

Title: A Pragmatic View of Grammatical Forms
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This paper draws on a pragmatic study of the communicative speech act of offer in Russian in situations where there is a mixture of cooperation and conflict between the two sides involved in the communication. The study was designed to make students on Study Abroad (SA) programs aware of some important aspects of Russian politeness. Preliminary findings suggest that language immersion has a positive impact on the ability of SA students to notice pragmatic infelicities and enhances their awareness of some important aspects of Russian politeness.

It is well-known that politeness and friendliness do not correlate in Russian and American speech behavior. Starting from Brown and Levinson's theory of positive and negative politeness, here called 'friendliness' and 'formality' (Brown and Levinson, 1987), and empirical research in the area of conventionalized politeness (Miller 1992), the study is also heavily informed by my own field research, as well as by the work of Bardovi-Harlig (2001), Kasper and Blum Kulka (1993) and Lantolf (2000), among others, both conceptually and methodologically.

I focus on the following communicative situations. First, since native speakers of Russian encode their intent indirectly, rather than stating it as an overt proposition, it may be hard for the native speaker of English to grasp whether Russian speakers are expressing politeness by being respectful and formal (i.e., 'unfriendly'), or whether they are expressing politeness by being friendly and making someone feel like part of the group. Second, since politeness as a form of indirectness in speech appears to be a common feature of English speech behavior, unmitigated directness in the speech acts of the Russian native speaker is much more likely to be perceived by the English speaker as unwillingness to accommodate the addressee. Third, in some situations, lack of politeness and consideration may paradoxically indicate the expression of intimacy or display warmth and friendliness.

The paper presents the results of the study and analyzes several cases of polite language usage and respectful forms of address marking the degree of politeness in Russian. I also comment on relatively clear-cut socio-cultural rules regarding when to use which forms.