

## Communicative Category of Politeness in German and Russian Linguistic Culture

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Doi:10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n3s2p497

### Abstract

*The article is devoted to the comparative analyses of politeness in Russian and German linguistic cultures. Ethnic and cultural peculiarity of politeness, defined as communicative category, is revealed on the basis of associative experiment research, conducted with participation of Russian and German respondents. In the analyzed ethnic societies we have established common and nationally specific strategies of positive and negative politeness. We have come to the conclusion that studying strategies characteristics of ethnic and cultural politeness, comprising obligatory component of cross-cultural competence and providing opportunity for cooperative, conflict free communication between different linguistic cultures' representatives is perspective.*

**Keywords:** politeness, communicative category, strategy, cross-cultural communication, communication efficiency, associative experiment.

### 1. Introduction

At present the fact, that people speaking different languages and belonging to different cultures perceive reality in different ways, is generally recognized. As a result of cross-cultural contacts expansion the representatives of different ethnic cultures are increasingly involved in communication. In this view the language knowledge alongside with that of national and cultural peculiarity of verbal and non-verbal communication and also of ethnic norms, first of all those of politeness become defining conditions for cross-cultural communication efficiency.

Interest for politeness as social and linguistic phenomenon was distinctly shown in the late decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the evidence to which is a great number of researches, devoted to this (Nolen, 1981; Janne & Arndt 1992; Kasper, 1990; Watts, 1993; Watts & Claus, 2000 and many others). Politeness norms, comprising the ethical aspect of communication act, are consistently classified in the form of maxims, axioms, communication principles, discursive politeness characteristics, situational conditionality of polite strategies are actively studied.

However despite quite frequent reference to this phenomenon by linguists in the context of their research there is still no common opinion about the nature of the analyzed phenomenon, which is defined as a concept, category or strategy.

### 2. Main Part

2.1. R. Lakoff was one of the first who in addition to cooperative P. Greis' axioms formulated the rule of politeness, which includes the following maxims or sub-rules: 1) Don't impose; 2) Give option; 3) Make feel good – be friendly (Lakoff, 1973,; p. 298). Depending on which maxim is realized in this or that situation, R. Lakoff suggests differentiating Formal Politeness, Informal Politeness and Intimate Politeness, correspondingly.

Consistent study of the politeness principle belongs to J. Leach, who defined politeness maxims, relevant to both partners of communication (Leech, 1983,; p. 131-139). The most interesting in the context of mitigation realization are the following politeness maxims: 1) tactfulness maxim, following which a speaker moderates decision-making intentions, giving an addressee a possibility of choice, e.g. - Wie ware es, wenn wir in der Nahe was trinken gehen. Sie haben keine Bleibe, ich kenne keinen Wei.wein im Kuhlschrank. Das erganzt sich doch perfekt, oder? ((v. Kueurthy, 2007, p. 84).

The given peculiarity of communicative behavior T.V. Larina defines by the term "non-imposing" or reducing to minimum direct influence on the addressee in those speech acts, where this influence is forced to be shown, i.e. following communicative immunity [Larina, 2007,; p. 11];

2) maxim of approval, imposing a speaker to avoid negative characteristics of the addressee or things, connected

with him. If the negative estimation is of illocutionary force of the given expression, then following the given maxim, the subject of the statement tries to mitigate his categorical assessments, e.g.:

- Also, weist du, Sascha“, setzte ich vorsichtig an. „So richtig toll fand ich dein Demo-CD auch nicht“ ((Hertz, 2007:, p. 309)).
- 3) maxim of modesty, realized first of all in speech acts, containing positive assessment of a speaker himself, as it obliges the addresser to be reserved in expressing appraisal in his own address, e.g.:
  - Dabei sollte sie sich freuen, dass ich ihm nicht auch noch auf der Tasche liege – weil ich selbst eine ziemlich erfolgreiche Geschäftsfrau bin [(Bielenstein, 2007, p.: 8)].
- 4) maxim of consent (reduce to a minimum dissent between you and an interlocutor), which determines in particular mitigation of assertive illocution, leaving possibility for another opinion, e.g.:
  - Der Mann heißt Georg Makulis, - sagte er, - kein sehr angenehmer Mensch, aber fünfzig Millionen schwer. Ich denke, das ist für dich das Entscheidende ((Fischer, 2007, p. : 55)).
- 5) maxim of sympathy ( reduce to a minimum antipathy between you and an interlocutor, relevant first of all in the situations, where the object of criticism is a speaker himself, i.e. in the self-criticism situations, e.g.: - Du ... ahm, du findest mich nicht irgendwie blond, oder? ((Keller, 2001:, p. 122)).

