

“RESEARCH-BASED TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TRADITION AS A BASIS FOR INNOVATION”

International Conference on Teacher Education

ISLAM, THE WEST AND LINGUISTIC POLITENESS: A COMPARISON OF POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN AND THE UNITED STATES

Arlene Clachar,
*Professor Emerita,
University of Miami*

Fulbright U.S.,
*Scholar Uzbekistan
State University of
World Languages*

Linguistics as a field of knowledge emerged out of an endeavor aimed at giving voice to the colonial subaltern. As a discipline for expressing the diversity of others, it ironically created constructs of language out of processes of the invisibility of voice, the denial of cultural entanglements, and the suppression of experiences, histories, and indigenous languages – processes that were traumatic. Not surprisingly, the imposition of colonial values and meanings on indigenous languages and the “revoicing” of indigenous knowledge created in the colonial subject a feeling of existing absolutely for the other, a psychic split characteristic of feelings of detachment from a sense of integrity, self-worth, and human value. The use of politeness practices in the target language by foreign language (FL) speakers is exactly this story. In the area of pragmatics, a sub-discipline of linguistics, politeness practices in the target language (TL) almost always privilege the all-knowing “native speakers” or politeness experts. Their own experiences, histories, and values are at the fore-front of TL acquisition. Within the English language teaching profession, this approach entails the explanation of TL English politeness practices and patterns along with teaching FL speakers how to adhere to them. This paper arose out of the need to understand of the concept of linguistic politeness in TL English in a space where non-native speakers of English in the Central Asian country of Uzbekistan, namely, Uzbeks, non-Uzbek minority groups and Russians engage in linguistic politeness practices that frequently oppose and resist TL English norms and Western values, in other words, “contested politeness”.

Additionally, the paper sets out to understand the dynamic and vibrant dimension to TL English politeness in Uzbekistan, a multilingual and Islamic context in which FL speakers position themselves and others across/within multiple social worlds and discursive sites (home, mosque, the university campus, the university language classroom, peer group social sites, and the workplace). The

“RESEARCH-BASED TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHER EDUCATION: TRADITION AS A BASIS FOR INNOVATION”

International Conference on Teacher Education

geographic center of Islamic revival in Central Asia is Uzbekistan which is the most densely populated of all Central Asian countries and with a reputation, even during the Soviet period, for being a bastion of Islam. Uzbekistan is a space where Russia, Islam and Western nations have been in a contentious battle for geopolitical supremacy. This supremacy has created ideological forces which manifest themselves in how Central Asians view politeness in target language English.

The paper builds on the notion that FL speakers’ underlying purpose of communicating in TL English is to connect with other individuals, relate to other groups and gain insights into other cultures. In so doing, the paper positions FL speakers and thus, FL politeness practices within the context of everyday TL English interaction where discourses of representation are at play within multiple social worlds. The FL speakers in this paper are multilinguals (speakers of Uzbek, non-Uzbek languages and Russian) who negotiate identities across multiple social worlds and discourse sites which have been shaped by histories and experiences stemming from state structure and centers of power inherited from the Soviet era and which have remained largely intact in present-day Uzbekistan ; histories and experiences stemming from an Islamic revival after suffering sustained assault under seven decades of Soviet hegemony; histories and experiences stemming from the imposition of Russian during the Soviet rule; political demands stemming from the West, particularly from the United States, due to concerns about the rise of political Islam and Afghanization in the region; and the pressure of TL English acquisition driven by Western political, economic and security interests, mainly those designed to block potential rivals such as Russia, China and Iran from gaining influence in the Central Asian countries. TL English politeness practices take place in a space where FL speakers in the Central Asian country of Uzbekistan, namely, Uzbeks, non-Uzbek minority groups and Russians engage in linguistic politeness practices that frequently oppose and resist TL English norms and Western values, in other words, “contested politeness”.