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Peculiarities of concept «politeness» in Russian and English languages and its influence on forming foreign and cross-cultural competence

The article in question represents the results of a practical research of various ways of expressing politeness in the Russian and English linguistic communicative cultures depending on the context and the country of residence of the English speaking respondents. An analysis is done of different approaches to defining politeness in Russian and in English on the basis of the cultural background. The results are contrasted and compared, explained and analyzed with the description of their cultural specifics and also their possible reasons. In conclusion the ways are explained that can be used in teaching foreign languages to secondary school and university students as a part of forming linguistic and intercultural competences.

Key words: concept, politeness, culture, influence, stereotypes, foreign competence, cross-cultural competence, survey.

Politeness is an inseparable part of any nation's culture and being an element of communicative consciousness can be studied as a communicative category which has its own mental value [1; 12].

Communicative politeness is a key requirement of effective communication. Using it we demonstrate our cultural behaviour. Politeness as a communicative category is universal, that is it can be witnessed in behaviour of all the people in the world. However it manifests itself differently in different cultures. That is why teaching politeness at a foreign language lesson becomes so important. It is one of the corner stones of intercultural competence, one of the many that enable people with various ethnical, cultural and linguistic backgrounds communicate with each other effectively [2; 34].

In the English language politeness in communication is expressed both lexically and grammatically. A combination of these variants can also be observed.

First it is necessary to give a definition to the word «politeness». This lexical unit was derived from the word «polite» that is why one should begin with defining it. Definitions from several dictionaries were compared:

1. Longman:

Polite I. behaving or speaking in a way that is correct for the social situation you are in, and showing that you are careful to consider other people's needs and feelings;

II. you make polite conversation, remarks etc. because it is considered socially correct to do this, but not necessarily because you believe what you are saying [3].

2. Oxford learner's dictionaries:

I. having or showing good manners and respect for the feelings of others;

II. socially correct but not always sincere [4].

3. Macmillan dictionary:

I. someone who is polite behaves towards other people in a pleasant way that follows all the usual rules of society [5].

4. Cambridge dictionary:

I. behaving in a way that is socially correct and shows understanding of and care for other people's feelings;

II. socially correct rather than friendly [6].

The definition analysis of the lexical unit «polite» has shown the following semantic features were revealed: rules of behaving in the society, observing rules and regulations, using good manners (socially correct 2, follow rules of society 1, behaving in a way that is socially correct 3, show good manners 1); taking into account and respecting feelings, emotions and other needs of an interlocutor (to consider other people's needs and feelings 1, respect for the feelings of others 1, show understanding of and care for other people's feelings 1). These features can be used in defining the nucleus of the concept «politeness».

It is worth mentioning that sometimes the British express politeness in the ways which are seldom employed in other languages.

For example, in order to sound polite Britons often resort to indirect evasive expressions or seems to be indecisive in the situations where speakers of other languages would be more straightforward. At the same time Americans are usually more direct in the same communicative situation

Another example is the use of the phrase «*thank you*» by the British to show gratitude even for minor and inconspicuous services in the situations where speakers of other languages don't find it necessary, e.g., a cashier giving changes to a customer and both of them saying «*thank you*» to each other. On the other hand British English allows not to respond to «*thank you*» in some contexts, while in American and several other variants of English one needs to give an answer saying for instance «*you're welcome*» [7; 2].

In a number of languages consider it polite to refuse a compliment or praise and to criticize or self criticize something or somebody praised. Though in British English it is possible to hesitate a little before accepting a complement, an active refusal is considered rude [1; 25].

In some countries it is obligatory to resort to different form of expressing politeness depending on the social status (that might be higher or lower) of the interlocutor. In English there are special forms of address which are to be used in certain situations, but there are no strict demands connected with the social status of the speaker and the addressee.

As for the Russian culture, many nations have stereotypes about impolite, rude and arrogant Russians. These concepts are wrong. According to M. Honkanen and A. Mikluha, Russians have two separate forms of social life: public and private. They might seem to be rude and impolite in public but at the same time be kind, caring and communicative [8, 46]. T.V. Larina distinguishes two types of behaviour which are typical for the Russians: with unknown people and with close friends/relatives. She states that Russians are mostly polite with their close friends/relatives and quite often might be rude and impolite with strangers [9; 56].

I.A. Sternin points to the concept «a polite smile» in intercultural communication. He stresses that Russians are characterized by «social unsmilingness». A smile is not a signal of politeness in the Russian culture. Russians are cautious about a purely polite smile of an interlocutor. They call constant smiling a «social smile» and consider it a display of insincerity and a reserved character. Russians usually smile only to people they know while a smile by an unknown person is a signal to look for reasons of this smile. Despite it a Russian smile is thought a true display of high spirits or positive disposition to the interlocutor. The idea of a smile in the Russian culture is clearly reflected in the Russian proverb «You are stupid if you smile without any reasons». Russians also don't smile to raise one's spirits or to encourage somebody if there are people nearby experiencing difficulties or hardships. These are the main peculiarities of the Russian smile [10; 42].

