

A Comparative Analysis Of Address Terms In Korean And Uzbek

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of address terms in Korean and Uzbek from lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, and linguocultural perspectives. It focuses on how forms of address express age, social status, kinship, professional position, familiarity, and formality between interlocutors. Korean forms such as 호칭어 (hochingö, address terms), title + 님 (-nim), 씨 (-ssi), 선생님 (seonsaengnim), and speech levels are compared with Uzbek forms such as “siz/sen” (formal/informal ‘you’), “aka/opa” (older brother/sister), “ustoz/domla” (teacher), and “janob/xonim” (Mr./Ms.).

Keywords: address terms, Korean, Uzbek, 호칭어, honorifics, speech etiquette, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, comparative analysis

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Introduction. The way people address one another in communication provides important information about their relationship, the communicative situation, and cultural norms. An address term is a word or phrase used to name an interlocutor, address them directly, or indicate their social role. Such forms may include personal names, kinship terms, occupational or professional titles, honorific suffixes, pronouns, and other lexical and grammatical devices. Although address terms are closely related to vocatives, this study focuses particularly on their pragmatic functions: expressing an attitude towards the interlocutor, initiating interaction, attracting attention, and establishing social distance.

Comparing Korean and Uzbek provides a productive way to examine this phenomenon. In both societies, age, status, kinship, and respect influence norms of communication, although these factors are not expressed through identical linguistic devices. In Korean, the choice of address term often works together with honorific verb forms and sentence-final speech levels. In Uzbek, the “sen/siz” distinction, the use of kinship terms for non-relatives, professional titles, and the honorific use of the plural suffix “-lar” are important. Studies by Choi (2007), Son (2010), and Lee (2020) show that Korean address choices depend on social relationships and context [1–3]. The social and cultural functions of Uzbek forms of address and kinship terms have also been discussed by Akbarova (2007) and subsequent studies [4, 5]. The translation of kinship terms in Korean and Uzbek has likewise been examined in comparative research [6].

The aim of this article is to identify the main types of address terms in Korean and Uzbek, compare their sociopragmatic functions, and highlight key differences that arise in translation and intercultural communication. The objectives are to explain the concept of address terms, describe the principal forms in both languages, systematize their similarities and differences, and draw implications for translation practice and language teaching.

Research methodology. The article draws on descriptive, comparative-typological, contextual, and linguopragmatic methods. The material includes scholarly studies of Korean address terms, examples established in Korean linguistics, academic sources on Uzbek forms of address, and common everyday utterances in both languages. The examples are analytical and illustrative; they are not presented as statistical findings obtained from a dedicated survey or a large corpus. Accordingly, the conclusions concern a qualitative comparison of the two systems and do not claim to cover every regional, intergenerational, or stylistic variation.

Theoretical foundations of address terms. Address terms belong to the lexical-semantic system of a language, while their use is closely connected with sociolinguistics and pragmatics. The same word may convey different meanings in different situations. For example, Uzbek “aka” may indicate a kinship relationship, serve as a respectful form of address to an older unfamiliar man, or increase warmth in some informal situations. Similarly, Korean 선생님 (seonsaengnim) means “teacher” in an educational setting but can also function as a respectful form of address in certain service or everyday contexts. Thus, the meaning of an address term is not limited to its dictionary definition; it emerges through the relationship between participants and the situation [1, 3, 5].

Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory emphasizes that linguistic choices take account of an interlocutor’s social self-image, need for

respect, and the distance maintained in interaction. Forms of address are part of these strategies: they may signal closeness, maintain formality, or acknowledge social status [7]. However, whether a particular form is considered polite or inappropriate is not universal; it depends on the norms of the speech community and the specific context. For analytical purposes, address terms can be provisionally grouped into personal names and honorific forms attached to names; kinship terms; occupational, positional, and social-role titles; pronouns; general expressions of respect or familiarity; and grammatical honorific devices. This classification is not identical across the two languages, but it provides a useful model for comparison.

