

POLITENESS AS A WAY TO ENCOURAGE CONVERSATION

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The empirical material is the novel of the German-speaking writer B. Schirmer *Schlehwains Giraffe*. The research focuses on speech strategies and tactics of politeness as one of the components of verbal communication addressed to the Giraffe. Recorded in a text, the model of verbal and non-verbal behavior of a person, the author, trying to encourage a conversation with an animal is analysed. The category of politeness, thus, appears in a single discursive space with the direction. The relevance of the study is explained by the communicative and pragmatic approach applied to the analysis of speech addressed to an animal. The narrator treats the animal with great care. He also asks various questions to the Giraffe as he believes the Giraffe is able to communicate. However, the author fails to establish communication. The Giraffe is silent. The narrator uses directive linguistic means in the colloquial style of speech: brief questions, accentual particles, lexical and syntactic repetitions, appeals to the Giraffe and so on. The author-narrator repeatedly corrects his verbal behavior, uses various strategies, but, eventually, comes to the conclusion, that the Giraffe is incoherent. Finding herself in a usual natural environment, the Giraffe unexpectedly reproduces a phrase which belongs to the group of precedent texts, to the surprise of the narrator. The narrator understands the reasons for the Giraffe's persistent silence. The communicative strategy of the author-narrator changes, his speech becomes rude and impolite. Thus, the language material illustrates the widest spectrum of politeness pragmatics and deviations from this speech strategy.

Keywords: modality of politeness, implicit and explicit politeness, directivity, literary narrative, verbal communication with an animal.

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ВЕЖЛИВОСТЬ КАК СПОСОБ ПОБУДИТЬ К РАЗГОВОРУ

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Эмпирическим материалом служит роман немецкоязычного писателя XX в. Бернда Ширмера «Жираф Шлейвайна», рассказывающий об историческом периоде ГДР 1970–1980-х годов. В центре внимания исследования — речевые стратегии и тактики вежливости как одна из составляющих вербальной коммуникации, обращенной к жирафу. Анализируется зафиксированная в художе-

ственном тексте модель речевого и неречевого поведения человека, автора-рассказчика, пытающегося побудить животное к разговору. Категория вежливости выступает, таким образом, в едином дискурсивном пространстве с побуждением к вербальному действию. Актуальность исследования объясняется проекцией коммуникативно-прагматического подхода к анализу речи, обращенной к животному. Согласно сюжету романа, нарратор очень бережно обращается с животным. Он также адресует жирафу вопросы, просит рассказать о себе, так как принимает за истину способность жирафа к связной речи. Однако автор-рассказчик раз за разом терпит коммуникативную неудачу. Жираф упорно молчит и отказывается от коммуникативного сотрудничества, иногда лишь невербально реагируя на речь. В речи рассказчика используются языковые средства передачи директивности в разговорном стиле речи: краткие вопросы, акцентные частицы, лексические и синтаксические повторы, обращения к жирафу и другие. Нарратор постоянно корректирует свое вербальное поведение, применяя различные стратегии и тактики, но в итоге констатирует неспособность жирафа к связной речи. Однако оказавшись в привычной для себя природной среде, жираф неожиданно для рассказчика воспроизводит фразу, относящуюся к группе прецедентных текстов. Рассказчик понимает причины упорного молчания жирафа. Коммуникативная стратегия автора-рассказчика изменяется, речь становится грубой и невежливой. Таким образом, на языковом материале можно наблюдать самую широкую палитру прагматики вежливости и отклонения от данной речевой стратегии.

Ключевые слова: модальность вежливости, имплицитная и эксплицитная вежливость, директивность, художественный нарратив, вербальная коммуникация с животным.

1. Introduction

The semantics of the Russian word “politeness” goes back to the word ‘to know’, which means that politeness should be understood as the knowledge of some generally accepted cultural and linguistic code and its execution. The discussion of politeness in connection with the linguistic picture of the world is recognized in a number of works in the field of modern linguistics [Krylova 2006; Myatsinskaya 2014]. The German-language concept of *Höflichkeit* includes two meanings as well: “*höfliches Benehmen*” and “*höfliche Worte*” [DUW 2015: 881]. Thus, politeness is a contaminated concept that combines the verbal and non-verbal components.