At the same time we should note, that maxims of consent and sympathy, in our opinion, are more common, typical of practically any situations of polite, ethically correct behavior. The main intention of a speaker, following in his behavior (verbal and non-verbal) maxims of politeness, is as known to reach a consensus with an interlocutor and to create a positive opinion of himself.

The study of different aspects of politeness has been greatly influenced by the theory of P. Brown and S. Levinson (Brown, Levinson, 1987), despite the fact that it has been repeatedly criticized for ascribing universal character to models, founded on the example of the English language. As the basis for the theory of politeness P. Brown and S. Levinson took the notion of a “person (which can be rendered as face)”, suggested by E. Goffman (Goffman, 1967) and treated as universal one, a kind of social image, which preserving is of all communicants’ interest. Sufficiency of such understanding of a “person” is supported by the existence of such collocations both in Russian and German languages as those in which a word “face” corresponds to the notion of “social image”- to save face, to lose face, not to disgrace oneself, das Gesicht verlieren, das Gesicht wahren. P. Brown and S. Levinson suggest differentiating “negative face”, i.e. a wish of a person to be free in his actions and “positive face” as a wish to appeal or to please others, (the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some other) (Brown, Levinson, 1987, p. *ibid*: 67). According to this the authors distinguish two kinds of politeness- positive politeness as the expression of solidarity of a speaker with an addressee, and negative politeness as giving the latter freedom of action (Brown, Levinson *ibid*.: P. 129). A great deal important is the fact, that communicative image of both interactants is in close interaction as showing little respect to a partner of communication and damaging his image, the addresser thus damages his “face image” (loses his face), first of all “positive” one as his communicative value falls in the interlocutor’s eyes.

It is namely the threat of losing face by one of communicants that forces all the participants of communication to act according to the rules of ethically normative, appropriate speech behavior. For the speech acts, somehow threatening to the “face” of communicants, P. Brown and S. Levinson introduce the term (Face Threatening Act – FTA). However in the modern linguistic researches in different problems of communication there is often pointed fact, that the process of communication almost always contains in itself a threat to one’s or another’s interlocutor’s “face”, i.e. most speech acts are potentially face-threatening. To prevent possible communicative conflicts P. Brown and S. Levinson suggest strategies of politeness, joined in two subgroups, which accordingly realize negative and positive politeness. The studies devoted to communicative aspect of politeness note that alongside with conventional or ritualized politeness including speech etiquette note that individual politeness plays a special role in communication. Thus H. Haferland and I. Paul in particular distinguish three levels of politeness functioning: elementary, codified and reflective politeness (Haferland, Paul, 1996, p.: 51). Elementary politeness is set by customs and 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 and diplomatic protocol. For this type of politeness, which bears ceremonial character and regulates behavior irrespective of addressee, status and situational characteristics of speech contact course is especially important. Reflective politeness is defined only by a speaker himself in each specific communication situation and combines the forms of elementary and codified politeness. This type of politeness is also defined as implicit [Rathmayr, 1996] or personal (Vorderwulbecke, 20021986: 267) politeness.

For reflective politeness the defining factor is addressee catering. Taking into account communicative expectations of the latter when deciding on speech tools, which realize intentions of a speaker, his ability for communicative empathy,

plays an important role when a speaker is reaching his goals in communication, which finally defines efficiency of speech behavior in situations of cooperative, harmonious communication.

In the works of N.I. Formanovskaya it is stated that politeness as a core concept includes three types: politeness-sincerity as respect to a partner of communication, politeness-formality as discharge of accepted manners and politeness-mask as a tactical move of hiding real attitude to a partner of communication (Formanovskaya, 2007, p.129).

