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**Politeness in Udmurt Language:
negative answers, apologies, response to compliments and requests**

PhD Dissertation

Abstract

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1. Introduction

In my dissertation I examine the use of Udmurt language in politeness situations, such as 1) negative responses, 2) apologies, 3) requests and 4) responses to compliments. For my dissertation I was looking for a field of linguistics, that discusses an aspect of the Udmurt language, that was so far out of sight of the linguists. It was also very important for me to work on a topic that is not only underexamined, but also has a practical benefit, and the speakers can use my results in the future to revitalize the language spoken by them. Politeness was a topic that was hardly examined before (except for in a few cases) not only in the case of the Udmurt language but also in the case of the other small Finno-Ugrian languages spoken in Russia.

One of the biggest challenges in carrying out research like this was, that so far if they made politeness research on Finno-Ugrian languages, it was always carried out on a language, that is spoken by people living in their own independent state, such as Estonian, Finnish and Hungarian, but in the case of the smaller languages spoken in Russia, there were no research that could have been used as scientific background, that could have functioned as a guideline. Their social structure is completely different from the ones in the case of the speakers of Estonian, Finnish or Hungarian, who live in their own independent state.

Most of the Udmurts live in Udmurtia, a republic of the Russian Federation named after them, and they are not in a majority position even there. Bilingualism is the part of their everyday life. A person who does not know Udmurt language can live there without any problems, but if someone speaks only Udmurt that person will face many difficulties, so bilingualism is not optional.

As my research does not have any direct antecedents in Finno-Ugrian Studies or in Udmurt linguistics, I had to start my research from the basics. Usually in the case of those languages that are widely researched it is common to do research on only one speech act, but as Udmurt language was not researched earlier, it is important to include more speech acts into the research. The reason behind this is that if we want the sociopragmatic researches to set foot in the Udmurt language, then it is needed, to create such a foundation that can be continued in many ways.

The Udmurt language belongs to the Uralic language family, and within that to the Finn-Permic subbranch of it. Most of its speakers live in the Udmurt Republic that is a subject of the Russian Federation, but as e.g. Pischlöger (2016: 109-110) presents it in his work, there are many of them living in the neighboring territories (Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Kirov oblast and the Permskiy Krai), and some of them are living outside Russia. Their number is about 550 000 people in total, this is the number of people who identified themselves as Udmurts during the 2010 census of Russia. From this circa half a million people there are only about 325 000 who is a speaker of the language (Pischlöger 2016:110). From the point of view of language use it is safe to state, that basically all the speakers are bilingual (except for some old people who are monolingual Udmurts, but their number is negligible), because they speak both Udmurt and Russian, but in the case of the speakers living in the southern part of Udmurtia there are trilingual speakers as well, who not only speak Udmurt and Russian but also Tatar as a native language (Pischlöger 2016:110).

On the 13 levels scale of EGIDS (Expanded Graded International Disruption Scale that shows the level of endangerment of the languages) the Udmurt language could have been found at level 5 (developing), e.g. at the time of writing Kubitsch – Németh (2019) we could refer to that position on the scale, but by now it reaches only level 6b (EthnologueUdmurt), which means that the different generations of the speakers actively use their language, but the number of speakers is declining. There is no information about what the reason behind the decision is to put the language 2 levels back since 2018. Based on my own experiences level 6a would reflect the situation of the language much better, as since my first trip to Udmurtia (2012) even in Izhevsk, the capital city of Udmurtia, the language gains more and more territory for itself.

Mainly based on my own experiences the attitude towards to speakers of the Udmurt language has gotten much better in the recent years. This is also supported by the fact, that more than 8 years has passed since my first trip there, and in this time interval the number of the Udmurt language writings increased in the capital city which is dominated by the Russian language.



