

A Socio-Cultural Study of Face and Politeness Conceptions in the Kazakh Context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the issues related to some aspects of the Kazakh concept of face and politeness, the perceptions of politeness, and politeness and impoliteness strategies. The principal means and mechanism guide and predetermines the social conduct that guarantees the harmony of the relationships between people. Kazakh politeness, as part of people's communicative behavior, is a component of national culture and is governed by national customs and traditions based on deep historical roots. Historically nomadic, the Kazakhs had to develop a pattern of interaction rules within the community and outside that helped them to adapt successfully to the harsh conditions of the steppe. The only guarantee to successfully survive in the vast steppe, arid nature, and nomadic way of life was to maintain benevolent relations between people and, at any expense, prevent conflict and aggressive situations. An online survey was conducted in which 100 first-year

al-Farabi university students participated. The survey data obtained provided valuable insight into the young people's beliefs about politeness and impoliteness and how the concept of politeness affects their moral values and shapes their ethnocultural behavior in modern times. The respondents' answers showed a surprising uniformity in defining the politeness principles in the Kazakh context. With Kazakh young people, politeness is nestled in respecting others,

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 17 July 2022

Accepted: 09 November 2022

Published: 22 December 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.30.S1.02>

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especially older adults, appropriate behavior, maintaining smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations, good manners, and adhering to societal rules and norms.

Keywords: behavior, communicative, face, harmony, im/politeness, interaction, socio-cultural, strategies, survival

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is an inalienable part of people's everyday life and permeates all fields of human interaction and activities. The increased interest in studying this phenomenon on the part of representatives of different fields of knowledge indicates the importance of this issue in human relationships. From the 1970s to the present day, this topic remains a major focus for research in disciplines concerned with social interaction, such as psychology, ethnopsychology, cultural studies, anthropology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, applied linguistics, and communication, among others. Since politeness is basic to the production of social order and a precondition of human cooperation, any theory that provides an understanding of this phenomenon simultaneously goes to the foundations of human social life (Brown & Levinson, 2009; 1987; Brown & Gilman, 1989).

What is politeness? A multitude of answers has been proposed to this question. As was pointed out by Bargiela-Chiappini (2003), although a variety of studies have

been done, "this field still lacks an agreed definition of what politeness is" (Bargiela-Chiappini (2003, p. 1469). It is an expected truth since politeness is a form of human relationship that people try to establish to *live comfortably together*. It is known that human relationship is one of the most complicated puzzles of human life.

While defining what politeness is, authors mainly concentrate on the pragmatic view of politeness principles: "to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place" (Leech, 2007, pp. 167–206), "a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse—both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that a confrontation will be perceived as threatening." (Lakoff, 1990), "nationally specific strategies of behavior aimed at harmonious, conflict-free communication and meeting the expectations of the partner" (Larina, 2015), "a means of expressing consideration for others" (Holmes, 2006), "choosing many different kinds: what we want to say, how we want to say it, and the specific sentence types, words, and sounds that best unite the what with the how. How we say something is at least as important as what we say, in fact, the content and the form are inseparable, being but two facets of the same object" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 260).

Today, there are several approaches to the study of various aspects of the category of politeness: politeness as a social norm; politeness as speech maxims and

rules (Lakoff 1973, 1990; Leech, 2007); politeness as “saving face” (Goffman, 1955; Brown & Levinson, 2009; 1987); socio-cultural approach (Fraser, 2005); politeness as tact (Janney & Arndt, 1993; Richard et al., 1992); politeness as an ethical and pragmalinguistic category (Formanovskaya, 1998); among others.

From our point of view, the socio-cultural approach to politeness deserves special attention, emphasizing social norms. Each society has a particular set of socially accepted norms containing clear-cut rules that prescribe a certain behavior its members should follow in different social contexts (Fraser, 2005). When an individual chooses the behavior following the norm, his behavior is considered polite. On the other hand, if his behavior is contrary to the norm, then he shows rude behavior, which is qualified as “shameless” according to Kazakh mentality. In this sense, politeness is synonymous with good manners,” “social etiquette,” and “considerate behavior” (Muldagaliyeva et al., 2015, pp. 33–84).

The big interest is also the consideration of politeness from the perspective of saving face, introduced by Goffman (2017) and Brown and Levinson (2009). The concept of face, a fundamental concept in sociolinguistics, was first suggested by Erving Goffman in his article “On Face-work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements of Social Interaction” and in his book “Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior.” Brown and Levinson (2009) further developed the idea of the face. They argue that this concept is universal.