It should be noted however that a smile is not a symbol of politeness for the Russians. A person's being kind is much more importance than presence or absence of a smile on his/her face. It happens so because in the Russian mentality politeness is manifested through kindness.

As in English, there lexical and grammatical means of expressing politeness in Russian. The most common phrases showing politeness are «*пожалуйста*», «*спасибо*», «*не за что*» and others. As for the grammatical structures «*не могли бы вы*», «*извините, не подскажите ли вы...*», etc. are the most common. These expressions highlight frequent using of the negative particle «*не*» («not») in Russian requests as compared with the English language. Nevertheless the English tendency not to use this particle is getting widespread nowadays, e.g. today it becomes preferable to say «*подождите, пожалуйста*» instead of «*не могли бы вы подождать*».

To find out associative peculiarities of politeness among speakers of English and Russian an experiment was held. The interview method was chosen as the main for this experiment. The respondents were several residents of the USA, Canada, Great Britain and Russia. The results of the survey were later used to create an associative field of the concept «politeness» in the English language and for the comparative analysis of this concept in Russian and English.

An associative field is a set of associates, i.e. reactions to stimulus words. It is created after results of an associative experiment are processed. An associative experiment can be of two types – free and directed. A free an associative experiment means that its participants can respond at a stimulus using any word. In the case of a directed associative experiment a response is restricted by some predetermined conditions (e.g. the necessity to use certain part of speech or constructions).

Both free and directed associative experiments were used in the study. Two questionnaires were compiled for speakers of Russian and English.

About 60 respondents aged 16 to 72 from the USA, Great Britain and Canada took part in the first survey. They were suggested to answer the following questions:

1. *What forms of politeness do you use?*
 - a) *special words (ex. please, etc.)*
 - b) *special constructions (ex. could you..., wouldn't be you so kind...)*
 - c) *both of them*
2. *How will you ask for something from:*
 - a) *an unknown person (ex. asking time, way, etc.)*
 - b) *your close friend (ex. asking help in organizing party, etc.)*
 - c) *your relatives*
3. *What does «politeness» mean for you?*

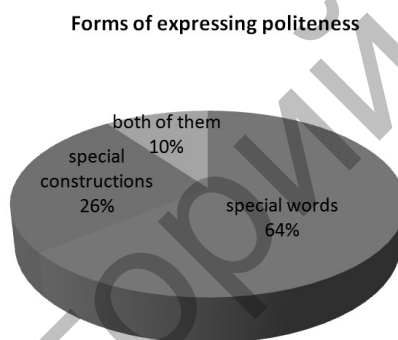
This survey was uploaded to the web-sites Facebook, American Chat-Room and British Chat-Room. The answer are various though having some ideas in common.

The first question:

1. *What forms of politeness do you use?*
 - a) *special words (ex. please, etc.)*
 - b) *special constructions (ex. could you..., wouldn't be you so kind...)*
 - c) *both of them*

Having analyzed the responses one can say that 64% of the respondents use special words, 26% — special constructions and 10% — both special words and constructions. It is shown in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1



From this diagram we can see that the Britons and the Americans mostly use special words like *please, thank you, you are welcome* to express politeness.

As for the special constructions the following were pointed out: *Could you..., Couldn't you..., Wouldn't you...*

It is interesting to notice that the use of constructions was stressed mostly by the respondents from Great Britain. It can be assumed that for Britons it is important to use not only one word to show their polite attitude to somebody but the whole constructions.

The second question:

2. *How will you ask for something from:*
 - a) *an unknown person (ex. asking time, way, etc.)*
 - b) *your close friend (ex. asking help in organizing party, etc.)*
 - c) *your relatives*

Let us quote some of the answers to this question to illustrate the concept of politeness in English:

Sorry, what's time now? Could you tell me the time? Excuse me, can you show me the way to the nearest shop? I'm sorry, tell me please where I can buy a book. Excuse me, where can I have a snack?

In most of the responses the initial word was *can*, with *please* also mentioned.

3. *What does «politeness» mean for you?*

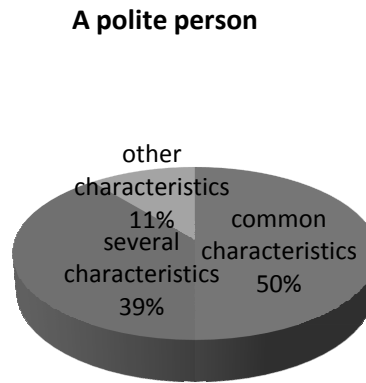
Some of the responses can give a good insight into the matter. Almost all the respondents characterized not the word 'politeness' but a polite person.

