
Key Concepts of a Communicative Category of Politeness in Korean and Russian

Nelly Khan

Kazakh University of International Relations & World Languages, Kazakhstan

Introduction

In the contemporary world of globalization the ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures is one of the most crucial tasks one has to accomplish. It is not enough just to master the language to be able to communicate with representatives of foreign languages and culture, it is necessary to understand the cultural specifics of an interlocutor. Therefore, this article examines concepts of politeness in Korean and Russian, which reflect communicative specifics of the two cultures.

1. The definition of concept

One of the most popular areas of research in linguistics in CIS is Linguocultural Studies which examines specifics of various cultures and their manifestation in language and culture. Linguocultural Studies examines so called “concepts” – “the main units of culture in the mental world of a human being” [1]. The concept does not only express a certain meaning of a referent, but contains a cultural and historical background, developed and embodied by societal practices of people. Concept is a mental notion, “it is like a bundled culture in people’s minds; something that embodies culture and enters the mental world of a human being” [1]. The concept exists in human mind in the form of an image, notions, knowledge, associations and emotions. Concepts build up culture like parts of a puzzle and contain mental, social and other kinds of human experience. Different concepts of various languages have been thoroughly examined by linguists around the world lately. Since concepts help to gain insights into national specifics of the linguistic picture of the world, they are also explored to identify those national specifics.

2. Hyper concept of «Politeness» in Korean and Russian

This research of a politeness category based on a comparative analysis of the two languages

such as Korean and Russian is of a particular interest and significance. The politeness category as a hyper concept and a linguocultural unit has been examined in many research papers [2, 3 and others]. A hyper concept is a set of concepts that constitute a conceptual picture of the world [4]. Politeness as a hyper concept entails different concepts as units that shape general understanding of a politeness category in different languages. Recently a new approach to the study of a politeness category has been developed, where politeness is considered as a communicative category. Therefore we consider the category of politeness as a core element of the system, which regulates people's communicative behavior.

Identifying and describing concepts, researchers receive an opportunity to explore specific national features of a certain notion. It is particularly important when identical concepts in different languages are contrasted to identify and compare national specific characteristics, understand people's communicative behavior and carry out successful communication. So, that concept, a hyper concept to be exact, is "politeness".

The hyper concepts of "politeness" in Russian and Korean have different content and focus, which is reflected in different interpretations of politeness. Thus, the concept of "politeness" in Russian culture means "observing the code of decency". According to the Russian researcher T.V. Larina, British people understand "politeness" (synonyms such as polite, civil, courteous, courtly, gallant, chivalrous, vary widely in terms of their nature and manifestation) as being attentive towards other people, using good manners and speech to demonstrate this way a respectful attitude towards an interlocutor. Politeness for Russian people is about following rules of decency and courtesy. Based on the aforementioned difference in understanding the concept of "politeness" in British and Russian linguistic cultures, it should be noted that "in British mentality being polite implies demonstrating respect and care towards others, whereas in Russian culture it is about knowing and following the code of social behavior" [5].

The hyper concept of "politeness" in Korean communicative mind is a broad category, different from interpretation of English and Russian speakers. It is supported by the abundance of lexical variations in the Korean language, which express the notion of "politeness". They are: 공손함, 존대(말), 높임(말), 경어(법), 예절, 예의, 정중, 존중, 존경함 and others. All the lexical units have to do with an expression of politeness and respect. They are also aimed at diminishing your own position as a speaker and increasing the position of an interlocutor. Being polite in Korean means being humble and showing respect towards other people, observing the rules of courtesy and demonstrating politeness, which corresponds to the social characteristics of an interlocutor. Observing the rules of courtesy in Korean culture is one of the major keys to successful communication in Korean society. The category of politeness pervades the entire Korean language and helps to build up interactions between communicators in accordance with a hierarchy of status.

In Russian culture a person who is older or has a higher status, elevates the interlocutor, in British culture the speaker downgrades himself/herself to reach the level of an interlocutor. Meanwhile in Korean culture, neither an upgrade nor a downgrade occurs. The person with a higher

status, keeps it in any circumstances and communication with another person with a lower status is carried out from top to bottom. The norms of such a hierarchy are regulated by social behavior, grammatical and lexical structure of the Korean language, status-based divided society, people's attitudes and mentality.