## 2.1 *The study of a ritual aspect of politeness*

First of all of speech etiquette is paid with much more attention. This is obviously explained by the fact that etiquette strategies and tactics and also realizing them language means are presented explicitly in the structure of utterances, easily analyzed and systematized. At the same time, despite a great number of papers on studying speech etiquette, the problem of proportion of etiquette and politeness up to date is still controversial, what is first of all connected with different approaches in defining the limits of speech etiquette.

Thus, in particular N.I. Formanovskaya thinks that etiquette and politeness do not cover one another but closely interact – not everything which is polite is etiquette, but everything which is not etiquette is impolite (Formanovskaya, 2007, p. 405).

Etiquette, defined by the author as socially-specified and nationally specific regulatory rules of speech etiquette in the situations of getting into contact, supporting and breaking it by communicants according to their social roles, status-role and personal relations in non-formal atmosphere is aimed at aggression removal or its significant decrease in communication as well as politeness, treated as ritualized manifestation of respect in behavior toward others.

Speech etiquette as manifestation of politeness, according to E. Bern, realizing good wishes and social strokes, and thus providing non-conflict communication represents the class of speech acts with their specific functions and speech intentions. Besides etiquette function in discourse is performed, according to N.I. Formanovskaya, by all means of authorization and addressing, by means of intimidation, meta-communicative units as a modus of relations to a partner, by all the phatic, aimed at commonness, mutual understanding and empathy. Despite such a wide understanding of speech etiquette politeness, according to N.I. Formanovskaya, is wider than speech etiquette, having in the area of communicative interaction a huge arsenal of both non-verbal means of communication and behavioral as such.

A.G. Balakay in his research, devoted to the Russian speech etiquette, defines otherwise proportion of the analyzed phenomena – “Modern understanding of etiquette is a little wider than that of politeness. If any manifestation of impoliteness (rudeness, loutishness, arrogance) is treated as violation of etiquette, than not any observance of etiquette (for instance good manners at the table, knowing how to use dinner wear, to dress according to the situation and so on) is treated by others as politeness” (Balakay, 2002, : p. 16).

Etiquette as a norm is realized in behavioral priorities, peculiar of different speech groups, in etiquette rules, reflecting cultural values and defining etiquette space by way of prescribed and forbidden forms of behavior.

T.V. Krylova notes close relation of etiquette and ethics, performing regulatory function and setting norms of behavior in the society. At the same time, by the author's opinion, etiquette is different from ethics in a number of characteristics:

- 1) Etiquette presupposes the focus on the outward, formal expression;
- 2) Etiquette bears more private character, being differentiated by a type of a social position (courtier, military, diplomatic etiquette and other) and even by a communication situation (the etiquette for guests' reception, of phone talk and others);
- 3) Etiquette, unlike ethics, is ritualized, significant role being played by verbal and non-verbal rites, marked by obligatory implementation, permanent form and conventional content. This stipulates such attributes of etiquette as stereotype, automated, semiotic and conventional nature;
- 4) Etiquette is more pragmatic, the characteristics of a concrete communication situation, first of all status and interpersonal distance, separating interlocutors is more significant for it (Krylova, 2006, p.242-248).

T.V. Krylova's opinion that alongside with speech etiquette there is naive etiquette deserves special attention. While the sphere of speech etiquette is limited by a narrow range etiquette situations (greetings, saying good-bye, addressing and so on), the rules of naive etiquette are common in any communication situation. “In the frames of naive ethics there are two spheres: a sphere of moral norms (spacing is given in the original –S.T.) and a sphere, regulating one's behavior in the course of communication with other people, or “communication ethics”, the last one is at the most close to naive etiquette”. (Krylova *ibid*: p. 255). There are certain differences between naive etiquette and naive ethics, manifested first of all in the following:

- 1) Alongside with the rules of positive attitude, approaching the rules of communication ethics in naive etiquette

- the rules of "rights' non-exceeding", less relevant for ethics play important role;
- 2) In naïve etiquette there is the aim at demonstrating this or that type of attitude, that one can actually have none, while communication ethics supposes manifestation of really existing attitude;
  - 3) The rules of naïve etiquette regulate exceptionally outer form of behavior, while the ethics communication rules can also regulate the substance of one's actions and the character of attitude towards other people as well;
  - 4) Etiquette prescribes performing certain rituals, what is less typical of communication ethics.

