

T and V Forms of Address Used in Russian Political Discourse

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Abstract

This article discusses speech etiquette as used by politicians when addressing each other in public and the reasons they choose specific forms of address. The relevance of Russian V forms of address as an indicator of the formal (official) style of communication is discussed. The article emphasizes the fact that non-compliance with the norms of their use can cause misunderstanding or failures of communication. It is shown that deviations from etiquette forms of address by politicians, on the one hand may be accepted if they are an indicator of their special, close relations. Conversely, they may be condemned, since they are perceived as a violation of the principle of politeness.

Keywords: political discourse, T (ты) and V (Вы) forms of address, speech etiquette, Russian politicians.

Introduction

The way we address each other: using second-person pronouns, such as *ты* or *Вы*, surnames, first names, titles, forms of greeting and goodbye, etc. – is critical for establishing contacts and marking relationships between people.

The various forms of address are a kind of code by which you can recognize each other. These words and expressions are often used as part of tactics and strategies for managing the interlocutor, communicative situation, and interpersonal relationships (Raymond 2016). They reflect the cultural values of the people and can act as an indicator of social and political changes in society. Therefore, the study of the forms of address is of great importance not only for linguists, but also for culturologists, sociologists and political scientists.

The choice of the form of address not only involves considering the appropriateness of its use in a particular speech situation, but also depends on the speaker's desire to establish the type of communication: official, business, or, conversely, informal. Forms of address can also be used as a

source of information for third parties, for those who are not directly involved in the act of communication, but are its observers. *T_{bl}* and *B_{bl}* forms of address of politicians can also be regarded as an indicator of different levels of relationships not only between politicians, but also entire states, and the transition of heads of state from *B_{bl}* communication to *m_{bl}* communication, or vice versa, can signal a change in emphasis in their communication and relations. Therefore, the targeted use of *m_{bl}* and *B_{bl}* forms of address in political discourse is of particular interest.

The study of forms of address within the framework of the topic under consideration began in the middle of the XX century and was noted in the works of sociolinguistic scientists of that time R. Brown and A. Gilman, where they emphasized that the difference in T and V forms of address lies in two planes: in the vertical, when the plural/polite pronoun (V) is used to express the appeal to those who are higher in status, and the single/familiar pronoun (T) is used to refer to those who are lower in status, and horizontally, when V addressed strangers, equal in status, and T refers to those with whom they were in close relationships. Even then, they made a connection between the social structure of society, ideology and semantics of T and V forms of pronouns. A little later, their study of T and V forms of address, built on the semantic components of '*power*' and '*solidarity*' appeared (Brown, Gilman 1960).

In the 1970s and 80s the research of R. Brown and A. Gilman was supplemented by the system of politeness strategies developed by P. Brown and S. Levinson (1978), linking the use of forms of address with the social role that interlocutors perform. Scientists have noted that T communication is used to demonstrate commonality with the listener, since T communication is a kind of marker of intragroup unity.

The next generation of scientists continued to develop and supplement existing research. The authors sought a special explanation of the speech behavior of speakers and listeners when using certain forms of address in the social, cultural, psychological behavior of the participants in communication. It was noted that politeness, expressed in forms of address, should be appropriate for the speaker and his interlocutor and in accordance with the rules of the society to which they belonged (Braun 1988). It was noted that the concept of politeness as used in political behavior, should be extended to the whole society (Watts 1989).

The topic of politeness and intimacy, expressed in the forms of address, remains relevant today. A focus for scientists is the changes taking place in the use of T and V forms of address, due to social, political and cultural changes in society. Studies of unified forms of address that have appeared

under the influence of English as a lingua franca and their use in pluralcentric languages are becoming increasingly popular (Ton 2019).