Indeed, in Kazakh, there is the word “*bet*” (face), “*bet +syz*” (lit. *having no face* or utterly impolite, rude, shameless), or “*Kai betingmen kelip tursyn?*” (lit. *aren't you ashamed to come or how could you come with such a face?*) In the communication process, participants are interested in preserving both one's faces and his/her partners. At the same time, saving face is not the goal of communication, but a condition, without which normal communication is impossible. To fulfill this condition, as Goffman figuratively expressed, every member of society should learn to save face, like learning the traffic rules of social interaction (Goffman, 2017).

Brown and Levinson propose distinguishing between the “negative face” and “positive face” and emphasizing positive and negative politeness. By a negative face, they mean the desire of every adult person to have freedom of action, the inadmissibility of interference of others (they want to have freedom of action unhindered), that is, “the desire to be independent,” and under the positive “the desire to be desired” by others (the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others) (Brown & Levinson, 2009).

Positive politeness strategies minimize the threat to the communication participant's positive face. In addition, these strategies create an atmosphere of friendship and mutual affection and are used when people know each other fairly well. These strategies include such language as compliments, joking, encouragement, and “white lies.”

Negative politeness involves respecting other people's privacy and emphasizes avoiding imposition on the communication participant. By attempting to avoid imposition from the speaker, the risk of facing a threat to the hearer is reduced. Negative politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by showing deference. These strategies involve questioning, hedging, and presenting disagreement as opinions. If individual acts considering the rules of "positive politeness" and "negative politeness," then it can be expected that by being mutually supportive and avoiding threats to face, speakers can always maintain smooth, peaceful, and non-conflict communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

There can hardly be found cultures that do not employ politeness norms. It is a universal category. However, here the question arises if the concept of "politeness" is fully equivalent in different languages since "the language itself is the door to a concept in people's minds" (Ide, 1982, 1989).

Leech (2007) also points out that it is premature to talk of universals of politeness, although the scales of value are widespread in human societies; their interpretation differs from society to society, just as encoding differs from language to language. Nevertheless, he suggests that this is the basis on which well-founded cross-cultural pragmatic research could proceed. The question to ask is, given these scales of value, what socio-cultural variants of them are found in particular cultures, and what pragmatic linguistic forms of language are used to encode these variants?

It is a common idea that what is polite in one society may be regarded as impolite in another. For example, addressing an older adult by his name is utterly rude in Kazakh culture. It is also not polite not to take off shoes when entering the house from the street or to interfere in the conversation when people are talking. On the other hand, it is polite to invite the guest to share lunch when the family is having a meal, and according to Kazakh customs, it is impolite if she/he refuses to do so. Instead, she/he should take a piece of bread and eat it (*auz tiu*). This custom is based on the idea "*Dammen ylken emessing*"—there is nothing more sacred than food, do not neglect the invitation.

The concept of face and politeness is, practically, an uncultivated area in the Kazakh language. Nevertheless, there are a few works on this topic. One of them is by Ryssaldy and Utepova (2018). In their paper "Lingo Cultural Peculiarities of Concept 'Politeness' in Kazakh and English Languages and its Influence on Forming Cross-Cultural Competence," the authors point out that English speakers pay great attention during communication to the plain of expression while Kazakh speakers to the plain of content. An important attribute of a polite person in the English language culture is the use of the words like "please" and "Thank you!". However, with Kazakhs, there are other indicators of politeness. They argue that these discrepancies should be taken into consideration in the process of teaching English to Kazakh students.

Aimoldina et al. (2015), in their paper “Polite Requests vs. Socio-Cultural Content in Kazakh, Russian and English Business Correspondence in Kazakhstan,” consider business correspondence in Kazakhstan. They claim that in business correspondence, it is necessary to consider the social characteristics of the data producers and recipients of the correspondence, which significantly reduces the possibility of discomfort or pragmatic communicative failures of business professionals in the context of different cultural and linguistic communities.

The authors believe it is important to thoroughly consider the particulars of the categories “face” and “politeness” in Kazakh culture. Therefore, the present paper aims to answer the following questions: What is the Kazakh national-specific conception of face? What is the Kazakhs’ understanding of politeness in communicative behavior in different contexts? How do Kazakh youth perceive the concept of politeness and politeness strategies?

Some Particulars of Kazakh National-Specific Conceptions of Face and Politeness

The Kazakh Concept of Face

The face is one of the most significant parts of the human body. In the framework of politeness theory, it is used to represent the whole human being, including physical and non-physical aspects (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). Therefore, the concept of face is a very important aspect of Kazakh culture and behavior. Unfortunately, finding a

one-to-one translation of this concept in Kazakh is difficult. The Kazakh concept of face comprises combinations of personal traits depending on the individual and the context: good name, honor, a sense of dignity, reputation, pride, and self-esteem.