Doing this the British respondents mostly mentioned that *a polite person shows consideration, respect for other people; courteous, respectful, considerate and sensitive towards other people; thoughtful of others;*

thinking of others; who is aware of other people; often use the words «please» and «thank you»; (each criterion was named by more than 50% of the informants). One response contained a repetition of several characteristics (39%): *A polite person is someone, who says «please» and «thank you» and has respect for other people; a person who uses manners, says «please» and «thank you».* Only a few responses enclosed other characteristics (11%): *a polite person is reserve), tactful, calm and cool, friendly, kind, pleasant).*

Percentagewise it looks as follows in Diagram 2:

Diagram 2



The final step in the data processing was their cognitive interpretation. The last question was answered by 154 people and their responses were interpreted.

In this work a direct cognitive interpretation of associated was employed. It is important to point out that with this method all the associates are interpreted including the single ones. Associates which are alike in their semantic content are united into an integral cognitive descriptor which is formulated verbally. The most stylistically neutral word is chosen as a name for the formulated cognitive descriptor.

The following groups of cognitive descriptors became evident:

Courteous 58: who says «please» and «thank you» 23, who uses manners 7, courteous 19, who behaves in a socially correct way 9;

Tactful 51: show consideration 12, considerate 11, thoughtful of others 13, thinking of others 10, tactful 1, who is aware of other people 4;

Respectful 35: respect for other people 15, respectful 20;

Friendly 2: pleasant 1, friendly 1;

Kind 6: sensitive toward others 5, kind 1.

Reserved 2: calm and cool 1, reserved 1.

Respondents from Russia were offered to answer the following questions:

1. *Write your immediate association with the word «politeness».*

2. *Describe a polite person.*

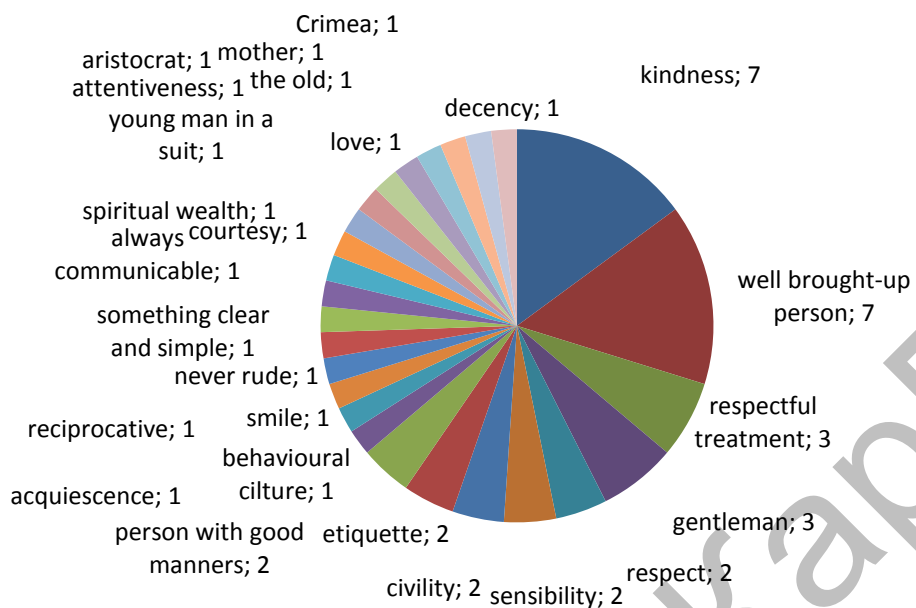
About 50 citizens of Russia aged 14 to 55 took part in the survey. The survey was uploaded to Vkontakte, the most popular social network in Russia. The following results were obtained:

1. *Write your immediate association with the word «politeness».* 47 answers were given to this question. The results are presented at Diagram 3.

The results suggest that politeness in the minds of the Russian people is kindness and a well brought-up person. For the Russians respect is the background in contrast with the speakers of English for whom it is the main characteristic feature of politeness.

The conclusion can be made that English politeness is oriented to others (demonstration of respect to others) while Russian politeness is subject oriented and concentrates on the speaker and his/her kindness.

Diagram 3



97 responses were given to the second question about the description of a polite person. The results are presented in Table.