In the discursive space politeness interacts with other communicative, pragmatic and behavioral presets. In this study the initial statement of close interaction of the two categories is accepted: politeness and directivity to verbal action. The main question is how the category of politeness manifests itself in the framework of verbal behavior of a person to an animal, and non-verbal interaction between a person and an animal.

How do the categories of politeness and motivation interact? What features do they exhibit in connection with the specifics of animal-oriented communication?

The relevance of the research is manifested by the fact that in the recent linguistic studies the problems of animal communication systems and ways of human-animal communication have been covered. See, for example, one of the fundamental works in this field [Burlak 2011]. The research material is a model of verbal influence on the behavior of an animal recorded in a literary text. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study takes into account both classical approaches to the analysis of politeness from the standpoint of linguistics and cultural studies, as well as modern theories. The choice of research material is determined by a non-standard approach to the category of politeness and the desire to get a great scientific relevance. Moreover, the selected material makes it possible to show the versatility of the category of politeness.

2. Methods and material

The main research methods are as follows: 1) communicative and pragmatic analysis; 2) component analysis; 3) contextual analysis; 4) elements of literary analysis.

The research material is the novel *Schlehwains Giraffe* by Bernd Schirmer, a German writer and playwright of the 20th century. The cultural and historical background of the narrative is associated with the period of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the time of the unification of Germany. The text of the novel is a conversation between the narrator and a real Giraffe living in his apartment. The main communicative task of such ‘interaction’ is to learn as much as possible about the Giraffe. Politeness, as one of the components of interaction, is manifested both at the non-verbal and verbal levels of communication. The non-verbal behavior of the animal is described as follows, for instance:

- (1) *Die Giraffe schüttelt den Kopf. ... sie blickt stumpf und gelangweilt drein* [Schirmer, 1991, 23]. — ‘The Giraffe turns its head from side to side — a dull and bored look’.

Or the following:

- (2) *Die Giraffe ist in sich zusammengesunken und hat ihren Kopf auf den Rücken gelegt* [Schirmer 1991: 25]. — ‘The Giraffe is in herself and has put her head on her back’.

Based on the cognitive model of the general knowledge of the world, the reader understands that the actions of the animal described are also characteristic of its behavior in the usual habitat. Therefore, the question of to what extent these actions are related to the narrator's speech remains open.

The narrator is convinced of the opposite. Experiencing a communicative failure time and again, he changes his communicative behavior. Thus, based on the theory of modelling literary communication [Novozhilova 2021], the Giraffe takes the place of the fictitious recipient of the narrative.

The situation of discursive interaction with the Giraffe is also interesting because the word "Giraffe" in German is grammatical feminine, i. e. the male narrator's speech is addressed to a female being, which creates additional pragmatic connotations.

3. Discussion. Politeness in language and culture. Modern linguistic concepts of politeness

The scientific paradigm of modern communicative and anthropocentric linguistics cannot ignore such important category as politeness. The most important role of the category of politeness in communication is postulated in the scientific works of P. Grice, recognized by modern linguistics as classical [Grice 1975].

In the Russian linguistics politeness is considered, among other things, in the works of N.I. Formanovskaya. N.I. Formanovskaya suggests describing politeness as a concept, since politeness is, according to Formanovskaya, "a moral and communicative category that has diverse expressions through numerous means" [Formanovskaya 2007: 125]. As a rule, politeness is viewed from a positive perspective, since deviations from politeness already belong to the category of "impoliteness". For the purposes of this study, both manifestations of politeness and deviations from this strategy are relevant, which will be shown below on the linguistic material of a prose text.