There are very interesting idioms and proverbs in the Kazakh language with the organ of the face that convey the idea of losing face by becoming ashamed, angry, or sad. For example, *Qara bet* (lit. *black face*), *kok bet* (lit. *blue face*—scandalous), *Betsyz* (lit. *having no face*—shameless), *betke basu* (lit. *to throw to the face*—to say an unpleasant truth to the face), *bety ashylgan* (lit. *face opened*—shameless about female, the truth discovered about an inadequate affair, business, crime), *betty zherge qaratu* (lit. *to look with one’s face down on the ground*—to be disgraced, discredited).

The examples show that the organ of the face in Kazakh is used in proverbs and idioms to indicate more negative emotions than positive ones. The face is used to describe the psychological states, feelings and emotions, and character and behavior of people. Thus, the face is emotionally invested, which can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. Although, in general, people cooperate (and assume each other’s cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation is based on the mutual vulnerability of face. Normally everyone’s face depends on everyone else’s being maintained, and people can be expected to defend their faces if threatened and defend their own threatened others’

faces (Brown & Levison, 2009). The Kazakhs highly value their “face,” and throughout their life, they try hard to live up not to stain their faces.

The Kazakhs are very shame-sensitive people. The word “*Uiat*,” shame, is a “strong” and “heavy” word in the Kazakh language. The proverb “*Olimnen uiat kushty*” (lit. *shame is stronger than death*) proves this idea. *Uiat* is the measuring yardstick of correct and good actions and behavior. It is an internal ability of a person to evaluate his actions, measure his behavior following the moral norms accepted in society, and have a sense of moral responsibility for his deeds and actions in front of people. *Uiat*+*syz* (negative suffix)—*shameless is one of the most humiliating face threats*.

The common belief guides the Kazakh communication behavior among participants to save each other’s faces. Many Kazakhs are so sensitive to saving and losing face that they consider it very seriously. Kazakhs strive to maintain the face they have earned in different social situations. They highly value and are emotionally attached to their face, so they are comfortable and content with their life when their face is maintained; loss of face causes deep emotional injury, so in social interactions, Kazakhs try hard to cooperate by following the accepted norms of politeness strategies to not to lose their face since it is something that cannot be bought, sold or traded. It is something that must be gained and earned by the respect of the people. A person’s social standing is related to the identity

or image each person wants to claim in interactions, and face-work involves the set of strategies that persons use to maintain their face. There are the proverbs: “*Eger de zhaman soz estiging kelmeze, zhaman soz aitpa*”—if you do not want to hear a hurtful word, then do not say it, and “*Soz suekten otedy*” (lit. *word pierces the bone*). These proverbs imply the following truth: **Word is powerful. Be careful with words!** A hurtful word is perceived as particularly painful, which is qualified as a serious face threat to Kazakh, for example, *Adamnyng betin zhyrtyp soileu* (lit. *to shame a man by tearing his face apart*) which literally means “*to throw wounding words at the man’s face*.” At the same time, being easily offended is considered not good. One of the most common Kazakh proverbs is “*Zhaksy adamnyn okpesi shay oramal kepkenshe*” (a good person’s grudge will go away faster than a thin handkerchief will dry).

In Kazakh culture, it is prescribed that every person should possess self-respect and dignity, and he/she is expected to save others’ feelings and faces. This idea is expressed in the Kazakh sayings “*Omir sholak, adam bir birine konak*” (lit. *life is short, and men are guests to this world and each other*) or “*Kamshynyng sabyndai kyska omir*” (life is as short as the handle of a whip). The sayings imply that life is short and temporary, and people should value and appreciate each other, maintain healthy, respectful, and polite relationships, not offend each other, and not give way to face-threatening acts so that not make each other’s life an unbearable business.

With Kazakhs, it is advisable never to make a person feel ashamed—lose face in the presence of others. It is considered an utterly unacceptable face-threatening act. This behavior on the part of the speaker is qualified as an absolute ruining of the reputation and authority of the hearer in the eyes of those who witness. Kazakhs will not stand the use of anger or a thunderous voice which is also an unacceptable behavior that means loss of face and may bring a terrible conflict. According to ancient Kazakh “unwritten” laws, no one had the right to “*til tizizu*” (hurt with a word, insult).

Kazakh culture is rich in traditions and customs that promote practicing positive politeness strategies. Observation of traditions and customs relates to the gatherings of people who know each other fairly well. The interaction is based on predominantly positive politeness strategies emphasizing intimacy, familiarity, solidarity, friendship, and good relationships. These are the situations when people avoid face-threatening acts. Having chosen a strategy that provides an appropriate opportunity for minimization of face risk, a person rationally chooses the linguistic (or extralinguistic) means to satisfy his strategic end.

