

GREETING AS A SPEECH ACT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH, UZBEK AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract: Greeting is one of the most frequent forms of interpersonal communication and a conventional means of initiating, maintaining, or renewing social contact. Although the need to greet is universal, its linguistic forms and pragmatic meanings vary across languages and cultures. This study examines greeting as a speech act in English, Uzbek, and Russian from a comparative pragmatic and linguocultural perspective. Particular attention is paid to conventional, time-based, formal and informal greetings, welcoming expressions, phatic inquiries, and reunion formulas. The study combines Speech Act Theory, politeness theory, speech etiquette, and cross-cultural pragmatics and employs comparative, contextual, pragmatic, and linguocultural methods. The analysis demonstrates that the three languages share the basic function of establishing or renewing interpersonal contact, while differing in the ways formality, respect, familiarity, social distance, and cultural expectations are expressed. The findings show that greeting is not limited to lexical equivalents such as Hello, Salom, and Привет, but constitutes a multifunctional pragmatic field. The study contributes to comparative pragmatic research and has implications for intercultural communication, translation, and foreign-language teaching.

Keywords: greeting, speech act, pragmatics, politeness, speech etiquette, linguoculture, phatic communication, English, Uzbek, Russian.

Introduction

Language functions not only as a system for conveying information but also as a means of performing social actions. Speakers use language to request, promise, apologize, thank, congratulate, invite, and establish interpersonal relations. This action-oriented understanding of language constitutes one of the fundamental principles of Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and further elaborated by Searle (1969).

Greeting occupies a particularly important position among communicative acts because it commonly initiates interaction and establishes the interpersonal framework within which subsequent communication takes place. When a speaker says *Hello*, *Salom*, or *Здравствуйте*, the utterance does not merely transmit lexical information. It performs a social action: the speaker acknowledges the addressee and establishes or renews communicative contact (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

However, greeting is not limited to short lexical formulas. English, Uzbek, and Russian possess a relatively broad repertoire of greeting-related expressions. English includes *Hello*, *Hi*, *Hey*, *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, *Good evening*, *How do you do?*, *Nice to see you*, and *Long time no see*. Uzbek uses forms such as *Salom*, *Assalomu alaykum*, *Xush kelibsiz*, *Yaxshimisiz?*, *Qalaysiz?* and *Ko'rishmaganimizga ancha bo'ldi*. Russian includes *Привет*, *Здравствуй*, *Здравствуйте*, *Доброе утро*, *Добрый день*, *Добрый вечер*, *Добро пожаловать*, *Рад вас видеть*, *Как дела?*, and *Давно не виделись*. These forms do not all perform exactly the same function; some are core greetings, while others extend or reinforce the greeting act.

Consequently, a comparative study should not treat greeting as a simple set of lexical equivalents. The distinction between *Hi* and *How are you?*, for example, is pragmatically relevant: the



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first primarily establishes contact, whereas the second may function as a phatic inquiry accompanying or following a greeting. Similarly, *Welcome*, *Xush kelibsiz*, and *Добро пожаловать* primarily express welcoming upon someone's arrival rather than functioning as unrestricted equivalents of *Hello*. Russian greeting resources also distinguish conventional forms such as *Привет*, *Здравствуйте*, time-based greetings, *Как дела?*, and *Давно не виделись*.

Greeting is also closely related to politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) demonstrate that linguistic choices in interpersonal communication are influenced by social distance and relative power. Leech (1983) likewise emphasizes the role of politeness in regulating interpersonal relations. These principles are particularly relevant to greeting because speakers normally select formulas according to the degree of familiarity, respect, formality, and social distance between participants.

The cross-cultural dimension is equally important. Wierzbicka (1991) emphasizes the relationship between communicative practices and culturally specific conceptualizations, while Duranti (1997) demonstrates that greeting practices may perform broader social actions than simple acknowledgment. Thus, a greeting may simultaneously establish contact, signal respect, express solidarity, indicate familiarity, welcome an arriving person, or mark the resumption of contact after a period of absence.

Russian linguistic research has traditionally examined greeting within the broader system of speech etiquette. Formanovskaya (1987) emphasizes the relationship between etiquette formulas, communicative situations, social roles, and interpersonal relations. Uzbek pragmalinguistic research likewise considers communicative meaning in relation to context, communicative intention, and participants (Safarov, 2008; Hakimov, 2013).