Address terms in Korean: names, titles, and honorific suffixes. The Korean term 호칭어 (hochingö) refers to expressions used to address an interlocutor. The choice of address form depends on age, familiarity, status, situation, and the relationship between speakers. Choi (2007) notes that address terms are sensitive not only to social relationships but also to context: a form appropriate in one relationship may seem unsuitable in another [1]. Son (2010) classifies modern Korean address terms into groups such as general and kinship forms and identifies a relationship between the type of address and the speech level used towards the listener [2]. One common form is the honorific suffix -님 (-nim), often attached to titles or role nouns to show respect: 선생님 (seonsaengnim, teacher), 교수님 (gyosunim, professor), and 사장님 (sajangnim, company director or boss). Depending on context, these may be translated into Uzbek as “ustoz,” “professor,” “rahbar,” or “janob”; however, -님 has no single Uzbek equivalent in every situation.

The suffix 씨 (-ssi) is generally used with a personal name and conveys a neutral or polite form of address. For example, 민수 씨 (Minsu-ssi) is a polite way to address a person named Minsu. However, it is not appropriate for people of every status: in some situations, using a name + 씨 for a senior or someone who deserves particular respect may sound insufficiently deferential. Learners of Korean should therefore choose address forms by considering the social situation, rather than relying on dictionary meaning alone [1, 3].

Kinship terms are also important means of address in Korean. 형 (hyeong) is used by a male speaker for an older brother or a familiar older man; 누나 (nuna) by a male speaker for an older sister or familiar older woman;

언니 (eonni) by a female speaker for an older woman; and 오빠 (oppa) by a female speaker for an older brother or familiar older man. These forms can be used beyond biological kinship, although such use depends on familiarity and social norms. Korean kinship terms therefore indicate not only family relationships but also social distance between interlocutors.

Speech levels and grammatical honorifics. One distinctive feature of Korean is its system for expressing respect towards the listener through verb forms at the end of a sentence. Commonly distinguished forms include 합시다체 (hamnida-che), associated with formal and polite speech, and 해요체 (haeyo-che), used for everyday polite communication. In close, informal relationships, 해체 (hae-che), also known as banmal, may be used. This is a simplified classification; Korean linguistics offers more detailed accounts of speech levels. The key point is that the address term and sentence ending jointly communicate the social relationship. A formal address followed by an excessively informal verb ending may create a stylistic mismatch in some situations [3, 8]. Korean also uses the suffix -시- (-si-) on verbs to honor the subject. For example, 가다 (gada, “to go”) has the honorific form 가시다 (gasida), while 드시다 (deusida) is an honorific lexical alternative to 먹다 (meokda, “to eat”). Although these are not direct address terms, they form part of the honorific system in combination with forms of address. Korean politeness must therefore be studied not only in terms of whom one calls by which name, but also through verb forms and sentence endings [8].

Pronouns and the expression of respect. In Uzbek, the pronouns “sen” and “siz” are important grammatical and pragmatic means of address. “Sen” often signals familiarity or is used with peers and younger people, whereas “siz” may convey respect, formality, or social distance. This distinction is not an absolute rule: usage varies among family members, friends, and regional speech traditions. When “siz” is used respectfully for one person, it takes a plural verb form, as in “Siz keldingizmi?” (“Have you arrived?”) and “Yaxshimisiz?” (“How are you?”). Thus, grammatical plurality can also express respect in Uzbek. Compared with Korean speech levels, Uzbek “siz” is an important honorific device but does not encompass several systematic sentence-final levels of the Korean type. Respect in Uzbek is generally conveyed through the combined use of pronouns, person-number forms of verbs, address terms, intonation, and context. Therefore, translating Korean honorific levels solely with “siz” may not always be sufficient.

Kinship terms and social address in Uzbek. Terms such as aka (older brother), opa (older sister), uka (younger brother), singil (younger sister), amaki (paternal uncle), xola (maternal aunt), tog'a (maternal uncle), ota (father), ona (mother), bobo (grandfather), and buvi (grandmother) express family relationships but are also used to address people who are not relatives. For example, "aka" or "opa" can be used to address an older person with respect and warmth. Forms such as "amaki," "xola," "otaxon," and "onaxon" may express intergenerational respect in certain situations. This extended use of kinship terms is an important linguocultural feature of Uzbek speech, expressing social closeness and respect beyond biological relationships [4, 5].

