



Research Article

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Politeness in the German Ethnosocium: The Diachronic Aspect

Svetlana Takhtarova

Ramil Khairutdinov

Darya Abuzyarova

Olga Morosova

Kazan Federal University

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the consideration of the main characteristics of politeness as a sociocultural phenomenon based on the material of the German linguistic culture in a historical perspective; a general characteristic of codified and individual politeness is given. The dominant features of German politeness in the diachronic aspect are determined. The ambivalent attitude towards politeness in the German ethnic society was determined not only by the development of society, but also by foreign policy priorities in a specific historical period. Calls for politeness intensified in Germany at historical turning points and were aimed either at reminding the new, emerging social strata of the norms of behavior of the older generation, or with the goal of reporting on the virtues of the new social class. The paper concluded that German politeness throughout its development was marked by the confrontation of two directions - the desire for tactful, indirect politeness and commitment to critical ethics, advocating traditional German honesty and frankness. The juxtaposition of formal, external and internal politeness is consistently carried out in studies devoted to various aspects of politeness on the material of the German linguistic culture. The article presents the results of an associative experiment aimed at determining how the German language speakers understand politeness and allowed to establish the modification of the dominants of politeness and polite behavior in the modern German ethnic society.

Keywords: Linguistics, language, learning, communication, speech, experiment, cultural dominants

1. Introduction

Interest in politeness as a social and linguistic phenomenon was clearly appeared in the last decades of the 20th century, as evidenced by a large number of researches devoted to the study of this phenomenon in both domestic and foreign linguistics [Gazizov, 2011; Larina, 2009; Takhtarova, 2015; Brown and Levinson, 1987 ; Leech, 1983; Kasper, 1990; Avazzadeh, 2015; Nebessayeva et al, 2018; Mendoza & Mendoza, 2018]. The norms of politeness, which constitute the ethical aspect of the communicative act, are consistently systematized in the form of maxims, postulates, principles of communication; the discursive characteristics of politeness and situational conditionality of polite strategies are rather heavily investigated.

Such active attention of linguists to this phenomenon seems to be quite natural, because the decisive condition for the success of any socially determined communicative activity is to follow ethical norms of communication, among which politeness plays a crucial role in achieving success of interaction. However, despite the fact that linguists have often mentioned this phenomenon in the context of their research, there is still no consensus on the nature of the analyzed phenomenon,

which is defined as a concept, category or strategy.

2. Methods

In studies on the communicative aspect of politeness, it is noted that along with conventional or ritualized politeness, including speech etiquette, individual politeness plays a special role in communication. Therefore, in particular, H. Haferland and I. Paul distinguish three levels of functioning of politeness: elementary, codified and reflective politeness [Haferland and Paul, 1996, p. 51]. Elementary politeness is established by customs, traditions, and functions at the level of habitual forms of behavior in everyday communication. Codified politeness determines behavior in certain social situations and is reflected in etiquette or diplomatic protocol. For this type of politeness, which is ceremonial in nature and regulates behavior regardless of the addressee, the status and situational characteristics of the speech contact behavior are particularly important.

Reflective politeness is determined only by the speaker himself in each specific communication situation and combines the forms of elementary and codified politeness. This kind of politeness is also defined as implicit [Rathmayr, 1996, p. 371] or individual [Vorderwülbecke, 2002, p. 267] politeness.

3. Results and Discussion

In recent decades, in German linguistic science, the phenomenon of politeness has also become the subject of numerous studies that address various aspects of this phenomenon [Lüger, 2002; Kotthoff, 2003; Mnich, 2003; Nixdorf, 2002; etc.]. In the overwhelming majority of works, an ambivalent attitude to politeness in German linguistic culture is noted, this attitude is reflected, in particular, in the definitions given to this phenomenon by J.W. Goethe: in his frequently cited phrase from *Faust* – *Im Deutschen lügt man, wenn man höflich ist*, and in his diametrically opposite characteristic of politeness as courtesy of the heart – *Es gibt eine Höflichkeit des Herzens; sie ist der Liebe verwandt*.

It is interesting, in our opinion, the fact that changes in the understanding of politeness were determined in German linguistic culture not only by the development of society, but also by foreign policy priorities in a given historical period. Thus, in particular, the tension in relations between Germany and France in the 18th century served as one of the reasons for the criticism of court politeness characteristic of French society, and the opposition of German sincere and honest politeness in the works of Herder and Lessing [Felderer and Macho, 2002, p. 13].

According to C. Schmölders, calls for politeness, demands for polite behavior and reissues of books on etiquette appeared in Germany at historical critical times - in 1789, 1871, 1945 and 1989, and were directed either to remind new, emerging social strata of the norm behavior of the older generation, or, as in the textbook on etiquette A. Knigge (1788), to report the virtues of the new social class [Schmölders, 2002, p. 536].

According to S. Scharnowski, in the middle of the 18th century in Germany there was a process of replacing the French model of court politeness, which was actively criticized by Herder and Lessing, with a model of polite behavior, which was formed within the framework of the young bourgeois class and was closely related to criticism of the last everything that was determined by the noble court traditions [Scharnowski, 1996, p. 105]. In contrast to the French politeness-mask in German bourgeois society, the "politeness of the heart", based on naturalness and sincerity in expressing oneself and in relation to others, is gaining increasing recognition.