The present study therefore approaches greeting as a pragmatic field rather than a single lexical category. The aim is to identify similarities and differences in the realization of greeting in English, Uzbek, and Russian, with particular attention to the relationship between linguistic form, communicative function, social relations, and cultural specificity.

1. The study addresses the following research questions:
2. What major types of greeting-related formulas occur in English, Uzbek, and Russian?
3. What pragmatic functions do these formulas perform?
4. How do formality, familiarity, age, and social distance influence their use?
5. What universal and culture-specific characteristics can be identified?

The central hypothesis is that greeting is universal at the level of its basic interactional function, while its linguistic and pragmatic realization is language- and culture-specific.

Methods

The study employs a qualitative comparative methodology combining pragmatic, contextual, comparative, and linguocultural analysis.

The **comparative method** is used to identify similarities and differences between greeting formulas in English, Uzbek, and Russian. The comparison considers not only lexical meaning but also communicative function, degree of formality, and sociocultural conditions of use.

The **pragmatic method** is employed to determine what communicative action is performed through a particular expression. Speech Act Theory provides the basis for interpreting greeting as an illocutionary act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

The **contextual method** is used because the same expression may acquire different pragmatic implications depending on the participants and circumstances of communication.

The **linguocultural method** makes it possible to identify culturally conditioned meanings associated with greeting practices (Wierzbicka, 1991).

The analysis is organized according to the following sequence:

formula → communicative function → context → social relationship → pragmatic meaning → cultural specificity.

Data Collection

The empirical material consists of representative greeting and greeting-related formulas in English, Uzbek, and Russian, with particular attention to their use in literary and discourse contexts.

Rather than treating every expression containing a greeting-related meaning as belonging to a single category, the study distinguishes several functional groups.

Table 1. Major Greeting Formula Types in English, Uzbek and Russian

Functional group	English	Uzbek	Russian
Basic greeting	<i>Hello, Hi, Hey</i>	<i>Salom, Assalomu alaykum</i>	<i>Привет, Здравствуй, Здравствуйте</i>
Time-based greeting	<i>Good morning, Good afternoon, Good evening</i>	<i>Xayrli tong, Xayrli kun</i>	<i>Доброе утро, Добрый день, Добрый вечер</i>
Formal greeting	<i>How do you do?</i>	<i>Assalomu alaykum</i>	<i>Здравствуйте, Добрый день</i>
Welcoming	<i>Welcome, Welcome back</i>	<i>Xush kelibsiz</i>	<i>Добро пожаловать</i>
Greeting + inquiry	<i>How are you?, How have you been?</i>	<i>Qalaysiz?, Yaxshimisiz?</i>	<i>Как дела?, Как поживаете?</i>
Positive meeting formula	<i>Nice to see you, Good to see you</i>	<i>Sizni ko‘rib turganimdan xursandman</i>	<i>Рад вас видеть, Рад снова вас видеть</i>
Reunion formula	<i>Long time no see</i>	<i>Ko‘rishmaganimizga ancha bo‘ldi</i>	<i>Давно не виделись</i>

This classification is deliberately functional. It recognizes that some expressions, such as *How are you?* and *Как дела?*, are not identical to core greetings but commonly accompany greeting exchanges and contribute to their phatic function.

Data Analysis

Basic Greeting Formulas

The first group consists of conventional formulas whose primary function is to establish or renew interpersonal contact.

In English, *Hello* represents a relatively neutral greeting, while *Hi* and *Hey* are generally associated with more informal interaction. In Uzbek, *Salom* functions as a common greeting, whereas *Assalomu alaykum* carries an additional dimension of respect and culturally conventionalized interpersonal recognition. In Russian, *Привет* is strongly associated with informal interaction, while *Здравствуйте* occupies a more formal and respectful position (Formanovskaya, 1987).

Thus, although *Hello–Salom–Привет* may be regarded as broadly corresponding forms, they cannot be considered absolute equivalents because their pragmatic distributions are conditioned by social and contextual factors.

Time-Based Greeting Formulas

A second group consists of greetings referring to the time of interaction.

English uses *Good morning*, *Good afternoon*, and *Good evening*. Russian has corresponding forms *Доброе утро*, *Добрый день*, and *Добрый вечер*. Uzbek also permits expressions such as *Xayrli tong* and *Xayrli kun*, although the frequency and pragmatic distribution of time-based formulas differ from those of English and Russian.



