

Kurchenko O.O.

Verbal Politeness: the Principle of Additional Effort vs. the Linguistic Economy Law

*Kurchenko Olena Oleksandrivna, PhD Senior Lecturer at Spanish and Italian Philology Department
Institute of Philology, Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University, Kyiv, Ukraine*

Abstract. In this paper we formulate the principle of additional effort as basic verbal politeness principle, and analyze the existence reasons of such a principle in spite of the main development law of every natural language, the linguistic economy law.

Keywords: *verbal politeness, principle of additional effort, linguistic economy law*

1. Introduction

The present stage of Linguistics development is characterized by a special interest towards the problem of the interrelation between the language and the culture. The science about the language is more and more transformed into the science about the human being, the structure of his mentality, the forms of his interaction with other people and with the world where he lives.

The impossibility of a successful communication without knowledge about the interlocutors' culture is already an obvious fact, that's why the questions regarding relationship between the language and the culture are more and more actual. The researchers of different realms of knowledge about the human being have come to the conclusion that the culture reflects the human consciousness and defines the peculiarities of people's communicative behavior: W. von Humboldt, A.A. Potebnia, J. Baudouin de Courtenay, L.S. Vygotskiy, G.P. Melnikov, N.D. Arutiunova, E.M. Vereschagin, A.A. Zalevskaya, V.G. Kostomarov, Y.N. Karaulov, V.I. Karasik, Y.A. Sorokin, I.A. Sternin, E.F. Tarasov, N.V. Ufimtseva, V.E. Shagal, V.I. Shakhovskiy, A. Wierzbicka, A. Duranti, G. Triandis, D. Hymes, G. Hofstede, E. Sapir, R. Scollon, S. Scollon, R. Young and many others.

Nowadays it is not discussible the fact the verbal communication is not only an information interchange, but also a form of establishing, maintaining and cutting off of social relationships, as well as of demonstrating the attitude of the speaker towards his interlocutor. At the same time, the communicative categories in their quality of communicative consciousness elements are very little investigated so far.

In the context of mentioned tendencies a research dedicated to the politeness category becomes timely and topical. As every important social phenomenon, the politeness has its verbal realization. It is precisely the verbal politeness which interests us in general and particularly in its relationship with the main law of the development of a natural language, which is reflected in the title of this article.

So what do we understand under the term "politeness"? Having analyzed a big number of existent definitions, we have done the following compiled definition: politeness is a systemic category of the communicative consciousness, that regulates speakers' communicative behavior in order to reach a determined goal.

The majority of the researchers underline the universality of politeness, adding nevertheless that its concrete realization is characterized always by national specifics. In this article we would like to focus on the universal side of politeness. The universality of this communicative (and social) phenomenon consists in a quite paradoxical for a

natural language principle: the principle of additional effort.


2. Principle of additional effort in politeness

In our opinion, the politeness functions due to the principle of application of an additional effort – this is valid both for non-verbal and verbal politeness. In the context of the non verbal politeness everything is clear: if we cede somebody a seat, we produce an additional effort, if we hold the door open for somebody to get in, also; and so on. Possibly, at the verbal level it is not that obvious, that's why we will explain it in detail.

In the first place, let's formulate the definition of the functioning of this principle: **the principle of additional effort consists in the application of an additional verbal effort in order) to transform neutral (or transactional) sentences into polite ones.**

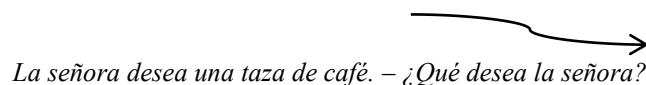
Let's illustrate our postulate with an example at the level of Phonetics, namely the prosodic one, which is possibly the less obvious field of the functioning of the principle of additional effort.

What is at issue is the intonation in interrogative sentences in Spanish, though this phenomenon takes place in many European languages. Special questions beginning with interrogative words – *qué, quién, cómo, cuánto, dónde, cuál* – formally have an intonation similar to the one used in affirmative propositions, in spite of being questions; that means that the prosodic curve goes down in its final part:



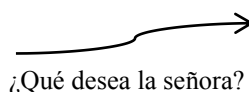
¿Qué desea la señora?

