

“PLEASE”, “THANK YOU”, “EXCUSE ME” — WHY CAN’T YOU BEHAVE NATURALLY?” Linguistic politeness in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia

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Abstract – The aim of this work is to outline the main tendencies in linguistic politeness in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia during the 1920s, when the transformation of social classes and gender politics had a great impact on the definition of linguistic etiquette and formulaic expressions. In particular, the expressions encoding social deixis were largely affected by semantic shifts. For instance, the address terms “tovarisch” ‘comrade’, “gospodin” ‘sir’, “papasha” ‘daddy’ are claimed to be ideologically biased. The study is based on the analysis of fictional dialogues from Michail Bulgakov’s satirical novel *the Heart of a Dog* (2004 [1925]). It is seen as the story of a failed attempt to create a new man, with the absurd name Poligraf Sharikov, undertaken by a prominent Russian professor of medicine, Filipp Preobrazhenskiy. Professor Preobrazhenskiy and an artificially created Sharikov represent the two different archetypes of an old tsarist era and an emerging Bolshevik regime, respectively, in a constant clash at the verbal and nonverbal level. The analysis considers the micro level of conversation dynamics in its pragmalinguistic aspects (address terms, speech act formulas and hypocoristics) and sociopragmatic aspects (distance and power dimensions) and shows the features of the interactional behavioural norms of the chosen period of investigation. During this transition period, politeness formulas and address forms undergo constant negotiation.

Keywords: post-revolutionary Russia; politeness; address terms; speech acts; hypocoristics.

1. Introduction

If someone is asked to mention the most typical Russian word, “tovarisch” may be the first one that comes to mind. Roughly speaking, its use is primarily associated with the period from after the October Revolution in 1917 until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It served to show in-group status and was a distinctive language feature of the Iron Curtain popular discourse (Comrie *et al.* 2003).

However, “*tovarisch*” became outdated in a relatively brief period of time, thus showing that social marking and behaviour norms were evolving according to the changing ideological context and historical period. In Russian linguistics the norms and tendencies of social appropriateness used to be described in an ideologically supportive field of “*kul'tura rechi*” ‘language culture’ born in the post-revolutionary period. This branch of linguistics linked language conventions to issues of power and authority, while the tendencies of language use were ascribed to specific social groups. Since then, the transformation of social classes and gender politics had a great impact on the definition of linguistic etiquette and, as a consequence, on the use of formulaic and deictic expressions.

The present study belongs to the field of historical pragmatics, which focuses on the relationships between any particular historical language use and its situational context (Culpeper 2010, p. 77). When it describes language use in earlier periods of time, it is based on the analysis of fictional materials (poems, narratives, plays). The importance of historical (fictional) data was proven in the investigation of language variation and change (Denis, Tagliamonte 2017, p. 554). Traditionally, historical pragmatics mainly concerns English language studies (Jucker, Taavitsainen 2010, p. 12-13), but it seems to be a particularly interesting and challenging task to use this framework for the study of Russian in a diachronic perspective. Despite the above-mentioned social and historical changes that affected politeness perception in the beginning of the 20th century, the research in this area still remains rather limited and inconsistent.

The data for this study is provided by the M. Bulgakov’s satirical novel “The heart of a Dog” (2004 [1925]).¹ It is the story of a failed attempt to create a new soviet man (*homo sovieticus*, as philosopher Zinov’ev (1991) puts it) with the absurd name of Poligraf Sharikov, an attempt undertaken by a prominent Russian professor of medicine, Filipp Preobrazhenskiy. The novel cuts a clear distinction between the class affiliations of the characters, as they represent an emerging proletarian class and old tsarist values in a constant clash at the verbal and nonverbal level. Also, the members of the housing committee, on the one hand, and the professor’s assistant doctor Bormalental’, on the other, reinforce the contrastive representation of the proletarian and bourgeois conversational styles.

This study aims to contribute to the body of research in historical pragmatics with an analysis of linguistic politeness in the post-revolutionary Russia of the 1920s, which shows how the functional use of language was shaped by social roles. In the paper I will examine social implications of

¹ The novel was written in 1925 (when it was rejected for publication) and was first published in the Soviet Union in 1987.

deictic usage and politeness formulas within the framework of politeness theory (Brown, Levinson 1987), in its two dimensions of positive and negative politeness, the former emphasising people’s common ground and the latter stressing non-imposition of their personal space. My goal is to show how interactional appropriateness is to be described strategically, as it evolves in context, instead of focusing on a content-oriented approach to politeness (Eelen 2001).