The Kazakh Concept of Politeness

Politeness is solely human property. The study of politeness issues is largely significant for it helps human beings better understand the world they are living in and the reality they are confronted with, as better understand how social members re(construct), realize, and represent their

social and personal identity. The issue of politeness is one of philosophy, one of human life philosophy. It should be one of the ultimate goals of politeness studies (Xie et al., 2005; Wei, 2010).

With Kazakhs, politeness is a broad and complex concept with many elements. Therefore, the consideration of the Kazakh concept of politeness will be more fundamental from the point of view of the theory of discernment-dominated and volition-dominated cultures (Hill & Burt, 1986; Hill et al., 1986).

The members of the discernment-dominated culture mainly build their interactions in the light of cultural norms in a way that the communication participants either directly follow culturally recommended patterns of behavior or at least observe the customs and traditions of the society. Following customs and traditions necessarily involves polite behavior. Moreover, in volition-dominated cultures, people enjoy more freedom in building their interactions; their behavior according to recommended patterns is limited (Kydyrbayeva et al., 2021).

Kazakh politeness, as part of people’s communicative behavior, is a component of their national culture and is governed by national customs and traditions based on deep historical roots. Historically nomadic, the Kazakhs had to develop a pattern of interaction rules within the community and outside that helped them to adapt successfully to the harsh conditions of the steppe. In accumulating social experience, they have generated the norms

of behavior, the rules of communication, and etiquette—everything that regulates the social life in each community. The only guarantee to successfully survive in the vast steppe, arid nature, and nomadic way of life was to maintain benevolent relations between people and, at any expense, prevent alienation from the community. People could maintain smooth relations and sustain successful communication by being mutually supportive, avoiding threats to face, and following politeness strategies. Politeness was socially prescribed. From time immemorial, the Kazakhs lived following the motto “*Tyrlyk byrlykte!*” (survival is easier when people are united!).

Politeness is a behavior chosen by an individual according to conventional cultural rules. Whatever the cost, the Kazakhs did their best to preserve peaceful relations between people, and today they do. One of the essential principles of their existence was and remained the avoidance of conflict and confrontation. This idea finds expression in the proverb “*Taspen urgandy aspen ur*” (lit. *if someone throws a stone at you, you throw food at him*).

Throughout history, the Kazakhs strove to preserve societal harmony and promote tolerance and respect among people (Aubakirova et al., 2016). Another important indicator of the Kazakh mentality is tolerance. Tolerance lies based on the Kazakh philosophical worldview and spirituality. Thanks to practicing tolerance, the Kazakhs maintain loyal, non-aggressive, benevolent relations between different people, social strata, and states. Tolerance

means understanding and acceptance of other ideas, thoughts, attitudes, emotional states, faith, actions, and traditions; it is an ability to show patience and politeness (Balpanov, et al., 2018). This phenomenal feature of Kazakh mentality helps ensure unity, solidarity, and peaceful life in Kazakhstan today.

During the Second World War, the Kazakh people peacefully welcomed many nations on their land, shared their bread and home with them, and treated them with kindness and warmth.

Kazakhs highly value “*aralasu*” (communication), which means living in peace and maintaining close communication and interaction with countrymen and representatives of other nations since, as Kazakhs say, “*Adamnyng kuni adammen*” (lit. *man is a man among people*), which implies that a person becomes a person in the process of interacting with other people when he learns social norms, cultural values, and behavior patterns in society and behaves in compliance with the norms applied in society. Therefore, Kazakhs are amazingly open to communication. “*Aralasu*” is maintaining respectful, polite, and friendly communications with relatives, friends, families, and neighbors, which is the meaning of life for Kazakhs. *Aralasu* lies are based on multiple customs, traditions, and rituals that serve a vital function in the life of Kazakhs. They bring order and harmony to life, unity, and solidarity. This special quality to successfully communicate with people has developed from the nomadic lifestyle (Nurysheva et al., 2019).

Kazakh Linguistic Routines of Politeness

Politeness is a complex socio-cultural concept. Nevertheless, the fundamental principles of socio-cultural organization and its members' interpersonal relations are based on positive politeness strategies. Positive-politeness utterances are used as a metaphorical extension of intimacy to imply common ground or sharing of wants to a limited extent, even between strangers who perceive themselves, for the interaction, as somehow similar. For the same reason, positive politeness techniques are used as a social accelerator, where the speaker indicates that he wants to be closer to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Conversational interaction develops in continual tension between two general communicative needs: the need to communicate as efficiently as possible and the need to be polite. In this context, linguistic routines (greeting, parting, address terms) represent the tool of polite behavior that reduces the risk of facing threats. A polite norm guides the use of linguistic routines. Greetings, partings, and addressing people are ritualized behaviors that help people to establish and maintain social relationships; they also may be called linguistic routines of politeness (Laver, 1981).