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Time-based greetings demonstrate that greeting can incorporate contextual information into the speech act itself. The greeting is therefore not simply an acknowledgment of the addressee but may also orient the interaction toward the temporal circumstances in which it occurs.

Formal and Respectful Greetings

One of the clearest dimensions of greeting is the distinction between formal and informal interaction.

The English expression *How do you do?* is particularly interesting because, unlike the ordinary question *How are you?*, it traditionally functions as a highly formal greeting, especially in first meetings or formal introductions. It should therefore be treated as a conventionalized greeting formula rather than interpreted literally as an inquiry about the addressee's state.

In Uzbek, *Assalomu alaykum* can perform a respectful greeting function across a broad range of social contexts. Its pragmatic significance is closely connected with culturally established norms of respect and interpersonal recognition.

Russian provides a particularly visible contrast between *Привет* and *Здравствуйте*. The former generally signals familiarity and informality, while the latter is appropriate in more formal or socially distant interaction (Formanovskaya, 1987).

The comparison demonstrates that formality may be encoded directly in greeting formulas or may be established through the interaction of formula and context.

Welcoming Formulas

Another important group consists of welcoming expressions:

- English: *Welcome, Welcome back, Welcome to...*
- Uzbek: *Xush kelibsiz*
- Russian: *Добро пожаловать*.

These expressions differ from ordinary greetings because their primary pragmatic function is to acknowledge and positively evaluate the arrival of a person.

For example, *Welcome to our university*, *Universitetimizga xush kelibsiz*, and *Добро пожаловать в наш университет* share a welcoming function, but they also construct a particular relationship between the host and the arriving person.

The Uzbek *Xush kelibsiz* is therefore more appropriately compared with English *Welcome* and Russian *Добро пожаловать* than with *Hello* or *Привет*. The distinction illustrates the importance of **functional equivalence rather than purely lexical equivalence** in comparative pragmatics.

Greeting and Phatic Inquiry

Greeting frequently occurs together with a short inquiry concerning the addressee's condition.

English provides expressions such as:

How are you? How have you been? How's it going?

Uzbek uses:

Qalaysiz? Yaxshimisiz? Ishlaringiz yaxshimi?

Russian provides:

Как дела? Как поживаете? Как жизнь?

These expressions should not automatically be classified as direct equivalents of *Hello*. Their principal function may be phatic: they maintain interpersonal contact and demonstrate interest in the addressee. This distinction is particularly important because a literal translation does not always reproduce the same pragmatic effect. The communicative function depends on whether the question is intended to obtain genuine information or primarily to maintain social contact.

Greeting and Positive Evaluation

Another group combines greeting with an explicit expression of positive interpersonal attitude. English uses *Nice to see you* and *Good to see you*. Russian has *Рад вас видеть* and *Рад снова вас видеть*. Uzbek may employ expressions such as *Sizni ko'rib turganimdan xursandman*.



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These formulas perform at least two functions simultaneously: they acknowledge the interlocutor and express a positive emotional or interpersonal evaluation. This multifunctionality supports the view that greeting is not a narrowly defined lexical phenomenon but a broader pragmatic field.

Results

The comparative analysis demonstrates that greeting in English, Uzbek, and Russian forms a relatively broad pragmatic field rather than a single category. The results can be summarized in four principal observations. First, all three languages possess conventional formulas whose primary function is to establish or renew contact: *Hello/Hi*, *Salom/Assalomu alaykum*, and *Привет/Здравствуйте*. Second, greeting formulas may contain additional pragmatic meanings related to time, formality, respect, familiarity, welcoming, emotional attitude, or previous contact. Third, some greeting-related expressions are multifunctional. *How are you?*, *Qalaysiz?*, and *Kak дела?*, for example, may operate as phatic inquiries accompanying greeting. Similarly, *Nice to see you*, *Рад вас видеть*, and their Uzbek counterparts combine greeting with positive interpersonal evaluation. Fourth, the three languages differ not in the existence of greeting as a communicative need but in the distribution of pragmatic meanings across available linguistic forms.

The principal model can therefore be represented as:

Core greeting → temporal greeting → formal/respectful greeting → welcoming → phatic inquiry → positive evaluation → reunion formula.

This model demonstrates that greeting has both a core and a periphery. Core forms primarily establish contact, whereas peripheral or extended forms perform additional pragmatic functions.