(1. picture: A sign where the Udmurt language occupies the dominant position and not Russian)

2. Hypotheses

In my research I dealt with the following questions:

1. There were two speech acts in the center of my research: negative answers and apologies. As I show it in my thesis these speech acts are really similar to each other. This similarity raises the question: is it possible to analyze these speech acts in a similar way? Because of this in my dissertation I reconsider the possibility to create a new, common system for the analysis based on the systems used by Szili (2013) in her own research that was carried out with Hungarian students.
2. Is it necessary in this new system of analysis to introduce new elements that did not appear in the Szili's (2013) questionnaire, the one mine is based on?
3. What are the mainly-used strategies in these speech acts?
4. Do the Udmurt speakers use Russian expressions, and if they do so then how much of them and in what manner?
5. Is it only the difference in the social status of the people taking part in the conversation that has an effect on how they form their speech, or there is another phenomenon as well that has an important role on how they choose to express themselves in that given situation?
6. Are there any phenomena that are specific to the Udmurt language?

7. Does the second past tense of the Udmurt language have any role in expressing politeness? Because this tense, called the Udmurt second past carries evidential meaning, which has the potential to express politeness (Aikhenvald 2015: 263, 270). Although Aikhenvald suggests that it has the potential to express politeness only in the case of questions and imperative sentences but this meaning should be examined in other types of sentences as well.

3. The structure of the dissertation

My dissertation is built-up in the following way. After a small introduction I present the sociolinguistic situation of the Udmurt language (second chapter).

Chapter three discusses the theoretical background of my research. In this part I write about speech acts themselves (subchapter 3.1), and about politeness as a speech act (3.2.). In this latter one I discuss how politeness can be defined (3.2.1.), the relevant characteristics of the DCT questionnaires that I used in my research (3.2.2.), and how negative answers (3.2.3.), apologies (3.2.4.), responses to compliments (3.2.5.) and requests (3.2.6.) can be approached from a theoretical point of view. As I got all my answers from female respondents I also discuss the relationship between gender and politeness (3.3.). After these, I discuss some of the features of the languages that can be associated with Udmurt: first I discuss the “bigger” Finno-Ugrian languages (3.4.): Estonian (3.4.1.), Finnish (3.4.2.) and Hungarian (3.4.3.). After these ones I write about Russian (3.5.) and Tatar (3.6.). In the next subchapter I mention the narrow available literature written about Udmurt politeness (3.7.). Finally, I discuss the relationship between bilingualism and politeness (3.8.).

In the fourth chapter, I deal with the methodology that has two important elements: the informants I worked together with (4.1.) and the questionnaire I used in my research (4.2.).

The analysis itself appears in the fifth chapter. It starts with the negative answers (5.1.), followed by apologies (5.2.), responses to compliments (5.3.) and requests (5.4.). In the case of all speech acts the first subchapter (5.1.1., 5.2.1., 5.3.1, 5.4.1.) introduces the system used for the analysis, and in the second subchapter (5.1.2., 5.2.2., 5.3.2., 5.4.2.) I introduce the results. In the case of apologies there are two extra subchapters (compared to the previous ones): in 5.2.3. I show, how the evidential meaning of the Udmurt second past is used to express politeness in this speech act (approached from a dialectical point of view) and in subchapter 5.2.4. the comparison of the two central speech acts of the dissertation (negative answers and apologies) takes place.

In the sixth chapter I deal with the grammatical structures that can be associated with politeness in the Udmurt language. I have placed them into two groups. In the first group I discuss those structures that are usual in the languages around the world (6.1.): imperatives (6.1.1.), indirect questions (6.1.2), diminutives (6.1.3.) and the conditional (6.1.4.). Those structures have been placed in the second group that can be considered as a specific feature of the Udmurt language (6.2.): the Udmurt second past discussed in connection with the apologies (6.2.1.) and a special way how the Udmurts form requests (6.2.2.).

The summary takes part in the seventh chapter. At the end of my dissertation the reader finds the list of sources (8.), the appendix (9.), which includes the Udmurt questionnaire I used for my research (subchapter 9.1.), the Hungarian translation of it (9.2.) and the list of the abbreviations (9.3.) and at the end the list of publications published in the topic of this dissertation (10.).