To contextualise the study, I will first outline the three areas of pragmatic research it is relevant to. The first one, namely the terms of address, shows how language works in society, especially when the latter undergoes a political change. In the Modern Russian language there are no deferential honorifics, so the most common way to approach unknown people is to refer to their gender (Formanovskaya 2002). However, in the eighteenth century there was a highly elaborated system of address terms on a person’s profession, origin, educational background and age (Comrie *et al.* 2003). Among them there was a group of address terms that codified social class membership. The differences in social status were an inseparable part of one’s identity, and there were many ways in which this could be acknowledged (Nevala 2004, p. 2127). In 1772 Peter the Great introduced the system of ranking called “The Table of Ranks” for the civil and military service, where the rank indicated a man’s status as determined by his title and class (Hassell 1970, p. 283). The social hierarchy and the choice of address terms were dictated by this prescriptive document abolished in 1917. After the October Revolution, the neat stratification between classes ceased to exist, and this caused some significant changes to the encoding of politeness. On the one hand, the kinship terms became widespread and used among soldiers and working class members as a positive politeness tool of “togetherness”, for example when referring to any older man or woman as “father” and “mother” (Comrie *et al.* 2003). On the other hand, “*tovarisch*” and the loanword *citizen* became official address terms employed by working class members to avoid former gender- or class-specific terms (Comrie *et al.* 2003). Moreover, terms of address not only indicate social roles (titles, professional and kinship terms), but also reveal personal attitude and fulfil a phatic function. Depending on how they are used, they can indicate deference or solidarity, or have a challenging, offensive or downgrading meaning (Mazzon 2010, p. 264).

The second area of pragmatic research this study relates to is that of speech acts. More specifically, it will examine whether the routine formulas of apologies and thanks vary in the described historical period (Blum-Kulka, Kasper, House 1989, Coulmas 1981, Frescura 1987, Greif, Gleason 1980, Liao 2013, Ogiemann 2009, just to cite a few). The metapragmatic cues show the role of politeness rules in the new social order. The citation from

the title “Why can’t we behave naturally?” suggests that they can be perceived in contrast with human nature and spontaneous conduct.

Third, I will examine gender marking in terms of address and reference as the equalising trends in politeness also concerned the use of feminine forms as opposed to gender neutral variants. The relevance of this is due to the fact that the Russian language is characterised by a complex system of diminutive-hypocoristic suffixes, which contributes to an array of different pragmatic meanings (Spiridonova 1999). For instance, the usage of *-k* suffixed proper names is associated with derogative meaning, while the suffix *-ush* is used to show care and concern; thus they can evoke inappropriateness when used without sociopragmatic considerations (Mills 1999).

In the rest of the study I will describe the use of the following pragmalinguistic resources (section 2): address terms including titles, kinship terms, hypocoristics and deferential terms (section 2.1); gender linguistic codification (section 2.2) and politeness formulas and speech act strategies for apologies and thanks (section 2.3). I will then discuss and comment on the findings (section 3).

2. Politeness negotiation: address and kinship terms, gender codification and speech act formulas

2.1. Address and kinship terms

As I mentioned earlier, during the 20s of the 20th century, we can attribute the instability of politeness norms to the drastic changes in the social and political life of the country. In the text considered, the negotiation of address terms can be spotted in the conversations between the members of a newly-established house committee and professor Preobrazhenskiy (here and elsewhere, the citations are from Bulgakov (2004 [1925])); the translation is by Michael Glenny (2013):

- *«Вы, господа, напрасно ходите без калош в такую погоду, - перебил его наставительно Филипп Филиппович, - во-первых, вы простудитесь, а, во-вторых, вы наследили мне на коврах».*
Тот, с копной, умолк, и все четверо в изумлении уставились на Филиппа Филипповича. Молчание продолжалась несколько секунд.
- *«Во-первых, мы не господа», - молвил, наконец, самый юный из четверых.* (p. 135)
- ‘You ought not to go out in this weather without wearing galoshes, gentlemen,’ Philip Philipovich interrupted in a schoolmasterish voice, ‘Firstly, you’ll catch cold and secondly you’ve muddied my carpets.’
The young man with a shock of hair broke off, and all four stared at Philip Philipovich. The silence lasted several minutes.