Greeting and Parting

Kazakhs have always given special attention to greeting and parting. Kazakhs say: "*Salemyng durys bolsyn*," (may your greeting always be benevolent and well-

wishing), and "*Salem- sozdyng anasy*" (greeting is the mother of a word).

Since greeting takes place at the opening of communication, it sets the overall tone for interpersonal exchange. It serves as a means of achieving the desired outcome and building a positive relationship with the participant of communication. Greetings are linguistic routines that form part of the repertoire of politeness and serve as means for initiating communication appropriately and establishing and maintaining positive social relationships (Liu, 2016).

Greeting at a meeting—"Amandasu"—in Kazakh culture is one of the most important traditions. "*Amandasu*" contains not only wishes for good health but also the main issue of health for the dwellers of the harsh nature of the steppe. This Kazakh tradition has not undergone any changes before, and since then, Kazakhs have switched to a sedentary lifestyle in the last century. Therefore, the Kazakh will first ask, "*Salemetsiz be?*" "*Amansyz ba?*" (lit. *are you in good health?*) Only after receiving a positive answer will they continue to communicate further.

Interestingly, the Kazakh greeting formulas are, at the same time, a question about the health and safety of the addressee. For example, the greeting "*Amansyz ba?*" (Are you healthy? Is everything right with you?), "*Aman-yesensiz be?*" (Hello! Are you healthy?), "*Esensizder me?*" (Hello! How are you?), and "*Sau-selemetsizder me?*" (Hello! How are you? Are you safe and healthy?). The words "*as aman-esen, sau*," besides the meaning "healthy," denote

safe, unharmed, unscathed by troubles, pandemics, and negative experiences, among others. Such a primary concern for health and safety stems directly from the nomadic nature of life, and people might not regularly see each other for a long time (Meirbekov et al., 2015).

A respectful attitude towards elders characterizes the Kazakh community. Children from an early age are taught to be considerate and helpful concerning parents and people of older age. Such an attitude could not but be reflected in the language. For example, the greeting formula: “*Salemet+siz be!*” (Hello—concerning an older person) and “*Salemet+siz+der me!*” (concerning the group of older adults). According to a Kazakh tradition, to the greetings of children and young people, older adults answer, “*Bakytty bol!*” (Be happy!), and *Zhasyng uzak bolsyn!* (May you live a long life!).

Kazakh formulas of parting and greeting are simultaneously a wish for health. For Example, “*Sau bolyngyz*” (Be healthy), “*Qosh, Sau bolyngyz*” (Goodbye, be healthy), “*Qoshbol*” (Stay well), “*Aman-Saubol*” (Be safe and healthy), and “*Aman-Sau bolyngng+z*” (Polite form of parting with an older adult). Usually, the second part of parting contains different expressions of wishes: “*Zholyngyz bolsyn*” (May your road be open), “*Koriskenshe kun zhaksy bolsyn*” (May the day be bright when we meet again), “*Salem ait*” (Best regards to everybody), “*Baqytty bolyngdar*” (Be happy), and “*Zholdaryng bolsyn*” (May your road be open).

Terms of Address

Within a framework of the theory of politeness, terms of address are a vital linguistic mechanism by which a speaker’s attitude and his/her evaluation of the relationship toward the hearer are mirrored. In Kazakh culture, addressing people is a very important element of communication. A polite person tries to choose the right address term to make the addressee feel comfortable. Moreover, the choice of address term often indicates the level of the addresser’s positive politeness and the level and “quality” of his upbringing.

According to the norms of the Kazakh national politeness principle, the most widely used address term is a *kinship term* used to refer to relatives and non-relatives. Therefore, the appropriate choice of the address term sets the tone for interpersonal exchange and serves as a means of achieving the desired outcome and building a positive relationship with the addressee.

The whole society can become a big kinship community by using a kinship address; kinship address terms are powerful means of creating and sustaining solidarity among not only members of a kin community but the whole society of Kazakhs have developed complex and varied terms of address. Tables 1 and 2 describe the terms.