4. Theoretical background

The Udmurt language does not have a translation for Pragmatics, speech act or politeness. In all three cases they use the Russian equivalent of the word. This is also a sign that shows that these researches are not really present, because Udmurt usually have technical terms for those fields that are researched (see Sergejeva 2012).

The starting point in the discussion of speech acts is the theory of Austin (1962), that defines speech act as an act carried out by words, which has 3 different types: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Later Cohen (1995) does not define it as an act carried out by words, but he also includes its interpretation in the definition. According to Salgado (2011: 9) research usually examines the illocutionary acts, so basically it is the research of the illocutionary act that we mean by speech act research, but in the case of politeness research the perlocutionary act has an important role, because the effect of our act on the other person has a huge importance. Austin also defined the felicity conditions: conditions that do not have to be met necessarily, but the lack of them can lead to misunderstandings: the process should be conventional, it should have a conventional result, the process should be carried out completely and correctly, the participants should have a will to carry out the process, and the correct participant of the process should carry out the correct act. However, Searle (1969) suggested that the fulfilment of these conditions is obligatory if we want the speech act to be successful. Searle (1976) later grouped the speech acts into 5 categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations.

During the discussion of the theoretical background I also pay attention to the progress this field of linguistics has gone through since the beginning. In the case of this dissertation they are both necessary. Although the former one is well-known for the specialists of Sociopragmatics, but the research in the field of Uralic studies is usually different, so for these researchers the theoretical background is less up to date. The later one shows that what the possible future continuations of my research.

Politeness research is based on two widely known theories: the theory of Leech (1983) based on the maxims of Grice, and the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) that is based on the face theory of Goffman (1967). In my research I use the latter one with the amendment of Foley (1997): politeness is an act, in which both participants of the interaction should feel appreciated enough. This amendment is especially important from the point of view of my research, e.g. in the case of apologies.

Since its appearance the politeness research has gone through a lot of changes. One of these changes is the appearance of first-order research (the previous ones belong to second-order research). The main difference between them, is that the second-order research the politeness is examined from the point of view of the researcher, but in the

other one it is not the task of the researcher to analyze the situations, but of a native speaker based on his/her own language use, experiences and his/her value system, and the researcher draws the conclusion from this evaluation. It was Watts (1992) who differentiated these research from each other. The basis of the differentiation is Pike's (1967) emic-etic theory.

Politeness not only changed this way. They started to examine politeness in the different languages in specific situations as well. In the handbook of Culpeper et al. (2017) there are many publications that show those special situations that were researched in different languages. Among those there are some that could be carried out in Udmurt too in the future.

In my research, as it is common in most research of this kind, I used DCT questionnaires. In this kind of questionnaire there is a situation presented to the speaker, and he/she has to write down what he/she would say in that given situation. Although there are many critics on these questionnaires, I still found it the most suitable for the research of the Udmurt language. The most important thing to mention is, as Labben (2016:86) mentions it that the results of these research should be considered as the result of test measuring the level of proficiency of the speaker in that given language. Labben says this about research, in which the members of the target group were not native speakers of the language. As my informants are native speakers of the language, Labben's idea can be interpreted that way that the statements are only valid in the examined situations, and it is not possible to draw general conclusions about the language.

In the case of the four speech acts I did my research on, the starting points were four definitions. A negative answer is a speech act, in which the speaker refuses to carry out the act the other participant of the interaction would like him/her to carry out (Chen et al. 1995: 21). According to Searle (1979: 15) we talk about apology, when the speaker carries out an action, which is not appreciated by the other person, and the speaker realize that he/she should apologize for what he/she did. It is a bit more difficult to define response to a compliment because they are usually discussed together with the compliment itself. The reason behind this is that they form adjacency pairs (Schelgoff – Sacks 1973: 296). Austin (1962) defined the compliment as a sympathetic attitude towards a situation. The compliment is the attitude towards that attitude. And finally Searle (1979: 13) defined the request as an effort to make the other person carry out the actions the speaker wants to be carried out.