The modern concept of politeness is described in the monograph by I.L. Erzinkjan [Erzinkjan 2018], which consistently presents both classical and innovative approaches to the description of this cognitive and linguistic category. The empirical part of the study is based on the material of the modern English language. At the same time, it is rightly emphasized that the means of expressing politeness are individual for each

language, and they may not exist at all. Then the very absence of markers of “impoliteness” should be understood as politeness. We consider the definitions of “implicit” and “explicit” politeness proposed by I. Erzinkjan to be the most valuable concepts for this study [Erzinkjan 2018: 128]. Indeed, this approach allows to describe the manifestations of politeness towards the Giraffe, which in the narrative are diverse and multifaceted.

For the most multidimensional implementation of the tasks of this study, it is expedient to introduce the concept of modality of politeness. Within this category the following can be taken into account: 1) the general cognitive attitude of the speaker (in our case, the author-narrator) to a polite and careful attitude towards the Giraffe; 2) the verbal behavior of the speaker addressed to the animal, including linguistic means of showing politeness and markers of deviation from politeness; 3) the communicative strategy of encouraging the Giraffe for verbal action.

4. Results

In this section on the language material of the novel we will trace how the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the narrator changes and the categories of politeness and directionality transform with the development of the plot.

An episode that opens the narrative is the scene of the narrator’s acquaintance with the Giraffe, including, in particular, description of the invitation to enter the apartment:

- (3) *Ich bat die beiden in die Wohnung. <...> Mit lässiger Geste lud ich meine Besucher ein, Platz zu nehmen* [Schirmer 1991: 12].
— ‘I invited both of them into the apartment and asked them to sit down with a casual gesture.’

As we can see, the author politely greets the guests, his old friend Schlehwein and his ward Giraffe.

According to the plot of the novel, the writer Schlehwein becomes a victim of a criminal prosecution for political and criminal reasons. To avoid being put into prison Schlehwein is forced to immigrate to Africa and leave the Giraffe in the care of his close friend, who turns out to be the narrator.

The fictitious reader of the novel, as well as the actual reader, too, ask themselves a logical question about the Giraffe’s ability to talk. The only person in the novel who allegedly heard the Giraffe’s coherent speech

himself, and therefore knows for sure that the Giraffe can pronounce individual words and, in fact, talk, is a postman named Kleingrube. The giraffe, according to Mr. Kleingrube, spoke when she lived with Karl-Ernst Schlehwein in a country house near the town of Oderbruch.

The animal's speaking skills are also indicated by the phrase put into the mouth of the postman in conversation with the narrator (Here and further in bold italics is the text of the examples highlighted by the author of the paper):

- (4) *Der Briefträger sah mich an. Sie spricht, ja? Wie kommen Sie denn darauf, erwiderte ich. Hat sie vielleicht gesprochen? Auf einmal hatte der Briefträger sehr eilig* [Schirmer 1991: 27]. — ‘The postman looked at me. “**She speaks, doesn’t she?**” “Why have you drawn such a conclusion? I objected. — She may have spoken?” The postman was suddenly in a hurry’.

As you can see, having touched on a difficult topic of conversation, the postman does not want to continue communication and leaves.

The author-narrator is a writer by profession. In search of new subjects for his work he tries to “talk” to the Giraffe, learn about her past, in order to later process the material and turn the animal's story into a literary work. But, once in the narrator's apartment, the Giraffe categorically refuses to talk and remains completely silent; see the quote from the novel:

- (5) *Die Giraffe hüllt sich in Schweigen* [Schirmer 1991: 47]. — ‘The Giraffe remains silent’.

The narrator addresses questions to the Giraffe not only out of professional interest. Boredom and simple everyday curiosity are additional motives for speaking. Another motive is the feeling of loneliness, because, according to the plot of the novel, for the third time he is abandoned by his wife Kristina, the woman he loves and is waiting for. Thus, “communication” with the Giraffe brightens up his anguish and fills the niche of communication after the family break-up. This feature of communication with animals is also indicated in specialised studies [Baikulova 2008: 17].

Again and again, trying to get the Giraffe to talk, the narrator resorts to various communicative and pragmatic strategies of a directive to verbal action. In an effort to gain the trust of the Giraffe, he tells her about himself. This story begins with an ellipsis of an imaginary request from a Giraffe:

- (5a) *Ich? Ich weiß nicht. Es ist nicht viel zu erzählen* [Schirmer 1991: 22]. — ‘Me? No, I do not know. There’s not much you can tell [about yourself].’