Thus etiquette and politeness, closely connected with it, regulating a speaker's behavior, both verbal and non-verbal, according to T.V. Krylova, bear in different communicative situations rather outward, conditional, ritual character, giving a speaker an opportunity to show the feelings he may not experience in the reality.

Sharing in general the author's differentiation of ethics, speech and naïve etiquette and also the above mentioned features of the latter ones we can't but agree that politeness as well as etiquette defines only outer form of persons' communication behavior.

We agree with the opinion of those researchers who define in politeness both outer, formal and inner component, reflecting respectful, kind, delicate attitude of a speaker to Another one, not only formal compliance to the rules, but also genuine attention and concernment towards those around.

We share the understanding of Claude Halmos' politeness (Claude Halmos), given by him in the work, devoted to the problem of children's politeness upbringing – "politeness-is not just a set of correct words and conditional gestures, that practically have no content, not a surface gloss, that should be acquired in order to look well-mannered".

*...A child's attitude to politeness always says of not belonging to a certain social class, but of a deep (spacing is given in the original –S.T.) understanding (not with mind only, but at emotional level) of the fact, that there are other people" (Almos, 20089,: p.74).*

T.V. Larina, whose research consists of more complete description of politeness category taking into account its socio-ethical and national-cultural characteristics, defines politeness as a central communicative category, the content of which is the system of ritualized strategies of communicative behavior (verbal and non-verbal), aimed at harmonious, conflict free communication and compliance to socially accepted norms at interactional communication (establishing, supporting and completing interpersonal contact)" [Larina, 2003,: p. 79].

Accepting that etiquette and politeness closely interact, the author offers her interpretation of these phenomena assymetry – Not everything is polite, that is etiquette like, and not everything that is not etiquette like is impolite, further noting that etiquette is outer manifestation of politeness, the content of politeness is a great deal deeper (Larina, ibid: p. 22).

### 3. Results

Despite the universal basic rules of polite communication, norms and axioms of speech behavior become mostly culturally conditioned and bear an imprint of the social medium, in which functions this or that language. Politeness is not a static set of normative rules of communication. As well as the norm itself, politeness defining normative behavior in communication, changes according to time and territory-cultural pertain. The problem of linguacultural politeness component study is one of the most topical in the modern linguistics.

When considering the problem of politeness in cross-cultural aspect we should proceed from the point, that politeness understanding in different cultures is different. Every culture has its own content of politeness concept. Different content of the given concept is reflected in the language and in speech and is manifested in lexical and grammatical, functional, pragmatic, discursive peculiarities. Politeness as communicative category reflects person's communicative conscience and contains certain conceptual knowledge of communication and also norms and rules of communication.

To find out how the representatives of German and Russian ethno-society understand politeness, we conducted associative experiment in the form of anonymous questionnaire with participation of more than fifty persons.

Informants were offered to explain how they understand the word "politeness" and to characterize a polite person.

The analyses of answers gave us the opportunity to elicit a number of interesting facts in interpreting politeness by the representatives of the given lingacultures.

The German respondents, answering the question what they understand by the word "politeness", distinguished the following components of politeness: respect to other people; eagerness to help; ability to listen to interlocutor; tact and

particularly tactful silence.

As the most indicative we would like to note such interpretation of politeness and of a polite person as: *ein wichtiges Merkmal von Zivilisation, Rücksicht auf bewahrte Konventionen des zwischenmenschlichen Umgangs; sich nicht (immer) durchsetzen; Etikette, sich zu benehmen wissen; Ich verstehe darunter jemanden, der anderen Menschen sein eigenes Ich nicht aufdrängt; ein hoflicher 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).*

For the Russian informants more characteristic is a wider spectrum of politeness components. These are respect, patience, understanding, unselfishness, compliance to conventional norms, ability and eagerness to give an ear, good manners, pliability, upbringing, gallantry, mutual help and deference as a way of self-actualization.