To present the connections between gender and politeness I used Mills' (2003) book, in which she takes the stereotypes connected to this topic into consideration, shows the background of those stereotypes and the problems with them.

The characteristics of politeness in the languages that are associated with the Udmurt language: in the case of the three "bigger" Finno-Ugrian languages I used the publications from the volume edited by Hickey and Stewart (2005). For Estonian it was Keevalik's (2005), for Finnish it was Yli-Vakkuri's (2005) and for Hungarian it was Bencze's (2005) publication. Based on these publications it turned out that in Finnish and Estonian the information itself has a much bigger role than way it is transferred, but the background differs. While in Finnish it is a result of the fact that the Finnish speakers try to avoid situations in which they have to communicate, in the case of Estonian the publication

explains it as an effect of those languages, that had a big effect on the Estonian language (German and Russian). In connection with the Hungarian language it turns out, that in Hungarian the way a person transfers the information is also very important.

The presence of politeness in the Russian language is very similar to the one that can be observed in Hungarian. Formal addressing has an important role in these languages. Based on Mills' (1991, 1992, 1993) statements the biggest difference between the Russian and Hungarian language from the point of view of politeness is that the Russians prefer to express themselves directly, while the Hungarians prefer indirectness.

Just like in the case of the Udmurt language there are not many studies published in connection with politeness, but Voinov (2013: 171) in his dissertation about Tuvan language mentions a feature of Tatar, that is also present in the Udmurt language: the softening of the imperative to a request with the help of an auxiliary verb, that does not have a politeness-related meaning. In the case of Udmurt this is the substantive verb, and in the case of Tatar it is the verb *see*.

There are only two studies to be mentioned in connection with Udmurt. In his publication Kuznyecov (2008) examined the greetings and the farewells in the languages of the Volga-Kama region. Although the study is very valuable, but it cannot be considered as a direct antecedent of my research, as it approaches politeness from a lexical point of view, and not from the strategies used and the grammatical structures. The author of the other study is Kondratjeva (2005). The two important statements taken in it: in the Udmurt language the politeness situations based on a questions and answers system and the use of diminutives is important. For my research the later one has a bigger importance, as it matches one of my hypotheses.

In the last part of the section discussing the theoretical background I write about the connections between bilingualism and politeness. For my dissertation the most important element phenomenon is code-switching, and to be more precise the motivations of it. Myers-Scotton (1998) names four criteria from which the first one is the most important for my research: to give a new dimension to the sociopragmatic force by the means of lexical elements, or the manner how the code-switching is carried out. This kind of added dimension/meaning could be the use a structure from the language with a higher prestige, so the speaker can express how much he/she respects the other person in the interaction.

5. Methodology

In my research I used the discourse-completion tasks of the CCSARP (Cross Cultural Speech Act Research Program), that are connected to the name of Blum-Kulka (1982). My questionnaire is based on the one used by Szili (2013) to examine Hungarian language. Her questionnaire has been translated to Udmurt and with some modifications. Some of the changes were carried out to localize it for the Udmurt speakers, and some modifications took place for methodological reasons. In the case of the latter one the majority of the changes were the removal of the direct instructions because they can influence the speakers, and they may answer the questions in a different way than they

would originally do. The translation of the questionnaire was done by me, but it was checked by Ekaterina Suntsova, the Udmurt language lecturer of the University of Szeged. The data I used was gathered during a field trip in October 2017 at the Institute of Udmurt Philology, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism thanks to a Campus Mundi scholarship. I carried out the research among the bachelor's degree students of Udmurt linguistics and Udmurt language teaching of the above-mentioned institute. The data-collection was carried out during classes, and I got a lot of help from the co-workers of the institute. From the 149 students with Udmurt language specialization (that were enrolled at that time) 120 filled in my questionnaire. During my research the target group was reduced to the female students. The reason behind this is the fact that the number of the male students was so low, that their results could not have been considered relevant. Some of the answers were not included in the analysis, because they did not contain any information that would have been useful for my research. Even this way I usually analyzed 105-110 answers in case of every question. This means the 70-74% of all the students, and 88-92% of the informants who answered my questionnaire.