The use of these forms may vary according to region, age, family custom, and situation. For instance, "opa" may refer to one's actual older sister in one context and serve as a respectful address to an unfamiliar woman in another. Likewise, "bolam" ("my child"), "qizim" ("my daughter"), and "o'g'lim" ("my son") may be used by older speakers to address younger people affectionately. These forms are not appropriate in every situation, however; in a formal business meeting, addressing someone by their professional title or name may be preferable.

Professional titles and general honorific forms. Uzbek forms such as "ustoz" (teacher/mentor), "domla" (teacher/lecturer), "muallim" (teacher), "professor," "doktor" (doctor), "rahbar" (manager/leader), "janob" (Mr./sir), and "xonim" (Ms./madam) acknowledge a person's profession, position, or social status. "Ustoz" and "domla" are commonly used as respectful forms of address in educational settings, but they are not always interchangeable: "domla" may be associated with particular educational traditions and environments, while "ustoz" can convey broader respect and esteem. "Janob" and "xonim" may be used in formal or public speech, especially alongside a name or title. In Uzbek, respect is expressed not only through address terms but also through requests and questions, as in "Marhamat, o'tiring" ("Please, have a seat"), "Aytsangiz" ("Could you tell me"), and "Iltimos, kutib turing" ("Please wait"). Address terms should therefore be studied as part of a broader communicative strategy, rather than as an isolated list of words.

A comparison of Korean and Uzbek. In both languages, age, social status, familiarity, and the communicative situation influence the choice of address forms. However, the degree to which these factors are grammatically encoded differs. In Korean, the address term, honorific suffix, subject honorific, and listener-appropriate sentence ending form an interconnected system. In Uzbek, lexical choice of address, the "sen/siz" distinction, verb person-number forms, kinship terms, and polite expressions play a major role.

The first similarity is that kinship terms in both languages can serve social functions beyond biological relationships. Korean 형, 누나, 언니, and 오빠, as well as Uzbek aka and opa, may be used for non-relatives in certain circumstances. They are not fully equivalent, however: Korean forms are more explicitly constrained by the speaker's gender and the age relationship, whereas Uzbek choices depend on kinship categories, age, local customs, and context.

A second similarity is that address forms denoting profession or status convey respect. Korean forms such as 교수님 (professor-nim) and 선생님 (teacher-nim) are functionally similar to Uzbek “professor,” “ustoz,” and “domla.” However, Korean -님 attaches to particular words as a conventionalized honorific element, while Uzbek often expresses respect through a separate lexical item or phrase. A third difference is the systematic selection of sentence-final honorific levels in Korean: the same content may be expressed with different verb endings depending on the social situation. Uzbek also has forms suited to different levels of politeness, but these do not constitute as extensive or grammatically obligatory a system of levels as in Korean. In translation from Korean into Uzbek, respect encoded in sentence endings may therefore need to be conveyed through a pronoun, address term, verb form, or polite expression. A fourth difference concerns the construction of address with personal names. In Korean, name + 씨 may be polite in some contexts but inappropriate depending on status. Uzbek uses a bare name, name + aka/opa, name + ustoz, or a professional title. This shows why mechanical substitution should be avoided: translating 씨 invariably as “Mr./Ms.” or -님 as “honourable” may sound unnatural.

The main differences are summarized in the following table:

Criterion	Korean	Uzbek
Pronoun-based address	Pronouns are available, but respect is also strongly encoded through sentence endings.	The “sen/siz” distinction is important for expressing respect and familiarity.
Kinship terms	Forms such as 형, 누나, 언니, and 오빠 are sensitive to the speaker's gender and age relationship.	Terms such as aka, opa, amaki, and xola may also be used for non-relatives.

Honorific suffix	-님 (-nim) is attached to titles and role nouns to express respect.	Respect is often expressed through separate words such as ustoz, domla, janob, and xonim.
Sentence endings	Speech levels such as 합니다체, 해요체, and 해체 are selected.	Respect is conveyed through pronouns, verb forms, lexical items, and polite expressions.
Role of context	Coordination between the address term and sentence ending is important.	Address terms, pronouns, intonation, and speech etiquette jointly convey meaning.