- ‘Firstly, we are not gentlemen,’ the youngest of them, with a face like a peach, said finally.

An awkward silence fell among the speakers, which shows their need to work out and re-establish their positions, as the members of the house committee declined the use of a deferential term “gospoda” ‘gentlemen’.

Further on, Preobrazhenskiy again fails to call them with deferential terms:

- «...а вас, милостивый государь, прошу снять ваш головной убор», - внушительно сказал Филипп Филиппович.
- «Я вам не милостивый государь», - резко заявил блондин, снимая шапку. (p. 135)
- ‘...but I must ask you, dear sir, to remove your headgear,’ said Philip Philipovich imposingly.
- ‘I’m not your dear sir,’ said the fair youth sharply, pulling off his sheepskin hat.

In this case, the inappropriateness of the address term is exacerbated by the tone of imposition and the professor’s intention to teach a member of the house committee some basic etiquette rules. The man acknowledges his authority and follows the order, but remains unhappy with the address term. As the title “gospodin” (plural “gospoda”) or “gosudar” ‘sir’ were used mainly by the members of a privileged social stratum, it clearly became alien to the working class.

The following dialogue takes place between Preobrazhenskiy and Sharikov, when they are openly discussing reciprocal address terms:

- «...если вам угодно, чтобы вас перестали именовать фамильярно “Шариков”, и я и доктор Борменталь будем называть вас “господин Шариков”».
- «Я не господин, господа все в Париже!» – отлаял Шариков.
- «Швондерова работа! – кричал Филипп Филиппович, - ну ладно, посчитаюсь я с этим негодяем. Не будет никого, кроме господ, в моей квартире, пока я в ней нахожусь!» (p. 189)
- ‘If you want us to stop calling you Sharikov, Doctor Bormenthal and I will call you “gospodin” [mister]² Sharikov.’
- ‘I’m not a gospodin [mister] – all the gospoda [mistress] are in Paris!’
- ‘I see Shvonder’s been at work on you!’ shouted Philip Philipovich. ‘Well, I’ll fix that rascal. There will only be gospoda [mistress] in my flat as long as I’m living in it...’

² Here I would prefer to maintain the original word in order to distinguish it from a loanword “mister” also used by Preobrazhenskiy.

Here Preobrazhenskiy uses “gospodin” as a sign of respect for Sharikov, which is also not accepted due to its ideologically wrong connotation. Sharikov alludes to a Russian intelligentsia emigration wave, thus excluding himself from this social group of regime enemies settled in Europe. When doctor Bormental’ joins the conversation, he provokes Sharikov by calling him “Monsier Sharikov” (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 190) and disregards the above statement that “all the misters are in Paris”. Despite Sharikov’s protests, the professor clings to the pre-revolutionary terms of address:

- *«Имейте в виду, Шариков... господин»... (p. 190)*

- ‘Look here, Sharikov... mister Sharikov’...

Finally, he explicitly refuses to accept being called “tovarisch” ‘comrade’, unveiling the ideological background of this address term. His refusal means that he excludes himself from this emerging social group. This title is employed both in order to avoid social inequality and to mark friend-or-foe relationships among equals. The unstable status of this new norm is also shown while a professor’s servant and an old curious woman who came to see “the talking dog” (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 176) still refer to the professor as “gospodin professor” (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 177), thus recognising his high-ranked position.

Kartsevskiy (1923, p. 38-39) noticed that originally “tovarisch” was a synonymous term for a friend or a co-worker which gradually evolved into an ideological marker. He pointed out that it was even perceived as a swearword as referred to a bourgeois member; the irritation of the professor is thus explained by his non-willingness to belong to this ideologically motivated group of people who call each other “tovarisch”:

- *«Да что Вы всё попрекаете – помойка, помойка. Я свой кусок хлеба добывал. А если бы я у вас помер под ножом? Что вы на это возразите, товарищ?»*

- *«Филипп Филиппович! – раздраженно воскликнул Филипп Филиппович, - я вам не товарищ! Это чудовищно!»*

- *«Уж, конечно, как же... - иронически заговорил человек и победоносно отставил ногу, - мы понимаем-с. Какие уж мы вам товарищи! Где уж. Мы в университетах не обучались, в квартирах по 15 комнат с ванными не жили. Только теперь пора бы это отставить». (p. 170)*

- ‘So what if I had to eat out of dustbins? At least it was an honest living. And supposing I’d died on your operation table? What d’you say to that, comrade?’