There was a problem to solve in connection with the questionnaire: how can I manage to get mainly Udmurt answers but in a way that mixed language use appears, as it is a common phenomenon among the speakers of Udmurt (Pischlöger 2016: 111). I solved this problem by saying during the explanation of the task, that they know about every person, that they speak Udmurt, e.g. they heard them speak it before. This strategy worked during both the pilot test of the research, and the real one as well.

The target group of my research was that group of the university students, that speak Udmurt at a high level (they can take part in higher education with their knowledge). Except for three students all of them declared that they are native speakers of Udmurt. As those three speakers were also enrolled in BA level studies of Udmurt, where even the language of instruction is Udmurt, they have a high enough knowledge to take part in this research. This was also supported by their answers. Although the questionnaire did not ask for the reasons why they consider a language as their native, but their answers doesn't have any distinguishable traits, they are exactly like the ones given by the other informants.

There are many reasons why the university-age students were in the focus of my research: first, this kind of researches are usually carried out among people from this age group (Szili 2013: 104-106), so later the results will be comparable with the results of speakers of another language. Second, it was also an consideration that if I would not have been able to travel there to carry out my research, then it would have been carried out online, and they are the ones whose answers would have been effected the least, as the online world is the part of the everyday life of this generation. And last but not least this is that age-group that is the most endangered by language loss, because usually these young people arrive to the Russian language dominated capital from their villages that are usually Udmurt language dominated.

6. Theses

For my hypotheses I found the following answers during my research:

1. It was possible to create a new, **common evaluation system** for the **negative answers and the apologies**, but it should be mentioned that in the new evaluation system there is a strategy that belongs only to the negative answers but not the apologies, and this is giving a positive answer. Although on the one hand this is a strategy that was not the part of the evaluation systems I started with, it was introduced by me, so based on these the evaluation system of the negative answers and the apologies can be unified. On the other hand, it was important to introduce this new strategy in the case of the Udmurt language because it was present in a significant amount of the answers I got.
2. It was typical for my informants that **they used Russian expressions that have a meaning related to politeness, but the use of them highly depended on the situation**. For example, they often apologized using a Russian expression, or an “udmurtized” expression that is definitely from Russian origin, but they never said thank you using a Russian expression, they always used the Udmurt equivalent of it. In connection with the Russian expressions I found that there is no connection between their use and the social status of the other person. This is the opposite of what I expected, because it would be logical that they would use Russian expressions with people who have higher social status than the speaker, as the prestige of the Russian language is higher than the prestige of the Udmurt language. This did not happen as expected. I would definitely amend my result with highlighting the fact that I did not come across any cases when the definite reason to switch to Russian would have been the difference of the social status of the participants. It can be explained by that that the difference between their social statuses were not big enough to trigger this phenomenon. This raises the question: where is this line, what is the minimal amount of difference needed to trigger code-switching? To find this out a new kind of questionnaire would be needed in which the difference in the social status of the participant is increased gradually, but to the preparation of a questionnaire like this would consume a lot of time, as the social structure should have been mapped really precisely.
3. **The same verb form (second person plural) is used in the formal address of the other person, but the way they use it is sometimes differs from the way they use it in Russian**. In Russian language use the formal addressing of the other person is much more dominant. It is a well-known fact that Russian speakers address their peers/schoolmates/course mates formally, if there is not any kind of relationship between them. The Udmurt speakers address these people in an informal way, and even use informal with unknown people if they notice any evidence that other person could have similar social status to their own. The formal language use probably appeared in the Udmurt language based on the Russian system. This is not only supported by the fact, that they use the same verb form in these situations, but also by the fact that if they had to use formal addressing they could do it without any problem, but when they were addressed

in a similar way they often thought that they were addressed together with other people at the same time.