Characterizing a polite person, Russian respondents note that a polite person should first of all be attentive, be able to "read" an interlocutor, listen to him, try to avoid conflicts, be amiable in communication, consider other people's opinion, know the etiquette norms, be kind, understand individuality of others and not impose his own opinion.

Thus the most frequent politeness interpretation in two cultures is "respect to other people and ability to give an ear without imposing one's own opinion". The fact that for both Russian and German informants an important element of polite behavior is kindness/tenderness of feeling and eagerness to help draws our attention.

In the works devoted to the analyses of English politeness it is stated that for English linguaculture a "negative" (in interpretation of P. Brown and S. Levinson) or distant politeness (according to R. Ratmeir, 2003) is characteristic. For a German ethno-society a positive politeness plays an important role. To illustrate this fact we may give the following characteristics of a polite person:

*Der hofliche 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, wahrt aber dabei zugleich Distanz zum anderen.*

Comparing the above mentioned two kinds of politeness and their implementation in the analyzed linguistic cultures, it would also be desirable to note that "privacy" or the autonomy of the individual, which is the most important concept of English culture, has an impact on the Russian and German linguistic cultures.

This is confirmed by the fact that both Russian and German respondents as politeness components note unobtrusive behavior and the ability to comply interpersonal distance. However the role of negative politeness in the analyzed ethnic groups is much lower than in English linguistic culture. Perhaps this explains the extensive use of Russian and German institutional discourse of direct instructions. As it is noted by A. Vezhbitskaya, for a person coming from an English-speaking country, one of the most notable features of the German streets is the frequent use of the word «verboten» (Vezhbitskaya, 1999).

Advertisements like "No smoking! No littering!", "Close the door!", "Staff only" and others are quite often in Russian society as well.

At the same time, alongside with certain symmetry of polite strategies, Russian and German linguistic cultures show notable differences in understanding and implementation of politeness.

Thus, in particular, Russian respondents in their responses do not mention respect for private property. While in the German ethnic society respect for property is as noted as respect to the personality of the interlocutor. In addition, of particular interest in culturally determined differences in the understanding of polite and impolite behavior are "pictures of Russian life" – situations, defined by German respondents as illustrating, in their view, a violation of politeness principle. This, in particular, want of welcome and even a smile from a ticket collector at the entrance to the theater, communication in the route taxis – impolite "you-address", without an etiquette "please", "thank you", drivers' attitude towards pedestrians. Phrases like: "Would you like a drink?" ("Will you drink?"), "What would you like?" ("What do you want?"), "Where are you going?" ("Where to?"), "Speak!", "All fares, please!" ("Pay your passage!") frequent in the Russian service, are characterized by native Germans as extremely impolite. All of the above mentioned brings us to the conclusion that for German culture not only verbal component of politeness is important, but also non-verbal, "active" politeness.

Summary: Thus politeness as communicative category is aimed first of all at secure conflict free, cooperative communication and suggests compliance to the norms of communication by means of communicative strategies usage, corresponding communicative expectations of a communication partner. Despite universal character of basic maxims of politeness, the implementation strategies of the latter ones in the process of communication are defined by linguistic cultural peculiarity, determined by national and cultural values of this or another ethnic society.

The analysis we have carried out is not intended to be an exhaustive explanation of the linguistic-cultural specificity



of politeness in the Russian and German ethnic societies. However the described similarities and differences in the understanding of the category of politeness in the analyzed linguistic cultures can form the basis for the description of the strategies and tactics of politeness in intercultural communication.

In addition, the results of the carried out research, playing an important role in formation of cross-cultural competence are of unquestionable practical importance.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up the foregoing, we can speak with certainty about the perspectives and viability of the ethnic and cultural aspects of politeness, opening opportunities for a higher level of practical mastery of the effective speech communication skills in situations of cross-cultural communication. The knowledge of national and cultural peculiarities of polite behavior is an integral component of cross-cultural communicative competence.

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