- ‘My name is Philip Philipovich!’ exclaimed the professor irritably. ‘I’m not your comrade! This is monstrous!’

- ‘Oh, yes!’ said the man sarcastically, triumphantly uncrossing his legs. ‘I know! Of course we’re not comrades! How could we be? I didn’t go to college, I don’t own a flat with fifteen rooms and a bathroom. Only all that’s changed now.’

The interpersonal conflict and further negotiation triggered by the use of “gospodin” and “tovarisch” also applied to other deferential terms, like “sudar” ‘sir’, which could be put into discussion by egalitarian politics. Due to its frequent use, it was subject to reduction, so “sudar” was often expressed by a particle –s added to a verb or a noun form. As it is used both by Preobrazhenskiy (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 171) and by the head of the house committee Shvonder (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 175), it highlights the instability of politeness norms where deferential forms of negative politeness like “gospodin”, “sudar” and an –s particle co-existed with egalitarian forms of positive politeness like “tovarisch”.

“Tovarisch” is also not the only way to express solidarity and in-group membership, as the same function was fulfilled by the address term “grazhdanin” ‘citizen’. Shvonder, similarly to Fyodor, the porter, calls Sharikov a citizen and uses the same term of reference:

«Вы, гражданин Шариков, говорите в высшей степени несознательно».
(p. 174)

‘I’m afraid you seem to be completely lacking in political consciousness, citizen Sharikov.’

«Простите, профессор, гражданин Шариков совершенно прав». (p. 174)

‘I’m sorry, professor, but citizen Sharikov is absolutely correct.’

As Braun (1988) reported, in the French revolution the term “citoyen” was introduced as a general form of address in order to indicate that someone was entitled to claim civil rights. It is not used by professor Preobrazhenskiy or doctor Bormental’, who, as we can see, prefer to implement a deference-based system of address terms.

It is not right, though, to think that the pre-revolutionary address system was lacking mechanisms of positive politeness and was orientated only to the maintenance of social status. Positive politeness could be expressed through emotionally charged adjectives and/or possessive pronouns added to honorifics (“dear sir” cited above), or through names used without titles in order to show affection and establish a bond, as in this exchange between Preobrazhenskiy and Bormental’:

- «Я сегодня вечером не нужен вам, Филипп Филиппович?» – осведомился он.
- «Нет, благодарю вас, голубчик. Ничего делать сегодня не будем». (p. 146)
- ‘Do you (*vous*) need me this evening, Philip Philipovich?’ he enquired.
- ‘No thank you (*vous*), my dear fellow. We shan't be doing anything this evening.’

As we can see, they are on formal terms even though the professor uses an in-group nickname “golubchik” ‘dear fellow’ for his colleague, thus treating him with both affection and respect.

Hypocoristics also play an important role in reducing social distance and in showing affection. Both professor Preobrazhenskiy and Sharikov use an altered version of the maid Zina’s name, but with a different meaning, as in this extract, where Zina was accused by Sharikov of theft:

- «А может быть, Зинка взяла»...
- «Что такое?.. – закричала Зина, появившись в дверях как привидение, прикрывая на груди расстегнутую кофточку ладонью. - Да как он...». Шейя Филиппа Филипповича налилась красным цветом.
- «Спокойно, Зинуша, - молвил он, простирая к ней руку, - не волнуйся, мы все это устроим». (p. 191)
- ‘Maybe Zinka took it...’
- ‘What?’ screamed Zina, appearing in the doorway like a spectre, clutching an unbuttoned cardigan across her bosom. ‘How could he...’ Philip Philipovich's neck flushed red.
- ‘Calm down, Zinusha,’ he said, stretching out his arm to her, ‘don't get upset, we'll fix this.’³

“Zinka” used by Sharikov shows superiority and arrogance towards the interlocutor, while “Zinusha” is an affectionate and condescending form used for emotionally close people. On the one hand, the arrogance of Sharikov shows that he does not want to be associated with servants of old intelligentsia. On the other hand, by employing “Zinusha”, the professor signals that he wants to take her side in this dispute and protect her from false accusations. (the hypocoristics are also relevant to gender issues, see section 2.2).