4. **Although the social hierarchy has an important role in the politeness speech acts, there are other factors as well that can even overwrite the expectations connected to hierarchy.** One of these factors is the importance to express togetherness, which is quite understandable among speakers of a language who form a minority even in their own republic. Thanks to this, although it is common that people are usually ruder with people who have a lower social status than theirs, but in the case of the Udmurts, they were not less polite with these people but even gave positive answers. The other phenomenon is being less polite with someone who is higher in the hierarchy than the speaker. It appeared in those cases, when although the other person had a higher social status than the speaker, but some kind of reason made the speaker feel that they are morally above the other person, and this provides them the right to be impolite. Timidity and placing the other person in front of themselves is also an important factor among the Udmurts. This is noticeable in the short responses given to compliments and in giving positive answers in the negative answer situations even if they would rather say no to the other person. But they do not do this under any circumstances. When they are blamed to create a face-threatening situation wrongly they can even stand up for themselves in an attacking manner.
5. **There are two phenomena that are specific to the Udmurt language use.** These specific features are not exclusive to the Udmurt language, but they have important role in the Udmurt language. One of them is the softening the imperative to a request with an auxiliary verb which has a meaning that is not related to politeness in any possible way. In the Udmurt language this is the first and the second past form of the substantive verb. However, my informants used only the first past tense form of the verb in this role, there was no case when they would have used the second past form. This does not mean that the second past form of the substantive verb is not in use anymore in the spoken language, just that it is not present in the language use of my target group (university student females). The softening of the imperative in a similar way is the feature of the Tatar language as well that is spoken in the southern neighboring territory, but to state that this is a phenomenon that appeared in the Udmurt language as a result of Tatar influence would need historical linguistic research.
6. **The other phenomenon that is characteristic to the Udmurt language is the use of the second past form in the case of apologies.** Just like I suggested it in my hypothesis, its common use is related to the fact that this tense can express the lack of control over the situations, which is a common thing to refer to when we ask for apology. Based on previous research this phenomenon is much more common among the speakers of the southern dialect compared to the speakers of the northern dialect. Another factor that had effect on how much the speakers used this form was the time spent enrolled in the Udmurt language studies program at the Institute of Udmurt Linguistics, Finno-Ugric Studies and Journalism of the Udmurt State University, because the first- and second-year informants tended to use these form less than the third- and fourth-year speakers.

7. If we compare the results to the Finnish, Estonian, Russian and Hungarian languages it seems that the way the Udmurts use politeness in their speech is **the closest to the Russian and Hungarian way of use** and not to the Finnish and Estonian way. From the Russian and the Hungarian systems, it seems to be closer to the Hungarian and not the Russian. There are some characteristics that are more similar the way politeness is expressed in Russian, like the rigidity of the distance between the teachers and their students, while in Hungarian informal conversation could appear between students and their professors, and the tendency of answering in an offensive manner in some of the situations. However, there are characteristics that are more similar to the Hungarian language use, such as using politeness in such a big amount that it would be disturbing for the speakers of the Russian language or addressing a stranger in an informal way if there is any kind of similarity between the speaker and the listener (age, place of origin, position in the social hierarchy).

7. Summary and possible continuations in the future

This dissertation is a really good foundation for further research on politeness in the Udmurt language, and for the other smaller Finno-Ugric languages spoken in Russia as well. For the former one it can be used as a starting point for the further researches, and for the others it can be used as a guideline to follow. I hope that this dissertation is the first serious step towards putting these languages closer to the spotlight of these research and that they will get more attention in this field where they were not really known before. My future aims include the continuation to analyze the language from a sociopragmatic point of view. There are many possible directions to go on from this point, and it should go on. As the dissertation discusses the language use of the female university students, data should be collected from male students of the same age, other types of speech acts should be included in the research, or speakers of other generations should be included as well. The long-distance goal is to expand the research to the social media sites. The continuation of the research is already in progress, I have started a first-order politeness research. This means that while in my dissertation I tried to find out what are the background processes behind the way my informants use the Udmurt language in politeness situations, in the continuation I include native speakers and their own ideas about the language use into my research.

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