3. Lexical and grammatical differences of a politeness category in Korean and Russian

Politeness in the Korean language is a core element of a hierarchy in Korean society and lexical and grammatical differentiation. Today the system of Korean politeness includes three categories: 1) addressive category (상대 경어법), 2) subjective category (주체 경어법), 3) objective category (객체 경어법).

The first category (상대 경어법) includes a system of lexical and grammatical forms, which expresses politeness (or absence of politeness) towards an interlocutor. The second subjective category (주체 경어법) expresses politeness towards an agent of an action. The third category (객체 경어법) expresses politeness towards the object of conversation.

The addressive category (상대 경어법) is the most understandable one for the native speaker of Russian, since it expresses politeness towards an interlocutor, which is expressed in Russian by means of second person pronouns like “ty” (informal You) and “Vy” (polite You). Grammatically politeness towards an interlocutor is expressed using a plural form.

The addressive category in the Korean language is the largest group and has the most sophisticated system of affix manifestation. Politeness through the addressive category is expressed through various degrees of politeness, which have appropriate lexical and grammatical components.

It is considered there are six main accepted degrees of politeness that fall into the addressive category [6]. They are: 1) 하십시오체, 2) 하오체, 3) 하계체, 4) 해라체, 5) 해요체, 6) 해체 (or 반말). These 6 degrees in turn are divided into two forms of politeness: official and non-official. Official types are as follows: 하십시오체, 하오체, 하계체 и 해라체, imperative in nature and they are used in official situations and contexts. Non-official types are 해요체, 해체 (or 반말). Each degree of politeness has certain grammatical endings. These degrees are used only in specific communicative situations and with particular interlocutors.

The politeness system of addressive category is divided into the following three degrees:

- 1) 아주 높임 – officially polite degree of politeness, which expresses the highest degree of politeness and includes the degree of politeness such as 하십시오체;
- 2) 높임 – non-official and polite degree, which expresses ordinary politeness and includes 해요체;
- 3) 안 높임 – familiar degree, which expresses absence of politeness and includes 해체 and 하계체.

In this addressive category we differentiate forms and degrees of politeness. The forms of politeness in the Korean language are similar to forms of politeness in Russian. The difference is that in Russian there are two forms of politeness such as formal (Vy- polite form of You), and informal (Ty – You). The terms such as “formal” and “informal” express their nature, the former

meaning “distant” and the latter meaning “close”. Whereas in the Korean language forms of politeness are divided into official and non-official. The names of these forms show that in the Korean language politeness is a social concept and depends on the communicative situation (official or non-official).

The forms within the Korean system of politeness have three degree of politeness, which have been discussed earlier. There are two degrees of politeness in the Russian language such as “ty”(You) and “Vy” (polite You).

Thus, lexical and grammatical system of politeness of the two languages under comparison can be presented in the following way (Table 1).

Table 1

| Korean language | | Russian language | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Forms of politeness | Degrees of politeness | Forms of politeness | Degrees of politeness |
| Official | Officially polite | Formal | Using “Vy” (polite You) |
| Non-official | Non-officially polite | Informal | Using “Ty” (You) |
| | Familiar | | |

Politeness in the Korean language is expressed through an attitude towards an interlocutor, it also shows the relationship between communicators, interlocutors and the subject of conversation. The system of politeness in the Korean language grammar (경어법) makes any Korean speaker use a certain degree of politeness towards an interlocutor in accordance with his/her age, status and other social characteristics. Regardless of the phrases and meaning conveyed, they definitely reflect a social status of the speaker as compared to the status of a conversation partner, and a social distance between the communicators [7].

The degrees of politeness in turn define the specific rules of politeness that must be observed, for example, observing the rules of subordination. Moreover, they influence a choice of certain communicative strategies and tactics that are used in the communication process (for instance, prohibition of directive sentences when one speaks to older or superior people).

There is no category of politeness such as 경어법 in the Russian language. However, there is a category of diminutive and hypocoristic words. This kind of politeness is expressed by means of different lexical and grammatical elements and reflects the genuine national Russian mentality and depicts a warmer and close attitude towards “insiders” than in English speaking or Oriental cultures. Diminutive affixes have expressive or emotional shade and most of the time imply an exceptionally close relationship and attitude of a speaker towards a listener.