The giraffe barely reacts to the story. When the narrator notices this, he appeals to the Giraffe’s attention, to issues related to the plane of metacommunication, but it turns out that the Giraffe is already fast asleep:

- (6) *Aber hörst du mir überhaupt zu?* [Schirmer 1991: 25]. — ‘Are you listening to me?’

The interrogative statement (6) has the form of a general question and, in fact, is a directive “listen to me!” The directive nature of interrogative sentences is generally recognized in the paradigm of modern linguistic knowledge. This confirms the fact that there is such an approach in the generally recognized classical works on German Studies. German linguists G. Helbig and J. Buscha note the following in this regard: “Fragesätze sind Aufforderungen bestimmter Art” [Helbig, Buscha 2001: 615].

The author takes care of the animal, takes her for walks, feeds her with her favorite cornflakes, allows her to watch TV. The verbal behavior of the author-narrator in the first part of the novel invariably belongs to the pragmatics of politeness, but the Giraffe hardly shows a desire for communicative cooperation.

Meanwhile, the narrator, in non-verbal and verbal form, constantly maintains contact with the Giraffe. For example, one of their walks together is described as follows:

- (7) *“Es ist tzu früh, sagte ich, beruhige dich. <...> Komm, sage ich, wir wollen sie besuchen, die Freunde. Die Giraffe ist entzückt. Sie freut sich <...> Latsch nicht so, sage ich. <...> Na bitte, sage ich <...> Hast du für heute genug, fragte ich, oder schaffst du noch einen? <...> Schaffst du noch einen? Die Giraffe nickt”* [Schirmer 1991: 28–29]. — “It’s too early,” I said, “calm down! Let’s go,” I say, “we’ll visit them, friends.” The Giraffe is delighted. She’s happy. “Don’t click like that,” I say. — “Here you go,” I say. — “Have you worked up enough for today?” I asked. — “Or will you manage another [visit]? Can you handle another one?” The Giraffe nods.

In the course of the narration, there are constant indications that the Giraffe avoids any verbal reaction to all the questions of the author-narrator. Here are some examples:

- (8) *Die Giraffe hüllt sich in Schweigen, ich kann fragen, was ich will* [Schirmer 1991: 47]. — ‘The Giraffe keeps silent, I can ask anything’.
- (9) *Nichts. Keine Reaktion. Hartnäckiges Schweigen der Giraffe* [Schirmer 1991: 52]. — ‘Nothing. No reaction. Persistent silence of the Giraffe’.
- (10) *Nichts. Die Giraffe steht nur da* [Schirmer 1991: 53]. — ‘Nothing. It’s just a giraffe here’.

The narrator’s repeated pragmatic failures force him to plan his own speech actions differently. The narrator states that his goal — to make the Giraffe talk — was never realized, despite all the efforts made:

- (11) *Ich komme und komme nicht weiter. Wahrscheinlich muß ich die Taktik ändern. Ich muß sie locker machen. Ich muß sie aufheitern. Ich muß den Ton wechseln. Ich muß ihr Vertrauen gewinnen. Wenn ich ihr alles sage, dann sagt sie vielleicht auch alles. Ich muß einfach erzählen* [Schirmer 1991: 55]. — ‘I’m still not getting any further. Perhaps I should change my tactics. I need to liberate her. I need to cheer her up. I need to change my tone. I need to gain her trust. If I tell her everything, then maybe she’ll tell me everything too. I just need to talk’.

The speaker directly formulates his intention to change tactics in order to gain the Giraffe’s trust. One of the stylistic techniques here is the lexical repetition of verbal lexemes: *komm* and *ich muß*. Repetition is a special pragmarhetorical device and is intended to give the utterance the effect of increased emotional colouring. For more information about the types of repetition see, for example [Nefedov 2022: 333].