Kazakh Hospitality

Without this unwritten but immutable law, for Kazakhs, it was impossible to survive in the steppe (Shadkam & Paltore, 2018). Every Kazakh family’s duty was to welcome a traveler, warm and feed

Table 1

Terms for male non-kins

Junior speaker-addresser	Senior speaker-addresser
<i>Ata</i> (grandfather): much older than the speaker	<i>Baury+m</i> (<i>younger brother</i> lit. 'liver'): male, relatively younger than the speaker
<i>Aga/Aga+i</i> (older brother/male relative): relatively older than the speaker	<i>Ini+m/in+shek</i> (<i>younger brother</i>): male, much younger than the speaker
<i>Bratishka/bratan</i> (younger brother, borrowed from Russian): of the same age/younger than the speaker	<i>Bala+m/bala+kai</i> (son): the addressee is of the age of the speaker's children
Note: the suffix <i>-i</i> indicates remoteness or lack of kinship ties	Note: <i>-m</i> is a possessive suffix; <i>-shek</i> , <i>-kai</i> are diminutive suffixes

Table 2

Terms for female non-kins

Junior speaker	Senior speaker
<i>Azhe+I</i> (grandmother), <i>Apa</i> (older sister/female relative): addressee is much older than the speaker	<i>Singil+im</i> (younger sister, younger female relative): female addressee, younger than the female speaker
<i>Apa+I</i> , <i>Apke</i> (older sister/female relative): addressee is relatively older than the speaker	<i>Kyz+ym</i> (daughter): female, much younger than the speaker
<i>Tate</i> (a young female): addressee is older than the addresser.	<i>Karyndas</i> (younger sister, younger female relative): female, younger than the male speaker
Note: the suffix <i>-i</i> indicates remoteness or lack of kinship ties	<i>Im/ym</i> –possessive suffix

Note: the most widely used kinship terms in addressing non-kins are *Apai* and *Agai*

him politely and respectfully. Hospitality is a trait in the blood of every Kazakh, and it was strengthened by the belief that “*Qyryk bir konaktyng biri aiagymen qut alyp keledy*” (lit. *one out of forty guests will bring well-being/luck to home with their legs*). The word “*Qut*” in the Kazakh language means “*happiness*,” “*well-being*,” and “*goodness and prosperity*.” Guests may be of two categories “*kudai konak*” (God’s messenger) and “*arnaiy konak*” (special guests). No longer are

the Kazakhs nomads, but this wonderful tradition remains and is being passed from generation to generation because it strengthens harmony and solidarity among people. As a rule, guests and hosts gather at a festive table (*dastarkan*), a table full of food. People get pleasure from the meeting, exchanging news, talking, and relaxing. It is one of the ways to brighten up spirits and have fun with friends, relatives, and colleagues.

METHODS

In this research, we used the descriptive analysis method of empirical data by considering the core principles of the Kazakh concept of face and politeness. Kazakh politeness is a behavior chosen by an individual following conventional cultural rules.

An important part of this research is the online survey conducted among 17–18 years old first-year Mathematical Faculty bachelor’s students of al-Farabi University, Almaty, Kazakhstan. The specific aims of the online survey are: (1) to find out what is the Kazakh young people’s understanding of the concept of politeness, (2) to determine the politeness strategies they use in everyday interaction, (3) and identify impolite behavior in their mind. The next step was to conduct the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey data.

Our decision to choose the 17–18 aged young people as respondents were substantiated by the idea that this is the stage

in life when life values and moral attitudes are developing. They have just left school, and most got out of parental care and are now entering the world of adults. Therefore, the online survey results will provide useful insights into young people’s ideas and traditional moral values. In addition, the survey data will demonstrate to what extent they have internalized the politeness norms and values of Kazakh society in the changing world. The online questions were emailed to 100 participants, 52% females and 48% males. All the participants are representatives of Kazakh nationality. The online survey included three questions (Tables 3 to 5): (1) What does politeness mean in your understanding? (2) What polite strategies do you use in everyday life? (3) What behavior is impolite, in your opinion?

The Results of the Survey

Fortunately, all 100 respondents participated in the survey and sent exhaustive answers to all questions.

Table 3

Types of responses to what does politeness mean in your understanding?

Kazakh	English	%
<i>adepti, sylastyq, qurmet, kishipeil</i>	respect	78%
<i>tarbiely</i>	good upbringing	77%
<i>meirimdylik</i>	kindness, generosity	65%
<i>sabyrly/ustamdy</i>	balanced, self-control	38%
<i>qarapaim</i>	kind-hearted, modest	10%
<i>zhaksy minez</i>	good character	8%
<i>tartipty</i>	disciplined, good behavior	7%
<i>adamgershilik</i>	humanness	3%
<i>madeniетtilik</i>	cultured, cultivated	3%

Table 4

Types of responses: What polite strategies do you use in everyday life?