Practical examples and translation issues. The following examples illustrate functional similarities between address forms in the two languages and demonstrate why translation requires attention to context. They are constructed examples for explanation, not statistical examples drawn from a corpus.

1) Korean: 선생님, 질문이 있습니다. (Seonsaengnim, jilmun-i itseumnida.) — Uzbek: “Ustoz, savolim bor” (“Teacher, I have a question”). Here, 선생님 respectfully acknowledges the person’s educational or service role. “Ustoz” is usually a natural Uzbek equivalent, although “o‘qituvchi” (“teacher”) or “domla” may be more appropriate depending on context.

2) Korean: 민수 씨, 잠깐 괜찮아요? (Minsu-ssi, jamkkan gwaenchanayo?) — Uzbek: “Minsu, bir daqiqa vaqtingiz bormi?” (“Minsu, do you have a moment?”). The suffix 씨 may not need a separate word in Uzbek; respect can instead be conveyed by the form “vaqtingiz” and the polite structure of the sentence. This illustrates the importance of functional rather than formal equivalence in translation.

3) Uzbek: “Aka, bekat qayerda?” (“Excuse me, where is the bus stop?”). In Korean, depending on the situation, a polite opening such as 실례합니다 (sillyehamnida, “excuse me”) and an appropriate address strategy may be chosen. Translating “aka” invariably as 형 would be incorrect because 형 is constrained by the speaker’s gender and the age relationship between the speakers. Another strategy may be more natural when addressing a stranger in Korean.

4) Uzbek: “Siz keldingizmi, ustoz?” (“Have you arrived, teacher?”). A polite Korean rendering may be 선생님, 오셨어요? (Seonsaengnim, osyeosseoyo?). Respect here is expressed not only by the address term but also by the honorific verb form and sentence ending. Although the Korean and Uzbek sentences are similar in meaning, respect is grammatically distributed differently. Three principles are important in translation. First, identify the communicative function of a form rather than relying only on its literal meaning. Second, consider the speakers’ age, status, gender, degree of familiarity, and the setting. Third, recognize that a grammatical marker of respect in one language may be compensated for by other devices in the other language. This approach prevents equivalence from being reduced to word-for-word correspondence. The comparison shows that address terms play an important role in expressing social order and interpersonal relationships in both Korean and Uzbek. In both languages, respect goes beyond acknowledging age or position: it can also convey familiarity, warmth, formality, and stance towards the interlocutor. However, because honorifics are deeply integrated into Korean grammar, address forms are difficult to analyze separately from the rest of the sentence. In Uzbek, the pragmatic potential of kinship terms and the pronoun “siz” is particularly significant. Address norms in both languages are also dynamic. Contemporary education, workplaces, digital communication, and intergenerational relations may give rise to new usages. Sociolinguistic studies of Korean address terms increasingly consider online forms, professional status, and choices in real-life situations [3]. It is therefore more useful to study how traditional forms operate in context than to memorize them as inflexible rules. A limitation of this article is that the analysis is qualitative; no quantitative calculations were conducted using a dedicated questionnaire, recorded conversations, or a parallel corpus. Future research could collect speech data from different age groups, regions, and formal and informal settings, compare Korean–Uzbek translations in a parallel corpus, and investigate address-selection errors made by language learners.

Conclusion. Although address terms in Korean and Uzbek differ in form, they perform similar communicative functions: identifying the interlocutor, expressing respect or familiarity, regulating social distance, and establishing an appropriate tone for interaction. In both languages, kinship terms can be used outside the family to express warmth and respect. Professional names and titles are also important for acknowledging social roles.

The main difference lies in the grammatical expression of respect. In Korean, -님, -시-, and sentence-final speech levels form a complementary system of honorific expression. In Uzbek, the “sen/siz” distinction, verb

person-number forms, kinship and professional address terms, and polite expressions occupy a central position. Consequently, translating address terms between Korean and Uzbek requires an approach based on context and communicative function rather than one-to-one lexical substitution. For language teaching, address forms should be taught not as isolated words but within complete communicative situations. Learners should be encouraged to consider the interlocutor's age, status, degree of familiarity, and the formality of the setting when choosing an address term. This approach can reduce pragmatic errors in intercultural communication and help develop intercultural competence.

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