Thus, from the second half of the 18th century, the concepts of "Aufrichtigkeit" and "Natürlichkeit" (sincerity and naturalness) stand out as key signs of politeness in German culture. The tendency towards simplification of ceremonial etiquette that emerged in this connection is intensified in the 19th century, which is reflected not only at the level of norms, but also in specific behaviors in the German ethnosocium, as well as in the classical question of German linguistic culture, regarding behavior and attitudes towards others – which is more important to be or to appear? (*mehr sein als scheinen*?). A. Linke, analyzing the formation of bourgeois politeness in the 19th century German society, gives Rudolf von Jhering's reasoning, who included the principle of

politeness in a quartet of social imperatives, in which the imperative of politeness (*Scheine!*) is opposed to the imperative of morality (*Sei!*). And then the author notes the fundamental distinction made in the era of the establishment of bourgeois society between the aristocratic "Seem!" and the bourgeois "Be!" [Linke, 1996, p. 96-97].

This problem loses its relevance in the days of national socialism, when the number of books published on etiquette is sharply reduced, and in those that are published, correct behavior, implying unconditional obedience and fulfillment of all the requirements of elders, is promoted. Anyone who wants to become a leader himself must learn to obey – this is the basic commandment of correct behavior [Zillig, 2002, p. 64]. The postwar years, especially the 60-70s of the 20th century, were marked in Germany by a new wave of criticism of insincere, false politeness and the demands of a new aesthetics. According to W. Zillig, in the discussion of various aspects of politeness and tact in numerous publications on etiquette that appeared in the second half of the last century, three main points can be distinguished: 1) the interpretation of politeness in books on etiquette, which were published in the 50s of the 20th century, was largely determined by the following keynote – We have already experienced *this* (the times of National Socialism), and now we are talking about the revival of the old culture, 2) the rules of which need to be modernized, and hopelessly outdated to be abolished, and 3) to recognize the requirement of naturalness and honesty in behavior as a special aspect of this modernization [Valtl, 1986, Kalegina, 2015; Ardakani et al, 2015].

4. Summary

Thus, the foregoing suggests that German politeness throughout its formation and development is characterized by the confrontation of two directions - supporters of tactful, indirect politeness and adherents of critical ethics who advocate traditional German honesty and frankness. The oppositeness of formal, external and internal, cordial politeness is consistently carried out in books and reference books on etiquette, as well as in studies devoted to various problems of politeness on the material of German linguistic culture.

In order to find out how the German language speakers understand politeness today, we conducted a directed associative experiment in the form of an anonymous questioning, which was attended by over 50 people aged from 20 to 76 years old, of different social status (students, housewives, medical and scientific employees, employees, businessmen, pensioners). The informants were asked to define politeness and characterize a polite person. Analysis of the answers revealed a number of interesting points in the views on politeness among representatives of German culture.

The respondents answering to the question how they understand the word "politeness", identified the following components of politeness as key:

- a. kindness, respect for other people,
- b. helpfulness,
- c. ability to listen to the interlocutor,
- d. tact and in particular tactful omission.

We would like to mention the following interpretations of politeness and a polite person as the most indicative:

ein wichtiges Merkmal von Zivilisation, Rücksicht auf bewährte Konventionen des zwischenmenschlichen Umgangs; sich nicht (immer) durchsetzen wollen; Etikette, sich zu benehmen wissen; Ich verstehe darunter jemanden, der anderen Menschen sein eigenes Ich nicht aufdrängt; ein höflicher Mensch ist zuvorkommend, liebenswürdig, aufmerksam; Achtung und Respekt vor anderen Personen und vor Sachen (vor dem Eigentum anderer Personen); helfen (z.B. einer älteren Dame den Koffer zum Bahnsteig hinauf tragen).

As shown by the responses of the informants, positive politeness plays an important role for the German ethnosocium. To illustrate this fact, the following characteristics of a polite person can be given: *Der höfliche Mensch wendet seinem Gegenüber ungeteilte Aufmerksamkeit zu und hat ein Gespür dafür, wie sich die betreffende Person fühlt. Er bemüht sich, andere Menschen zu verstehen und sein Verhalten danach auszurichten. Das tut er nicht in einer kalten berechnenden*

Weise, sondern lässt menschliche Wärme spüren, wahr aber dabei zugleich Distanz zum anderen.

At the same time, it should be noted that “privacy” or the autonomy of a person, which is the most important concept of English culture, is also important for German linguistic culture. This can be confirmed by the fact that German respondents note unobtrusiveness and ability to maintain interpersonal distance among the components of politeness: *andere durch dein eigenes Verhalten nicht stören; Distanz wahren; niemals aufdrängen; die Privatsphäre des anderen wahrzunehmen und nicht indiskret sein; Höflichkeit bedeutet auch immer Nachsicht und Distanz.*

5. Conclusion

Thus, the explicit, categorical, debatable and straightforwardness, highlighted in most studies as dominants of the German communicative style, gradually lose their obligatoriness, giving way to indirectness. In addition, the active development of intercultural contacts in various areas of life, globalization processes gradually lead to the modification of speech stereotypes and communicative dominants, reflecting a tendency towards unification of communicative behavior in intercultural communication. This is also true, in our opinion, in relation to the dominants of the polite behavior of one or another ethnosocium, which may also change over time, determining changes in the communicative behavior of representatives of this linguistic culture.

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