If we compare terms of address in Korean and Russian, the wide variety and number of variations of names in Russian arrests our attention whereas in Korean there are just few variations of address terms. Besides, names in Korean do not convey so much emotive

information like Russian personal names do. In the Russian language, names as address terms may have approximately 150 variations of the same name. The name is not used as an original full form, (for example, Vasilij), instead various derivatives are used more often. For instance: derivatives of Vasilij such as Vasya, Vaska, Vasenka, Vasyaka, Vasek, Vasyuk, Vasil , Vasilko, Vasyuta, Vasyutka, Vasey, Vasyay, Vasyukha, Vasyusha, Vasyanya, Vasyakha, Vaka, etc. The speaker chooses the most appropriate one, which corresponds to the attitude that he/she wants to express at this particular moment. Russian personal name can express respect, hatred, love and friendly attitude. Both attitude, emotions and feelings experienced by a speaker towards an interlocutor (while addressing them) are main factors that make a person choose a certain form of a personal name as an address term in the Russian language. In the Russian culture the emotional attitude and the degree of intimacy expressed by a person towards an interlocutor is considered to be more important than expressing politeness and respect towards a listener. That being said, the vast majority of address terms is used in communicative situations using casual, informal *Ty*. It demonstrates that relationships between interlocutors in the Russian culture are based on the social horizontal axis. In the Korean language, address terms reflect a politeness system and are characterized by social differences between interlocutors according to status-related vertical axis. Terms of address in the Korean language demonstrate a degree of politeness rather than a degree of intimacy or familiarity. Korean address terms are markers of communicators' status.

4. Conceptual framework of a politeness category

It is important to highlight here that a concept (or concepts) must be playing a significant role while choosing a particular strategy, which in turn is a key (core) element of national politeness. So, the concept of “self” in Russian culture as opposed to the concept of “other” is considered to be an important one. This concept has been studied by researchers such as Y.S. Stepanov, Y.M. Lotman, Y. A. Sorokin, V.V. Krasnyh and others, and was recognized as a significant concept in Russian speaking culture.

The importance of the concepts like “self/insiders” and “other/outside” for politeness in Russian culture is supported by the fact that I.A. Sternin and T.V. Larina named the strategies of Russian communicative politeness as strategies of “distancing” and “approaching”, not “positive” and “negative” ones (terms of P. Brown and S. Levinson) [8], since the first two names are more suitable for the Russian culture and politeness. There is a reason behind it and a lot can be explained through the concept that is a bedrock of politeness.

It can be claimed here that the concepts such as “self/insiders” and “other/outside” set a direction for the strategies of politeness to put distancing and approaching into action. Tatiana V. Larina highlights that “it is possible to distinguish three different kinds of behavior of Russian people: with “outsiders” (strangers), with “distant insiders” (formal relationship) and “close

insiders” (intimate relationship). Having said this, the most polite behavior can be seen towards the members of the second group, in other words towards “distant insiders”, the relationship with them has a distant nature (for example, colleagues). As for “outsiders” who fall beyond one’s communicative space (passers-by, passengers in the public transport) and “close insiders” (who belong to the close setting (family members, for instance) Russians can be impolite and even rude” [5]. The fact that the “self” concept is the most important one in Russian culture is supported by a sophisticated system of Russian proper names and their diminutive variations and a wide usage of diminutive and hypocoristic affixes almost in all the parts of speech.

From our point of view, the concept of “hierarchy” is a significant one in the Korean culture. The hierarchy, the order of subordination of inferior members of a society to the superior ones, is the main core of the structure of the Korean society and shows either a superior or inferior level of interlocutors in hierarchy. Having said that, the main rules of the Korean society are abidance by the rules of hierarchy. They shape politeness rules that in their turn define norms of communication. Depending on hierarchical level, both linguistic (rules of grammatical system of politeness) and general behavior of an interlocutor is affected and changes accordingly.

The defining factors in Korean hierarchy are status, age, sex, family ties which can be considered inborn factors and are acquired without any efforts and cannot be changed. The role of age, sex and family ties is weak in the Russian hierarchy, status being the most crucial factor. However, it is not strictly defined by social factors as compared to status-based relationships in the Korean culture. The researcher Lee Iksop wrote that “the power of authority influence overweighs (in Korean society) the power of human relationships” [9]. It means friendship is less important than social inequality in status-based Korean hierarchy. In contrast to this, in Russian society, on the contrary, human relationships prevail formal job related ones. Thus, the subordinate can build up close relations with an employer and use the address term such as “Ty” (informal You), give some advice and even object, which is impossible in Korean society.