Kazakh	English	%
<i>salem беру, amandasu</i>	greeting everyone appropriately	100%
<i>ata-anandy, zhakyndardy sylau</i>	respect parents and relatives	100%
<i>adamga karap esimin atau, asirese ulken kisining esimine "ata", "aga", "apa", degen sozderdi qosyp aitu</i>	addressing people, especially older adults, appropriately using kinship terms.	97%
<i>ulken kisige zhol беру</i>	to give way to an elderly person	83%
<i>konakzhai bolu</i>	show hospitality	78%
<i>adamdarmen qarym qatynasta zhaksy tartip korsetu</i>	to demonstrate good behavior and tactfulness in interaction with people	77%
<i>ulken adamnyng aldynan zholyn kesip otau</i>	not to cross the road in front of the elderly people	77%
<i>ulkenderding zhane aiel kisining syrtyk kiyimin sheshuge komektesu</i>	to help older adults and females to take their coats off	65%
<i>zhastarga izet korsetu</i>	to be a good example to young people, to be caring about the younger	56%
<i>adamdarga goldau qorsetu</i>	be supportive	53%
<i>komektesu</i>	being helpful	43%
<i>adamdardying kongiline qarau</i>	considering other people's feelings	38%
<i>adamdardy zyly shyraimen qarsy alu zhane zhaqsy qarym-qatynas ornatu</i>	to meet people with a genial and affable smile and maintain a benevolent relationship	35%
<i>zhagyndy/sypayisoileu</i>	speaking pleasantly	30%

Table 5

Responses to: What behavior is impolite in your opinion?

Kazakh	English
<i>ulkenderding sozin bolip soileu</i>	to interfere when older adults are talking
<i>ulkendermen qarsylasu</i>	to talk rudely to elderly people
<i>adamdy zhamandau, oseq tasu</i>	to speak negatively about somebody in public, spread gossip
<i>adamdarga mensinbeushilikpen karau zhane betin zhyrtyp soileu</i>	to speak to people tearing their faces up - to shame and humiliate somebody
<i>qasarysu</i>	to be stubborn about doing something
<i>adamdarga tesilip qarau</i>	shamelessly stare at somebody

Table 5 (Continue)

Kazakh	English
<i>bosip soileu, kop maqtanu</i>	to talk boastfully, always bragging about oneself
<i>adamdardying zheke omiri turaly kop suraq qoiu</i>	putting too many private questions, breaking private boundaries
<i>uiatsyz anekdot aitu</i>	to tell a shameful anecdote in public
<i>adamdardy elemei qol silteu</i>	to insultingly wave one's hand down to somebody
<i>ulken adamnyng zholyyn kesip otu</i>	to cross the road in front of an elderly person

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In a changing world, simple ‘norms and values’ are losing their significance in the pace of life. During the last 30 years, Kazakhstan has undergone considerable changes. Kazakhstan has transformed from a post-Soviet socialist country with a planned economy to a fast-developing democratic country with a market economy. The transformation period lasted for 10–15 years, and the collapse of Soviet ideals and overall stress in the moods and minds of people characterized this period.

It is well known that young people are very responsive to radical changes in society. Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel (2007) point out that “if the social order has changed and if social structures have weakened, we would expect to find evidence of these changes among young who are at crossroads of the process of social reproduction.” The survey data provided valuable insight into the young people’s beliefs about politeness and impoliteness, their attitude to the phenomenon under study, and how the concept of politeness

affects their moral values and shapes their ethnocultural behavior in modern times.

Most Kazakh youth (78%) associate politeness with *respect, good breeding, kindness, and generosity*. Here we need to decipher the meaning of *respect* in Kazakh mentality. All three lexical units *sylastyq, qurmet, and kishipeil*—possess the meaning of *respect* in their semantic structure. Therefore, according to the respondent, politeness primarily involves respecting people, particularly respecting older adults and younger ones. This idea is expressed in the proverb “*Ulkenge kurmet, kishige izel*” (Respect for an elder and caring for a younger), which implies everyone should equally be respected and treated politely. The word “*sylastyq*” in the Kazakh language belongs to “deep, meaningful words.” There are a big number of proverbs and sayings devoted to this concept which proves its specific importance in the life of Kazakhs. It is one of them: “*Sylasqannyng kuly bol*” lit. *Be the slave of the person who respects you.*

In the minds of young people, good breeding/courteous behavior (*tarbiely/*

adepty) are important characteristic features of politeness since 77% of respondents indicated these traits. Kazakhs pay special attention to “*tarbiely*” (good upbringing), which means good manners and polite behavior resulting from a good upbringing. Politeness is a thing that is not born with man. It is something that man has to learn and be socialized into (Watts, 2003). So, in Kazakh mentality “*tarbiely*” person is a person whose parents did their best to inculcate good discipline and the best moral values so that he grew up an acceptable individual in society. *Tarbiely* encompasses all the best human traits, such as tactfulness, discipline, friendliness, culture, and positivity. The negative form of it, “*tarbie+siz*” (ill upbringing), is one of the worst characteristics of the person’s behavior which also negatively characterizes his parents. Therefore, Kazakhs consider politeness reflects one’s upbringing in a family.

