really of high importance. And knowledge about when, where and how to greet your interlocutors with different social background is worth learning by heart.

The results of the present study may be used as additional information about communicative competence when teaching Kazakh students about the speech act of greeting in the English language. Knowledge about the differences in sociolinguistic aspects of speech acts forms a useful background for developing communicative competence in the target language. This knowledge can help to overcome misunderstandings at the beginning of the intercultural conversation.

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