The history of the use of *ты* and *Вы* forms in Russian political discourse

If we turn to the history of the use of *ты* and *Вы* forms by Russian politicians, we can see that *Ты* forms were considered primordial for Russian political discourse. Back in the XVI century during the reign of Ivan Groznyj, oprichnik Vasily Gryaznoy, appealing to the tsar with a request to barter for his release from his Crimean captivity, uses the word form *ты* in his ‘humble’ message: «*Не твоя б государская милость, и аз бы что за человек? Ты, государь, аки бог*». «*Царь государь, смилуйся*». The same form of address was also used when talking to the first tsars from the Romanov dynasty – Mikhail Fedorovich and Alexei Mikhailovich.

Old Russian literature preserves early evidence of addresses by *ты* - texts from the Novgorod Chronicle: «*Иди, князь, с нами в поход за данью. И ты добудешь, и мы*» (Pal'veleva 2006).

Вы forms of address appeared in Russian language in the XVII-XVIII centuries, initially in political discourse. They were borrowed from Western European languages, where they were used to indicate one person in the plural form. At the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire, when two emperors were on the throne in Rome and Constantinople, they were both addressed using the plural form to ensure no offence was caused (Formanovskaya 2005: 98).

The appearance of *Вы* forms in the Russian political discourse is also associated with the formation of a new category in the Russian language – the category of politeness. It is possible that this began in the time of Peter I. We are talking here about a polite form of address using *Вы*. Cases of the appearance of secondary forms of pronouns to indicate polite address are not restricted to Russia: similar phenomena are observed in other languages. e.g. German *du* and *Sie* (Pal'veleva 2006).

The first evidence of the use of the pronoun *вы* as a form of politeness appeared in the 1690s in the internal business correspondence of Peter I. Peter made frequent visits to Europe and had close relations with French, Dutch and German culture where, even today, polite forms of personal pronoun still exist. It is through his exposure to this foreign culture that Peter I introduced the use of *Вы* forms into Russian speech. He used *Вы* to address not only the highest ranks of the Russian court, but also European ambassadors. However, like any language norm, the use of *Вы* did not immediately

take root in the society of that time. For example, the letter of Tikhon Streshnev, the head of the Russian military department during that period, begins with *ты*: «Господин первой капитан Петр Алексеевич, мой милостивой, здравие **твое** десница Божия сохранит. Писание **твое**... о здравии **твоем**...» Но к концу послания Стрешнев переходит на *вы* попеременно с *ты*: "...и за то милость **вашу** благодарствую, а за **твои** тщательные труды... Желатель **вашей** милости здравия и всякаго счастья во всем Тишка челом бью» (Степун 2007). By order of Peter, textbooks on etiquette were also published, in which it was recommended, among other things, when solving issues of domestic and foreign policy, to use *Вы* forms of address.

However, the first formal book of grammar, which explicitly introduced the *Вы* forms of address, only appeared at the end of the 18th century ("Russian Grammar" by A.A. Barsov).

Soon, along with the polite use of *Вы* forms, the subordinate *Вы* was established: particularly for high-ranking officials who expected special treatment and demanded the use of the *Вы* form of address in any appeals made to them. It was then that in Russia *ты* and *Вы* became indicators of the social status of the interlocutors.

***Ты* and *Вы* Forms of address in Contemporary Russian Political Discourse**

Вы forms of address (subordinate and polite) are still actively used in modern Russian political discourse. At the same time there has been a tendency of some current politicians to address each other or the electorate with *ты* forms. But modern Russian society itself does not welcome a kind of closeness which is implied when *ты* forms are used instead of the expected *Вы* forms. Senior political leader shouldn't use *ты* forms of address in public, as it is often regarded as a kind of populist trick. As S.G. Ter-Minasova (2008) accurately noted, "in Russia such tricks are not recommended: the leader should not speak like us. Jupiter is not allowed..."