While being affectionate with his collaborators, the professor does not allow familiarity when addressed by Sharikov. For instance, he finds the kinship term “papasha” — roughly translated as ‘daddy’ — irritating. The professor finds unacceptable the use of this kinship form perceived as a fake

³ This is a particularly challenging extract to translate, as the English language does not have a direct equivalent to diminutive forms in Russian. I suggest “dear Zina” for “Zinusha” and “the servant” for “Zinka”.

attempt to bond. Instead of being called a dad, the professor demands the use of his name and patronymic. Here is another vivid example of negotiation of an address term, in which one of the parties explicitly asks to be called in a certain manner:

- «Что-то вы меня, папаша, больно утесняете», - вдруг плаксиво выговорил человек.
Филипп Филиппович покраснел, очки сверкнули.
- «Кто этот тут вам папаша? Что это за фамильярности? Чтобы я больше не слышал этого слова! Называть меня по имени и отчеству!» (p. 169)
- ‘Don’t be so hard on me, Dad,’ the man suddenly said in a tearful whine. Philip Philipovich turned red and his spectacles flashed.
- ‘Who are you calling "Dad"? What impertinent familiarity! I never want to hear that word again! You will address me by my name and patronymic!’

In parallel, the professor insists on using the name and patronymic form with doctor Bormenthal’ both as an address and as a reference term:

- «Иван Арнольдович, как по-вашему, я понимаю что-либо в анатомии или физиологии, ну скажем, человеческого мозгового аппарата? Как ваше мнение?»
 - «Филипп Филиппович, что вы спрашиваете!» [...] (p. 193)
 - ‘Ivan Arnoldovich, do you think I understand a little about the anatomy and physiology of, shall we say, the human brain? What’s your opinion?’
 - ‘Philip Philipovich - what a question!’ replied Bormenthal.
- «Не беспокойтесь, Филипп Филиппович [...]. Водки мне, конечно, не жаль, тем более, что она не моя, а Филиппа Филипповича» (p. 184)
- ‘Don’t worry, Philip Philipovich, leave it to me. [...] Of course I don’t grudge you the vodka, especially as it’s not mine but belongs to Philip Philipovich.’

Since the name and patronymic form is usually co-occurring with V-pronouns, it is associated with situational dimensions of power and social distance. The absence of the patronymic is considered a social equaliser, promoted by a new working class ideology. In Sharikov’s attempt to be equally respected by Preobrazhenskiy and Bormenthal’, he tries to imitate pre-revolutionary etiquette rules:

- «Борменталь!»
- «Нет, уж вы меня по имени и отчеству, пожалуйста, называйте!» – отозвался Борменталь, меняясь в лице.
- «Ну и меня называйте по имени и отчеству!» – совершенно основательно ответил Шариков.
- «Нет! По такому имени и отчеству в моей квартире я вас не разрешу называть». (p. 189)

- 'Bormenthal!'
- 'Kindly address me by my name and patronymic!' retorted Bormenthal, his expression clouding.
- 'All right, then you can call me by my name and patronymic too!' replied Sharikov with complete justification.
- 'No!' thundered Philip Philipovich. 'I forbid you to utter such an idiotic name in my flat.'

According to the professor, the chosen name Poligraph Poligraphofich is “a strange name” (Bulgakov 2004 [1925], p. 172), as it denotes a lie detector machine and clearly cannot be a human name. Before the Revolution, the naming convention was based on the church calendar, but once the Christian religion became outlawed and replaced by a new ideology, there was a tendency to invent new names denoting great Soviet achievements or to blend Soviet leaders’ first and family names⁴ (Comrie *et al.* 2003, p. 269-272). This satirical episode gives us additional information about earlier and more recent name-giving practices.⁵

Since Sharikov refuses to be called by a deferential term, in an attempt to find an appropriate way to address him, the professor and the doctor call him by his family name, which is perceived as rude and presumptuous behaviour. Doctor Bormental’ does not accept this address term for himself and insists on being called with the name and patronymic. Interestingly, though, the family names used in reference does not provoke unpleasant connotations and don’t require the negotiation of social role:

«Ну что же, ну Швондер дал. Он не негодяй. Чтоб я развивался». (p. 186)

‘Well, Shvonder gave it to me ... so what? He's not a fool... it was so I could get educated.’