Meirimdilik (kindness/generosity) is the second trait of 65% of Kazakh youth. The concept of politeness involves. *Meirimdilik*, in its semantic structure, encompasses all the noble qualities of man, such as love, humanness, high morality, the warmth of heart, the wish to help people, compassion, and caring (*Kazakh Encyclopaedia, 1998*). The Kazakh proverb reads: “*Zherden meirimdilik ketse barlyq zhaksylyk ketedi*” (If kindness leaves the earth, all the goodwill leaves the earth). There is also an English saying, “Kill them with kindness,” which implies that a person who kills people with kindness always prefers the noble road.

Such a person is kind and polite even when provoked by rudeness and anger.

Of particular interest is that the young people associate politeness with the trait of character “*sabyrly*”/“*ozin ozy ustai bilu*” (balanced/tolerant/self-control). With the Kazakhs, these character traits are qualified “*asyl kasiet*”—noble and precious qualities a person can possess. It is common knowledge that all interactions between people involve emotional elements. *Sabyrly* (self-control), in its semantic structure, possesses the meanings of emotional restraint and emotional tolerance, which provide avoidance of conflict, help to soften interpersonal disagreements, the ability to maintain tolerant behavior in stressful situations, and reach a peaceful outcome. Polite people are always *sabyrly*.

Besides these four main indicators—respect, good breeding, balance, and kindness—some respondents showed such human qualities as high morality, helpfulness, understanding people, listening to and hearing people, good character, and having no dirty thoughts about people.

The results of the data obtained from the survey place optimism that the Kazakhstani youth well understand and have internalized the basic politeness principles and politeness strategies. They also have assimilated that politeness is core to daily survival since being polite makes life much more comfortable, helps avoid conflicts, and promotes smooth communication with the surrounding community. For Kazakh youth, one of the important things in their life is not to ruin their parents’ reputation or disgrace

them by misbehaving and being impolite in the public eye. In Kazakh society, it is believed that young people who internalize the basic politeness values will make worthy personalities who will do their best to do positive things for themselves, their family, the environment, the nation, and their country.

CONCLUSIONS

The study considers the issues related to the Kazakh concept of face and politeness. The concept of face is a very important aspect of the study of politeness. Unfortunately, finding a one-to-one translation of this concept in Kazakh is difficult. For Kazakhs, this issue is a serious matter. They highly value their “face,” and they try hard to live up not to stain their faces all their life.

Historically nomadic, the Kazakhs tried hard to implement the politeness principle ‘Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing.’ It was the only means to successfully survive in the vast steppe, arid nature, and nomadic way of life. By being mutually supportive, avoiding threats to face, and following politeness strategies, which help to prevent conflicts, people could maintain smooth relations and sustain fruitful cooperation. Politeness was socially prescribed.

All Kazakh customs and traditions promote positive politeness, a kind of ‘social accelerator,’ ensuring people ‘come closer’ and unite. Linguistic routines such as greeting, parting, address forms, thanking, and famous “Kazakh hospitality” form part of positive politeness.

Our study allows us to argue that politeness is a nationally specific communicative category, the content of which is the system of ritualized strategies of communicative behavior aimed at harmonious, non-aggressive communication and observance of socially appropriate norms. People try to choose the appropriate strategies to minimize any face threats involved in carrying out the goal-directed activity and comply with the rules for what society or their culture considers appropriate behavior.

The analysis of the survey data shows that the Kazakh youth perceive politeness as a component of their national culture and is governed by national customs and traditions. In their families, they are taught that practicing politeness strategies in day-to-day life will guarantee saving their faces and their parents’ faces (i.e., social approval and acceptance) which serve as a motivating force for them in social interactions.

The results of the data obtained from the survey place optimism that the Kazakhstani youth well understand and have internalized the basic politeness principles and politeness strategies. They also have assimilated that politeness is core to daily survival since being polite makes life much more comfortable, helps avoid conflicts, and promotes the feeling of community and social relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are grateful to the double-blind reviewers for taking the time and effort necessary to review the manuscript. We sincerely

appreciate all valuable comments and recommendations that helped the authors improve this study's quality.

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