Such an intonation is possible when, for example, we are reading a question from a didactic text:



La señora desea una taza de café. – ¿Qué desea la señora?

But when the same question is formulated by a waiter to a client of the cafe he works at, the prosodic curve would be like this:



¿Qué desea la señora?

As we can see, here the intonation goes up in its final part, as if we were speaking about a general question (without special interrogative words), therefore we can say that here, according to Spanish phonetician Antonio Quilis, the questions are formulated "with a tint of politeness" [1, p. 84], because two features are used to express the question: an interrogative word and the ascendant in-

tonation, which means redundancy. In neutral situations only one feature is used, because of the law of linguistic economy. That is, the speaker uses the redundancy in order to formulate a *polite* question. A. Quilis in his manual *Principios de fonética y fonología españolas* [1, p. 84] says: "Linguistically correct questions may seem as "hard", "cutting", "dry" and to avoid it redundant patrons are used". So, here we can observe an eloquent example of the functioning of the principle of additional effort.

The same happens in Italian and in other European languages. The book "Politeness in Europe", published by Leo Hickey and Miranda Stewart, in chapter 2 [2, Ch.2] under the caption *Politeness in France: How to buy bread politely*, contains a very interesting example of polite question, worded as a greeting, which is usual in French bakeries: instead of the normal intonation of the greeting: *Bonjour, madame!*, sellers address their clients saying: *Madame, bonjour?*, that is, with a clear interrogative intonation [2, p. 32].

In order to illustrate the mentioned principle of additional effort, I chose a phonetic example, because the mechanics of this principle in other respects are much easier to observe, or one could even say practically evident. As far as lexicon is concerned, we very often observe an excess of verbosity, which goes together with a syntax characterized by exceedingly complicated phrases. Going beyond intonation, there are other examples in the realm of phonetics, where the additional effort is evident: politeness calls for a better pronunciation, for articulating words more clearly and this supposes an additional effort of the speaker.

Leaving aside the question of politeness, let us consider the main law of the development of every natural language.

3. Law of Linguistic Economy

Development of any language depends of many different processes, which take place within it. Some of those have a universal character, occurring in all, or in nearly all languages, other are specific, happening in a determined society. One of the universal mechanisms in the development of languages is the law of linguistic economy, a trend toward diminishing verbal effort.

Considerations about linguistic economy were widespread in the XVII and XVIII centuries, relative to discussions about projects of artificial languages, but the systematic study of this question started later on in the XIX century.

In this time, there were even proposals to simplify natural languages in order to make their learning easier, saying that this would only accelerate the natural process, which occur in the development of all languages.

Herbert Spencer [3, p. 172-173] said that according to the "natural laws of evolution" language goes from the complicated to the simple. According to him, long words become short, phrases with many words, become phrases with one word.

The law of linguistic economy, formulated by Witney in 1875 and Schleicher in 1894, was also considered in the structural analysis made by J. Baudouin de Courtenay and his pupil D. Polivanov. In "Practical stylistics of the Russian language", a respected manual in Russia, Dietmar Rosenthal states that "the law of diminishing the use of

articulatory resources is present in all levels of language" [4, p. 53].

Here we propose the following definition of linguistic economy: Linguistic economy is a set of mechanisms for the diminishing of articulatory effort, whose purpose is the improvement of the communication processes.

The French linguist Paul Édouard Passy, while studying certain phonetic changes, centred his attention not only in how, but also in why those changes occurred, which causes provoked them.

Passy's attention was attired by the fact that: 1.- Language constantly tends to eliminate the superfluous. 2.- Language constantly tends to emphasize the necessary [5, p. 227-228].

For Passy those two principles, applied to linguistic diachrony, can also be observed in the synchronic analysis of language and speech. Passy calls the first mechanism "principle of economy" (opposing the term "law of the least effort", proposed by George Kingsley Zipf) and the other "principle of emphasis".

4. The Principle of Additional Effort vs. the Law of Linguistic Economy

The principle of additional effort, which in our opinion is the basis of verbal and non verbal politeness, counteracts the main law of development of language, the linguistic economy law, and thus becomes an obstacle to language development.

The activation of the principle of additional effort in polite communication works as a brake in the development of the language, because it favours conservative forms and changes its norms very slowly as compared to the normal language.