Table 1 contains a summary of the address terms usage related to positive and negative politeness. It shows how professor Preobrazhenskiy and doctor Bormental’ are resilient to an emerging norm of social equalising and tend to

⁴ For example, the name Vladlen is a blending noun which stands for Vladimir Lenin.

⁵ In the film version of the book this episode was extended into a comic scene where Shvonder baptises new born girls in the name of two far-left wing politicians Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin.

negotiate their social role based on a different system of positive and negative politeness codification.

Proletarian speech		Intelligentsia speech	
Positive politeness	Negative politeness	Positive politeness	Negative politeness
<i>Daddy, comrade</i>	<i>Citizen</i> (+family name), family name, negative charged hypocoristics	<i>Dear sir, dear fellow,</i> positive charged hypocoristics	<i>Mister, name + patronymic, monsieur, sir</i>

Table 1
Address terms.

I would also like to highlight the role of referential meaning in the characters’ descriptions. The extract below shows that “citizen” works here as a default option, while “gentleman” and “tovarisch” are marked variants of the socially opposed groups. Clearly, the terms in question evoke social connotations:

Дверь через улицу в ярко освещенном магазине хлопнула, и из нее показался гражданин. Именно гражданин, а не товарищ, и даже вернее всего – господин. Ближе – яснее – господин (p. 162).

Across the street the door of a brightly lit store slammed and a citizen came through it. Not a comrade, but a citizen, or even more likely - a gentleman. As he came closer it was obvious that he was a gentleman.

Finally, the value of each address term should be considered in direct correlation with pronouns. The use of V pronouns is not negotiated for either category of speakers and is used with all the terms of address. The only usage of the T-form is registered in the conversation professor Preobrazhenkiy has with the maid Zina. This can be accounted for considering that she is younger and has an inferior social position, and, in fact, the professor calls her only by her given name.

2.2. Gender issues

While Sharikov remains particularly sensitive to social equalising issues, trying to be respected by the professor and the doctor, his attitude towards women has a different behavioural pattern. We already saw that he uses the pejorative suffix *-k* when he refers to the maid Zina. He explains his point in the following extract, a behaviour which triggers the professor’s reproach:

- «Спать на полках прекращается! Понятно? Что это за нахальство! Ведь вы мешаете. Там женщины».
- «Ну, уж и женщины. Подумаешь. Барыни какие. Обыкновенная прислуга, а форсу как у комиссарши. Это все Зинка ябедничает!»
Филипп Филиппович глянул строго:
- «Не смей Зину называть Зинкой!» (p. 169)

- ‘No more sleeping in the kitchen. Understand? I’ve never heard of such behaviour. You are a nuisance there and the women don’t like it.’
- ‘So what? Those women act as though they owned the place! They’re just maids, but you’d think they were commissars. It’s Zina⁶ - she’s always bellyaching about me.’
Philip Philipovich gave him a stern look.
- ‘Don’t you dare talk about Zina in that tone of voice!’⁷

Sharikov adopts an imposing and disrespectful behaviour towards women with a low social position and chooses unmitigated address terms to dissociate himself from servants.

While Sharikov thrives to construct his own hierarchal norms, Preobrazhenskiy re-establishes gender divisions in the following dialogue with the members of the house committee:

- «Во-первых, - перебил его Филипп Филиппович, - вы мужчина или женщина?»
- «Какая разница, товарищ?» – спросил он горделиво.
- «Я – женщина», - признался персиковый юноша в кожаной куртке.
- «В таком случае вы можете оставаться в кепке». (p. 135)

- Philip Philipovich interrupted him, ‘Are you a man or a woman?’
- ‘What difference does it make, comrade?’ he asked proudly.
- ‘I’m a woman,’ confessed the peach-like youth who was wearing a leather jerkin.
- ‘In that case you can leave your cap on.’

Here professor Preobrazhenskiy imposes nonverbal aspects of etiquette to his interlocutor by marking the gender of his visitors. On the other hand, the woman uses the term “tovarisch” to signal the irrelevance of gender distinctions to their relationship.

The following extract shows once more how the issue of gender can be made linguistically explicit:

⁶ “Zinka” in the original text.

⁷ The translator adopted a compensation strategy, as the pejorative suffix –k was omitted and rendered with a remark about Sharikov’s voice.