The speaker offers the interlocutor to make a speech move, to talk again, but to no avail:

- (12) “*Merkst du was, Giraffe? <...> du kannst jetzt reden, du kannst dich erleichtern. Nicht? Du willst nicht? Gut. Dann laß mich meins zu Ende bringen. <...> Aber hör mal, du kannst schweigen, wie du willst, ich erzähle trotzdem weiter. Ob es dir passt oder nicht*” [Schirmer 1991: 66]. — ‘You know what, Giraffe? You can talk now, you can talk now. No? Don’t you want to? Good. Then let me tell you the whole story. But listen, whatever you want, you can keep quiet. Despite this, I will continue, whether you like it or not’.

Here, a number of questions are aimed at finding out the information about the best years of the Giraffe’s life. Apparently, the narrator believes that if the Giraffe does not want to talk about the negative aspects of her

biography and also does not want to say anything about political topics, perhaps she will agree to talk about her positive memories:

- (13) *“Was war, fragte ich, die schönste Zeit deines Lebens? War es die Kindheit? Waren es die sonnigen Sommertage in Schlehweins großem Garten? Oder waren es deine Wanderjahre, über die **du dich so hartnäckig schweigst?**”* [Schirmer 1991: 67]. — “‘What was,’ I asked, ‘the best time of your life? Was it childhood? Were these sunny days spent in the large garden of Schlewine? Or were these the years of your wanderings, about which **you are so stubbornly silent?**’”

The giraffe is stubbornly silent again. After these questions, for the only time throughout the entire action of the novel, the narrator questions the very ability of the Giraffe to speak:

- (14) *Manchmal denke ich, die Giraffe **kann gar nicht sprechen**, und selbst ihre gestammelten Worte wie Kononialismus habe ich mir nur eingeblendet* [Schirmer 1991: 67]. — ‘Sometimes I think the Giraffe **can’t speak at all**. And even her muttering “conolialism” I invented for myself’.

Thus, the narrator here tries to explain the communicative failure that has befallen him again by the fact that the Giraffe simply does not know how to talk. And the words that are periodically “pronounced” by the animal seem to him only an illusion. Having found such an explanation of persistent silence, the narrator stops addressing questions to the Giraffe.

Further, in chapter 20 of the novel, it is told that the author goes to the country where Mr. Schlehwein lived to settle some legal issues, and takes the Giraffe with him. Delighted with the sight of the overgrown garden familiar to her, the Giraffe runs happily in the greenery. And suddenly utters a phrase that largely explains her reluctance to speak. The following text fragment is taken from one of the key scenes of the entire narrative:

- (15) *Die Giraffe wieherte, sie grunzte, sie gurrte. Sie sprach sogar. Sie sprach das erste Mal wieder seit langer Zeit. **Es lebe die dtsh demkrtsch Republik**, sagte sie. Halt dein Maul, rief ich, sonst kommst du wieder hinter Gitter’* [Schirmer 1991: 90]. — ‘The Giraffe was mooing, she was grunting, she was snorting. She even talked. She spoke again for the first time in a long time. “**Long live GDR!**” she said. “Shut your mouth!” I shouted. “Otherwise, you’ll end up behind bars again!”’

The giraffe “spoke” for the first time in a long time. The phrase that the Giraffe “pronounces”, ‘*Es lebe die Deutsche Demokratische Republik*’ is a precedent text. That is, it has the connection with a certain era and cultural and historical conditions of the development of Germany in the last decades of the 20th century. For more information about the features of functioning of precedent texts, see a modern monograph [Slyshkin 2000].

After hearing the Giraffe’s “utterance”, the author violates the politeness strategy. In a rough form he demands that the Giraffe be silent. The pragmatics of “impoliteness” is conveyed by the expletive “*Halt die Maul!*”, the verb of saying *rufen* and the threat that the Giraffe will be behind bars again. That is, when the Giraffe finally speaks, the author demands that she shut up. The communicative and pragmatic colouring of the author’s speech suggests that he is retreating from the strategy of politeness. The author intentionally offends the Giraffe, calls her names.