In his monograph *Verbal politeness* (1994), Henk Haverkate observes the interesting fact that children learn to express themselves in a polite manner relatively late. This slow evolution contrast with the early learning of the formal norms of the phonologic and syntactical systems of the language.

This difference finds its explanation in the fact that "from a purely rational point of view, the norms of verbal politeness contradict clarity and efficacy of communication." [6, p. 42].

From the above said it follows that for verbal politeness to exist, there must be a very important cause. J. Baudouin de Courtenay considered that the progressive development of a language results from the struggle of two forces: the force of habit that tends to avoid changes in linguistic norms and the aspiration for convenience [7, p. 58].

Today we understand that politeness results not only from the force of habit, but also from communicative expediency. In other words it would incorporate the same aspiration of language to express the necessary, i.e., the principle of emphasis, formulated by Passy, as a counterweight of linguistic economy.

It's confirmed by recent discoveries in the realm of neuronal science, exposed by Daniel Goleman in his *Social Intelligence*, 2006 [8] and in *The Brain and the Emotional Intelligence: New Discoveries*, 2012 [9]. According to these discoveries, our social contacts create in our brain so called neuronal circuits (which was proved in a great number of experiments with the use of functional tomo-

graphs of magnetic resonance), and the more «rutted», metaphorically speaking, are these circuits, the bigger is the speed that they reach in their functioning. This phenomenon is observed, i.e., in the fact that normally we understand better those people who we know better (during more time). It can also be observed in the mechanism of maternal language learning, as well as in that of foreign languages. Memorizing, repeating many times expressions, dialogues in certain language, we create correspondent neuronal circuits, that lately are used to communicate in this language. The politeness formulae also create analogue circuits. Just because of being traditional, that is, repeated constantly during long periods of time, these formulae are transformed into a traditional circuit, formed and “rutted” in a concrete social group and in a concrete society, that’s why they give certain guarantee of

reaching the desired communication result with an optimal expenditure of efforts.

Which would be, so, the conclusion? The verbal politeness is based on the principle of additional effort, though just because of the frequency of the use of traditional formulae and strategies of politeness, the speaker achieves his communicative goal faster and, paradoxically, with less effort possible. In other words, the application of an additional verbal effort in the reality serves to spare efforts (also the verbal ones) in order to reach the communicative goal, contradicting, on the one hand the linguistic economy law, but on the other hand submits to the law of economy of efforts in general, whose “jurisdiction” is apparently bigger than that of the linguistic economy law.

REFERENCES (TRANSLATED AND TRANSLITERATED)

1. Quilis A. Principios de fonología y fonética españolas. Madrid: Arco/Libros. 2010.
2. Hickey L., Stewart M. (eds.). Politeness in Europe. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 2004.
3. Спенсер Г. Основные начала. Киев: Вища школа. 1986. *Spencer H. Osnovnye nachala. Kiev: Vyscha shkola. 1986.*
4. Розенталь Д. Практическая стилистика русского языка. Москва: Высшая школа. 1965. *Rosenthal D. Prakticheskaya stilistika russkogo yazyka. Moscow: Vysshaya shkola. 1965.*
5. Passy P. Études sur les changements phonétiques et leurs caractères généraux. Paris. 1890.
6. Haverkate H. La cortesía verbal. Madrid: Gredos. 1994.
7. Бодуэн де Куртене И. Избранные труды по общему языкознанию. Москва: Издательство АН СССР. – Т. 1. 1963. *Baudouin de Courtenay J. Izbrannye trudy po obshchemu yazykoznaniiyu. Moscow: Publishing House of Academy of Sciences of USSR. – Vol. 1. 1963.*
8. Goleman D. Inteligencia social. Barcelona: Editorial Kairós. 2006.
9. Goleman D. El cerebro y la inteligencia emocional: nuevos descubrimientos. Barcelona: Grupo Zeta. 2012.

Курченко Е.А.

Вербальная вежливость: принцип дополнительного усилия вопреки закону лингвистической экономии

Аннотация. В статье формулируется принцип дополнительного усилия как основополагающий принцип вербальной вежливости, и рассматривается проблематика существования данного принципа вопреки основному закону развития языка – закону лингвистической экономии.

Ключевые слова: вербальная вежливость, принцип дополнительного усилия, закон лингвистической экономии, прагматика