- «...Только я, как заведующий культотделом дома...»
- «За-ве-дующая», - поправил её Филипп Филиппович. (p. 139)

- ‘Still, as manager of the cultural department of this house...’
- ‘Manager,’ Philip Philipovich corrected her.

Morphologically speaking, the masculine present participle “zavedujuschiy” ‘manager’ used as a noun can easily form a feminine equivalent “zavedujuschaya”. That is what professor Preobrazhenskiy did but what was lost in translation. Here we can therefore spot the tendency to use only the masculine form with higher prestige professions (Comrie *et al.* 2003, p. 237).

2.3. Speech act formulas

In this conclusive part, I would like to look at convivial speech act formulas, which are considered an important manifestation of politeness.

I think that the following extract is one of the most significant from the novel, which gives us some important information about clashes in perceptions of politeness caused by adherence to tsarist social norms vs. new proletarian ones:

- «Вот всё у вас как на параде», - заговорил он, - салфетку – туда, галстук – сюда, да «извините», да «пожалуйста-мерси», а так, чтобы по-настоящему, - это нет. Мучаете сами себя, как при царском режиме».
- «А как это «по-настоящему»? – позвольте осведомиться».
- Шариков на это ничего не ответил Филиппу Филипповичу, а поднял рюмку и произнёс: «Ну желаю, чтобы все...». (p. 182-183)

- ‘You act just as if you were on parade here,’ he said. ‘Put your napkin here, your tie there, "please", "thank you", "excuse me" - why can't you behave naturally? Honestly, you stuffed shirts act as if it was still the days of tsarism.’
- ‘What do you mean by "behave naturally"?’
- Sharikov did not answer Philip Philipovich's question, but raised his glass and said: ‘Here's how...’

Apparently, old etiquette conventions as well as politeness norms have become obsolete for the new Bolshevik regime, as they reflect the intellectual values of the old monarchy. Sharikov intuitively links the upper and middle class behaviour to politeness needs that can be seen as an unwanted imposition on the working class way of expression and their interactional practices. The new social order wants to be free from oppressive rules and challenges the predetermined models of conduct. Sharikov’s evasive response, though, marks the impossibility to bridge the gap that has been

created. At this historical period the old norms were experiencing a crisis and had not yet been replaced by alternative new options.

In the remaining part of this section, I intend to analyse the speech act formulas that were criticised by Sharikov in the extract above. To express gratitude, professor Preobrazhenskiy uses a contemporary Russian word “spasibo” ‘thanks’ or an old-fashioned loan formula “merci”. The latter was commonly used from the times of the widespread learning of the French language by Russian aristocratic circles until the 1930s. It was a neutral counterpart of Russian “spasibo”, although it was soon condemned for its upper class origin. The other way to express gratitude is through the performative verb “blagodarit” ‘express gratitude’, which is used four times by professor Preobrazhenskiy and once by Fyodor, the porter, with the adverb “humbly”, which codifies the interlocutor’s social dominance. In the professor’s speech, the etiquette formula “spasibo” is used twice. Instead, Sharikov does not thank anybody in the novel.

The other convivial speech act mocked by Sharikov is that of apology, which is expressed through the performative verbs “izvinjat” and “proschjat”, approximately translated as ‘excuse’ and ‘forgive’. Both of them are directive speech acts meant to obtain the addressee’s forgiveness. However, their usage conventions are different. “Proschjat” is more emotionally charged (Rathmayr 2003) and less frequent (5 times in the text), although it is used both by the house committee and by doctors. On the other hand, “izvinjat” proves to be the most widespread way to beg for forgiveness used among members of the Russian intelligentsia (13 times). The additional emotional load of “proschat” reinforced by the reiterated use of “izvinjat” is seen in this response to an offended patient:

«Ну извините, извините, голубчик, – забормотал Филипп Филиппович, – простите, я, право, не хотел вас обидеть». (p. 204)

‘Well I’m sorry, I’m sorry, my dear fellow!’ mumbled Philip Philipovich.
‘Forgive me, I really didn’t mean to offend you.’