Discussion

The results support the central hypothesis that greeting is universal at the functional level but variable at the linguistic and sociocultural levels. From the perspective of Speech Act Theory, the basic function of greeting is the establishment or renewal of interpersonal contact (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). However, the comparative evidence demonstrates that the realization of this function is considerably richer than the simple use of a lexical equivalent of “hello.”

Politeness theory helps explain why different greeting formulas are selected in different social situations. Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize social distance and relative power as important variables in interpersonal interaction. The contrast between *Hi* and *How do you do?*, *Salom* and *Assalomu alaykum*, or *Привет* and *Здравствуйте* demonstrates that greeting can index the relationship between participants. The data also support the relevance of speech etiquette. In Russian, for example, the conventional distinction between informal and formal formulas is strongly associated with the etiquette system described by Formanovskaya (1987). Uzbek greeting practices similarly demonstrate the importance of socially appropriate forms of respect, while English provides a broader range of contextually differentiated formulas.

The analysis of welcoming expressions further demonstrates that functional equivalence is more important than literal lexical equivalence. *Welcome*, *Xush kelibsiz*, and *Добро пожаловать* should be compared because they perform a welcoming function, even though they are not equivalent to *Hello*, *Salom*, or *Здравствуйте*. The same principle applies to *Long time no see*, *Ko‘rishmaganimizga ancha bo‘ldi*, and *Давно не виделись*. Their pragmatic meaning derives from the presupposition of previous contact and a period of absence.

Thus, the study suggests that greeting should be conceptualized as a multifunctional pragmatic field consisting of several interconnected subcategories. The universal element is the communicative need to acknowledge another person and establish or renew social contact. The culture-specific



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element lies in the linguistic choices through which respect, familiarity, social distance, hospitality, emotional involvement, and other meanings are encoded.

This interpretation is compatible with the cross-cultural perspective proposed by Wierzbicka (1991) and Duranti (1997), according to which communicative practices must be interpreted in relation to culturally specific patterns of interaction. Importantly, the findings should not be interpreted through rigid stereotypes. It would be inaccurate to claim that English greetings are simply “informal,” Uzbek greetings are always “respectful,” or Russian greetings are inherently “formal.” Each language possesses both formal and informal resources, and their interpretation depends on context, participants, and communicative purpose.

The more precise conclusion is that English, Uzbek, and Russian organize the pragmatic field of greeting through partially different linguistic and cultural resources.

Implications for Further Research

The present study suggests several directions for further research.

First, a larger multilingual corpus could be used to determine the frequency of particular greeting formulas in literary, conversational, and digital discourse.

Second, future research could examine greeting according to age, gender, social status, familiarity, and professional relationship.

Third, the relationship between verbal and non-verbal greeting deserves further investigation. Handshakes, nodding, eye contact, smiles, embraces, and physical distance may significantly modify the pragmatic interpretation of verbal formulas.

Fourth, digital communication represents an especially promising area. Forms such as *Hi*, *Salom*, and *Привет* may acquire different meanings depending on punctuation, emojis, capitalization, and the structure of the preceding interaction.

Finally, the findings may be applied to foreign-language teaching. Learners should be taught not only lexical equivalents of greeting but also when, with whom, and for what communicative purpose a particular formula is appropriate.

Conclusion

Greeting is a fundamental speech act through which speakers establish, initiate, maintain, or renew interpersonal contact. The comparative analysis of English, Uzbek, and Russian demonstrates that this communicative function is universal, whereas its linguistic and pragmatic realization is considerably more diverse. The study shows that greeting should not be restricted to basic formulas such as *Hello*, *Salom*, and *Привет*. The pragmatic field of greeting also includes time-based expressions, formal greetings, welcoming formulas, phatic inquiries, positive meeting formulas, and expressions associated with reunion after a period of absence.

The comparison of *How do you do?*, *Xush kelibsiz*, *Добро пожаловать*, *How are you?*, *Qalaysiz?*, *Как дела?*, *Nice to see you*, *Рад вас видеть*, and *Давно не виделись* demonstrates that greeting may simultaneously perform several communicative functions.

The principal conclusion is therefore that greeting is universal at the functional level but language-specific and culture-specific at the level of realization. Its interpretation depends on linguistic form, communicative context, social relationship, degree of formality, politeness, and culturally established expectations.

An integrated approach combining Speech Act Theory, politeness theory, pragmatics, speech etiquette, and linguocultural analysis provides a more adequate account of this phenomenon. Such an approach is relevant to theoretical linguistics as well as intercultural communication, translation, foreign-language teaching, and pragmatic competence development.



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