Another case of deviation from the strategy of politeness is the scene when the postman brings the narrator a photo from an old newspaper, in which the Giraffe is taking a treat from the hands, according to the postman, of the chairman of the Communist Party of the GDR. And the postman, reinforcing his arguments with the photo found, suggests that the narrator punish the Giraffe, give the Giraffe away to the new authorities. The Giraffe overhears their conversation and, seeing the Giraffe at the kitchen door, in a fit of rage, the narrator shouts at the Giraffe, offends her, and for the second time in the text of the novel deviates from the strategy of politeness. In an abbreviated form, this author’s appeal to the Giraffe can be given as follows:

- (16) „*du kannst doch reden <...> du Altlast du, du alte Seilschaft, du hast doch mit ihnen unter einer Decke gesteckt <...> du kannst doch reden <...> warum hast du nie was gesagt <...> es lebe <...> Es lebe die dtsch demkrtsch Rupli <...> so war es doch oder, oder nicht <...>*“ *Rief ich, schrie ich, den ich war so voller Wut, auf die Giraffe und auf Kleingrube und auf mich* [Schirmer 1991: 111–112]. “You can talk! You old nag, you, you, old trash, you were in league with them! You can talk! Why didn’t you ever say anything? “Long live... Long live the GDR!” — did you say that, or not?” — I screamed, I screamed, because I was very angry, angry at the Giraffe and at Kleingrube, and at myself”.

Numerous linguistic means are used here to convey the state of emotional tension; for more information on linguistic ways of expressing emotions, see, for example, [Oster 2010]. The lexical means inclu-

de naming the Giraffe in the addresses: *du Altlast du, du alte Seilschaft*. The *Altlast* token, the meaning of which can be described as ‘household waste whose decomposition is dangerous for the environment’ [DUW 2015: 133], is reinterpreted in this context to convey a pejorative assessment. Negative evaluation is also supported by the *Seilschaft*. One of the components of the meaning is associated with the cooperation of people within a political party [DUW 2015: 1596]; in combination with the adjectival *alt*, the semantics of negative evaluation is enhanced. Note that both lexemes have a feminine grammatical gender, which is consistent with the grammatical gender *die Giraffe*.

In addition, the phrase contains a threefold repetition of the personal pronoun of the second person singular *du*, which is designed to further strengthen the address along the line of targeting and is a marker of the speaker’s excited emotional state. Note also that lexical repetition is a stable sign of speech addressed to an animal, as indicated in special studies on this topic; see, for example [Ermolova 2015: 64]. The phraseological colloquial phrase *unter einer Decke stecken* [Duden 2002: 161] indicates close relationship of the Giraffe with the authorities of the former GDR. The accentuated particle *doch* repeated four times gives the statement an additional shade of increased emotionality.

As it can be seen from the example (16), there are other cases of repetitions here. The repetition of a phrase embedded in the mouth of the Giraffe (cf. example (15) above) with the deliberate reproduction of existing phonetic errors introduces a touch of irony. Repetitions of the phrase about the Giraffe’s ability to speak turn into a reproach for the refusal of communicative cooperation. The author reproaches the animal with the fact that the Giraffe did not tell him anything: no information about herself, about her past, or about her political beliefs. Repetition, in fact, is used very often in the text, being one of the stylistic techniques of the author’s narrative.

The scene of the conversation between the postman and the author-narrator is the last episode of the novel, relevant for a given perspective of the study. Having expressed his anger, the author still refuses to punish the Giraffe. The novel ends with Kristina returning home, and the Giraffe remains living in the couple’s apartment.

5. Conclusion

The proposed study is experimental. The applicability of the category of politeness in animal-directed communication is definitely an innova-

tive approach. An attempt has been made above to summarize the theoretical and methodological basis and project it onto a work of art. The main results of the study can be formulated as follows: 1) the category of politeness in the verbal behavior of the addressee acts in close relationship with the category of directivity to verbal action; 2) in situations when the Giraffe suddenly begins to speak, the verbal behavior of the author-narrator abruptly turns to impoliteness; 3) thus, in the form of a theoretical research model, one can imagine a discourse with the Giraffe as follows: the pragmatic failure of the speaker is the modality of politeness; the manifestation of the verbal behavior of the animal is the modality of impoliteness.

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