Any non-compliance with the accepted etiquette norms of address by Russian politicians may cause disapproval among the people, and some "blunders" even become the subject of jokes (Duleba, Dulebová 2021; Jalová 2020). Consider the phrase "**Boris, you're wrong!**" ("**Борис, ты не прав**"). These were the words of Yegor Ligachev, who at that time held the post of member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee. His original words were "*you, Boris, did not reach the right political conclusions ...*". From the point of view of the norms of speech etiquette, the address by

name, in full passport form, expresses the dissatisfaction with the addressee and the seriousness of the subject of conversation (Formanovskaya 2002: 104), the use of the pronoun *мы* demonstrate Ligachev's attitude towards Boris Yeltsin which implies equal status and that Yeltsin is younger. And the contextual meaning of the forms of address does not seem initially humorous: semantic signs expressed in phrases *have gone down the wrong path, did not reach the right conclusions* lead to the structure of the text meaning of the word *мы* components '*disappointment*', '*loss of hope*'. However, the humorist Gennady Khazanov, apparently, saw in the words of Ligachev a different subtext: the moralizing tone adopted at that time in the communication of the Communists, the habit of reprimanding the guilty publicly. This phrase, "*Boris you are wrong*" has become so etched in the minds of the public, that it is often used to express that the addressee is wrong – and in an authoritative but humorous manner.¹

The requirement of correct speech etiquette from the head of the country extends to those who are close to him. Crudely, familiar expressions like "*Hey, Artemyev! Come here!*" ("*Эй, Артемьев! Иди сюда!*") in which *мы* form is explicitly and implicitly represented in every word: in the colloquially lowered *Hey*, the familiar-dismissive *Artemyev*, the imperative *come*, even a direct order – are noticed by listeners and readers and typically confuse them.

After all, these words were addressed by Viktor Zubkov, who was at that time the Prime Minister, to the head of the Federal Anti-monopoly Service Igor Artemyev. Journalists began to remind Viktor Zubkov of his past (Stepun 2007), and an astute listener would wonder why he treats Artemyev this way.

Special attention by statesmen to speech etiquette is important: "non-compliance of which causes universal ridicule, and, as a result, loss of authority, is typical for Russian culture" (Ter-Minasova 2008: 94).

It is truth that in some western countries (e.g. United States) a President sometimes communicates with his audience in a way which seeks to give the appearance that he is "their friend" or "one of them". This contrasts with Russian culture where the President "should not be like all of us, he should be better than us" (Ter-Minasova 2008: 94). This rule also applies to his entourage.

Of course, in the future, Russian Society may become more tolerant of deviations from accepted speech etiquette. Indeed, examples of this start to appear. For example, when the President of Russia addressed Alexei Miller,

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuLdrucwhC4> [10. 8. 2021].

Chairman of the Board of PJSC Gazprom, only by name (August 2021) this was accepted without embarrassment by listeners. Perhaps this is a sign of increasing influence of unified etiquette and language standards of other linguaculture. Language as a living system is sensitive to what is happening in other languages. This includes political text. And this is a completely natural process (Cingerová 2016).

Conclusion

As long as languages and their social and cultural values are of concern to people, the study of *мы* and *Вы* forms will continue to be of great interest to researchers. Etiquette formulas of address are the key to understanding not only the language of people, but also their cultural, social and political beliefs.

Russian etiquette does not welcome emphatically friendly relations in political communication, such addressing is considered undesirable and raises many questions from the audience about the validity of such intimacy. Any familiarity in the communication of politicians causes alarm, and sometimes repels the audience.

However recently, especially among young people, communication with *мы* among politicians begins to be perceived as an indicator of unity and solidarity. This is an example of the ongoing evolution of the linguaculture of modern Russia. But despite the new trend to replace *Вы* forms with informal *мы*, *Вы* forms are still preferred by the older generation. And if for young people aged 16-40 years, the addressing by *мы* is a sign of their rapprochement, then older people (about 50-70 years old) experience some discomfort with this. For them the appeal by *Вы* is an indicator, first of all, of politeness.

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