The social structure in Russian society is more flexible as compared to the social system in Korean society. Employers and employees can build up very close friendly relations up to the point when the subordinate can give a piece advice to his/her boss and it is not even prohibited to object to the friend aka boss. These conditions make it possible to transfer from top to bottom and vice versa in relation to “I”. The social hierarchical ladder of Korean and Russian societies can be illustrated the following way (by T. Lee) [10]. See Diagram 1.

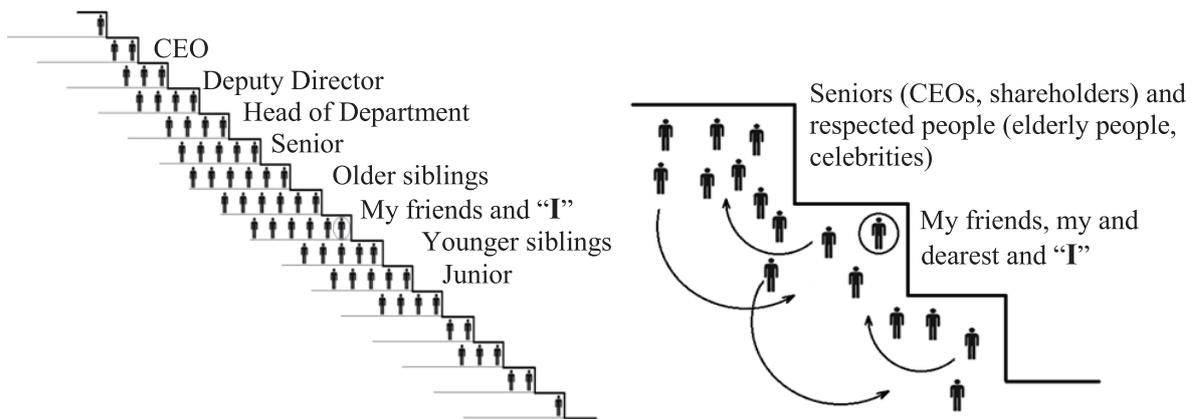


Diagram 1 – Status based hierarchy in Korean (to the left) and Russian society (to the right)

The diagram above shows that the Korean societal hierarchy is more sophisticated and structured as compared to the Russian societal system. In Korean society all the people who are older, have superior and higher positions and ranks, employed earlier (in companies) or who entered universities or schools earlier than others, are socially higher than “I”. Regardless of how close the human relationships are, those who are superior and inferior in terms of the social hierarchical ladder cannot be equal. Those who have inferior positions are not allowed by the rules of hierarchy to give orders, object, make remarks, refute what others say or use informal terms of address in communication.

No doubt, that in Russian culture the order of a hierarchy is clear and understandable, but as compared to Korean society is broader and not very rigorous. Flexibility of Russian status-based hierarchy is manifested in the possibility to change the ranking order depending on the development of relations, the level of respect, authority, etc.

That having been said, the concept of hierarchy can be highlighted as the key one for the Korean category of politeness and Korean society in general.

Conclusion

Thus, the concept of “self/insiders” as opposed to “other/outside” is a key communicative concept in Russian culture to build a politeness strategy. In accordance with the aforementioned concepts Russian people build their strategies of approaching and distancing. Whereas in Korean communicative culture the concept of hierarchy is the core one and they build politeness strategies of strengthening and weakening politeness to observe the norms and rules of that hierarchy.

These differences define national specifics of politeness strategies in the languages under consideration. For example, in the Russian language, diminutive hypocoristic variations of address terms towards complete strangers and acquaintances while using “ty” (informal You) make communication less rude and give positive emotional connotation in building strategies of approaching. In the Korean language in turn the highest formal degree of politeness mitigates

rudeness and too direct and straightforward speech, thus serving as a strengthening strategy of politeness in giving orders, refusals, etc.

The differences in the conceptual framework demonstrate that politeness in the Russian language has an interpersonal nature and also shows how close the relationship of communicators is. Whereas in the Korean language, politeness has social nature and shows social and/or status-based differences.

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