The other way to express an apology is through the reflexive verb form “izvinyat’sja” (4 times in the text), which was added to the repertoire of the speech act strategies probably due to the influence of Polish (Selischev 2003 [1928]) and was used only by proletariat members. This formula was seen as vulgar and empty, lacking the sincerity of a true apology expression: “the word is uttered, but has no sense” (cit. Gornfeld in Selischev 2003 [1928], p. 41-42). The reflexive verb does not codify either guilt (addressee-oriented expressive act) or a request for forgiveness (addresser-oriented directive act). So while canonical performative verbs can be reinforced by an appeal to the

good will of an interlocutor⁸ or by a profound sense of guilt felt by a speaker, this type of reinforcement cannot be done with reflexive verbs. By now it has simply become a colloquial routine word (Ozhegov, Shvedova 1992) which does not involve remorse:

- «Извиняюсь», - сказал четвертый, похожий на крепкого жука.
- «Извиняюсь», - перебил его Швондер (p. 136)

- ‘Excuse me,’ said the fourth, who looked like a fat beetle.
- ‘Excuse me,’ Shvonder interrupted him.

The already mentioned “merci” is used by the professor and the doctor, but is heavily criticised by Kartsevskiy (1923) for having spread over into the Russian language alongside the reflexive form “izvinjat’sja”. This linguist seems to be against the fossilisation of linguistic formulas that do not express genuine gratitude or apologies.

Although perceived to be a routine and neutral part of etiquette behaviour, etiquette formulas are heavily influenced by their diastatic origin. Due to the social change which was particularly affected by substandard language elements, the reflexive verb meaning ‘to excuse oneself’ gradually became a colloquial norm, while the aristocratic French loan “merci” gradually disappeared.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The paper is a brief report on address forms and politeness formulas usage in the interactions between representatives of two opposed social classes on the verge of political and ideological changes in post-revolutionary Russia. The analysis of the dialogues from Bulgakov’s novel suggests that the social order influences the speakers’ roles and behavioural norms. This requires negotiating interpersonal relationships and face needs. According to Formanovskaya (2002), speech etiquette is made up of socially determined and culturally specific rules of verbal behaviour stipulated according to people’s social and psychological roles. Indeed, the prescriptive approach to speech etiquette that dominated the scene of Soviet politeness studies was aimed at establishing a certain set of rules for a specific social group. However, the speaker’s perceptions of the interlocutor’s reciprocal status can undermine the assumptions underlying etiquette standards.

⁸ The apology can be boosted in the Russian language by an exclamation “radi Boga!” ‘for God’s sake!’, which is a literal appeal to the interlocutor’s Christian morality.

After the Revolution, while hierarchy and deferential status are generally maintained through the system of T and V pronouns, new address terms start to emerge. This fact has two important implications. On the one hand, the boundary between superiors and inferiors becomes fuzzier and, on the other hand, the dichotomy between “us” and “them” becomes more evident. Pre-revolutionary terms like *misters*, *sirs* and *gentlemen* not only mark a distinctive social group membership, but also imply, reflect and reinforce the social dominance of this particular group over working class members. This effectively underlines the original semantic meaning of these titles. The way in which the characters in the novel speak suggests that professional roles are stable – and indeed, nobody questions the use of such terms as “doctor” and “professor” – but also that, on the other hand, social roles and the labels used to refer to them constantly undergo the process of negotiation and modification. The above qualitative analysis of dialogues gives insights into the interactive factors that preside over specific choices of address terms (Mazzon 2010, p. 367).

The other interesting point for discussion is the negotiation of gender roles as a consequence of the social equalising language politics. Although the text makes us reflect only on the professional role of women in the post-revolutionary period, it is interesting to notice how the language is particularly sensitive to a slight paradigm shift taking place inside the working class movement. This suggests that in this socialistic world a new gender-neutral norm was being built upon male standards, which in the text involves the use of masculine nouns and address terms, such as “tovarisch”, which has no feminine counterpart.

Last but not least, I should mention the changing role of politeness formulas that become linguistic clues of social class affiliation. Their use is the part of old social conventions, and they are perceived as highly deferential compared to new routine formulas.

Although presenting a limited case study, this paper was meant to contribute to raising awareness on a complex nature of linguistic behaviour in the times of social changes. It worth mentioning that due to the ideological censorship and propaganda, the fiction of that period was heavily biased. It is also the reason why it was challenging to find a novel with clearly outlined social groups described through the lenses of an impartial observer. The text of the Bulgakov’s novel provides illustrative examples for the emerging trends of social role negotiation and serves the purpose to bridge the gap in the studies on Russian politeness within historical pragmatics perspective.

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