Table

реплики-реакции	количество
1	2
kind	14
well brought-up	6
ready to help	5
tactful	5
give place in public transport	4
attentive	4
respects others	4
smiling	4
always greets	4
reserved	3
kind hearted	3
pleasant to communicate with	3
sympathetic	3
communicable	2
polite	2
sensitive	2
noble	2
good-natured	2
well-bred	2
modest	2
amiable	2
knows how to behave himself	2
inspiring confidence	1
well-read	1
likes to listen and speak	1
gives way	1
good word stock	1
answers politely	1
says «Thank you»	1

1	2
neat	1
careful in his/her words	1
decent	1
diplomatic	1
courteous	1
one who won't hurt	1
compliant	1
orderly	1
delicate	1
is not rude	1

The table indicates that for the Russians a polite person is first and foremost kind and well brought-up with kindness being the most salient feature. For speakers of English kindness is in the background (it was mentioned only once).

A polite person in the mentality of speakers of English is someone who respects the others. This characteristic is not the first in the Russian mentality. Only one Russian respondent stated that a polite person always says «thank you» whereas this feature is rather frequent in the answers of the English speaking respondents.

It is worth mentioning that the responses of the Russians are more full and diverse comparing to the English responses. Speakers of English usually gave single-type answers. It might indicate that the concept of politeness is more clear cut in the English language and mentality while in the Russian mentality the ideas about this concept are still mostly vague.

The results of the survey of Russian and English speaking respondents became a basis for a comparative analysis of politeness in different cultures. The general outcome is the following.

The so called approach strategies aimed at getting communicants closer to each other are more characteristic of the English than of the Russian communication.

Predominance of these strategies in the English communicative culture manifests itself both in the qualitative and quantitative aspects, e.g. the use of the special constructions and markers such as can you..., please. These structures are less common in the Russian communicative culture while behaviour of Russians is exemplified by a greater degree of naturalness and less rituals. The use of the same special constructions is not obligatory with kindness being the main feature of a polite person. This quality is the most important manifestation of politeness in the Russian culture.

In communication speakers of English pay a great attention to the plain of expression while the speakers of Russian — to the plain of content. That is why an important attribute of a polite person in the English language culture is the use in speech (depending on the purpose and participants of a communicative act) the words «please» and «thank you». For Russians it is not the main feature of politeness. «Communicable», «livable», «sympathetic» — these features reveal the content of a communicative act.

The conducted analysis revealed deep discrepancy in the ways politeness is expressed in the English and Russian communicative cultures. These differences must be clearly indicated to Russian speaking students studying English. They should be taught not only the vocabulary, but also the very idea of politeness for English speaking communities and the contexts in which various forms of expressing politeness should be used. The essence of politeness as a mental category should be explained to such students. Otherwise they are not likely to succeed in intercultural communication as politeness being also an extra linguistic feature will influence greatly their communicative adequacy. Special exercises on politeness as well as other behavioral attributes and analyzing texts in English could become a suitable form of improving students' competence in foreign languages.

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И.Н.Мартынова

Орыс және ағылшын тілдеріндегі «әдептілік» концептісінің ерекшеліктері және оның шет тілді және мәдениетаралық құзыреттердің қалыптасуына ықпалы

Мақалада орыс және ағылшын тілді сұхбаткерлердің өмір сүру мәні мен тұратын еліне байланысты ағылшын тілді лингвомәдениеттердегі әдептіліктің берілуінің түрлі жолдары, практикалық зерттеу бойынша нәтижелері ұсынылған. Орыс және ағылшын тілдерінде «әдептілік» ұғымын мәдени алғышарттар негізінде анықтайтын әр түрлі көзқарастарға талдау жасалған. Алынған нәтижелер бойынша негіздеме беріліп, салыстырмалы-салғастырмалы талдау жасалған және олардың мәдени ерекшеліктері, сонымен қатар пайда болуының ықтимал себептері ашылды. Қорыта айтқанда, шетел тілдерін оқыту үдерісінде тілдік және мәдениетаралық құзыреттердің қалыптасуы шеңберінде пайдалануға болатын тәсілдер сипатталған.

И.Н.Мартынова

Особенности концепта «вежливость» в русском и английском языках и его влияние на формирование иноязычной и межкультурной компетенций

В данной статье представлены результаты практического исследования различных способов выражения вежливости в русскоязычной и англоязычной лингвокультурах в зависимости от контекста и страны проживания англоязычных респондентов. Проведен анализ различных подходов к определению понятия «вежливость» в русском и английском языках на основе культурных предпосылок. Приводятся обоснование и сравнительно-сопоставительный анализ полученных результатов, раскрываются их культурно-специфические особенности, а также возможные причины возникновения. В заключение описываются приёмы, которые могут быть использованы в процессе обучения иностранным языкам в рамках формирования языковой и межкультурной компетенций.

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