

# Discursive practices in Wikipedia politeness discourse

**Svetlana Sheypak**

*This paper discusses discursive practices in multilingual Wikipedia pages such as Civility, Etiquette, Consensus, No Personal Attacks, and Dispute Resolution. These pages explain to contributors the rules of collaborative behavior in a Wiki-community. The paper attempts to answer a question raised by Lovink and Tkacz (2011): 'How do different language communities relate to and differ from one another in multilingual projects?' A discursive approach is adopted in order to analyze politeness strategies on the multilingual Wikipedia pages. The discursive politeness practices recommended in the English, French, and Russian Wikipedia pages are analyzed through the concept of Face Threatening Act (FTA). In view of the criticism directed at the traditional FTA concept, we redefine FTA as a unit of discursive strategies. Our findings point out the divergence in applying politeness strategies to English, French, and Russian pages. Two hypotheses are advanced to explain their divergence. The first concerns the role of cultural variation, while the second concerns the role of ideological transformations in the process of knowledge production on Wikipedia.*

KEYWORDS Wikipedia; discursive practices; Face Threatening Act (FTA); positive/negative politeness strategies

## Introduction

Media technologies in the age of globalization have given rise to new forms of knowledge organization. Wikipedia, the XXI century universal encyclopedia, was one of the ten most popular websites in 2007.<sup>1</sup> According to estimates by the Wikipedia community, the most active contributors, across the more than the 250 languages, are in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>2</sup>

In the Internet age Wikipedia seems to expand the encyclopedic ideal of Diderot and D'Alembert, which was so radically innovative for the XVIII century. In contrast to earlier encyclopedias, which had only one author, their Encyclopedia was the first to use the collective work of various contributors to gather 'all the knowledge' in the world. Involving nearly 200 authors, this collective undertaking was marked by bitter controversies. These were largely due to the polemic character of the Encyclopedia, which was not simply a reference book, but a singular political and cultural intervention, about which Encyclopaedists had divided opinions. They worked for a common project, but their different ideological orientations and intentions fostered more controversies than efficient collaboration.

Despite the historical debt of the Wikipedia project to the French Encyclopedia, the online forms of communication emphasize consensus, a neutral point of view, and an impartial tone. These requirements result from a new conception of free knowledge. In a brief historical overview of Encyclopedias, O'Sullivan (2011: 47) explains that, the fact that the wiki software allows anyone to contribute, makes Wikipedia unique, even among other Internet encyclopedias. Unlike previous Internet encyclopedias, Wikipedia is free not only to use but also to edit. O'Sullivan notes the emergence of a new concept of knowledge, which is flexible, fallible, refutable, and involves change, disagreement, and continuous partial revision. He argues that Wikipedia's numerous rules and

conventions is a result of the great variety of opinion. When Wikipedia was created the main task was the completion of the project, so anyone was allowed to contribute. Nevertheless, as Graham (2011: 279) argues: 'there can only be one representation of any given feature or event present at any one time on its site. The countless ways of interpreting economic, social and political landscapes mean that articles that contribute [...] necessarily must only represent selective aspects [...] in selective ways.' According to Graham, this selectiveness is a result of 'power relationships and divisions in the offline world'. Thus, Wikipedia discourse reproduces power relation proper with the discourses of different specific domains of knowledge.

### Politeness discourse in Wikipedia

The continual revision of Wikipedia's multilingual information, as well as its distinctive collaborative character (Reagle 2010) evokes Foucault's description of the discursive construction of knowledge (Foucault 1972). Although he does not explicitly refer to semiotics, Foucault introduces a concept of discursive practices, which can be considered as a particular semiotic system grounded in a social and cultural context. A discursive practice is a way of creating meanings peculiar to this context. The concept of discursive practice has subsequently been developed by Critical Discourse Analysis that considers discursive practices as constituted by anonymous rules, systems and procedures in which knowledge is produced (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 62). They are structured through forms of selection, exclusion or domination, that concern both power relations and linguistic choices. Although produced by individuals, they are stable in the given social context due to the social and ideological position of individuals. Their position implies a system of constraints that make an arbitrary form of enunciation impossible, whilst emphasizing its particular forms.

A discourse analysis approach concerns not only referential semantic content, but also the social, ideological, and transformative power of discourse. The use of language in different social contexts is based on the indexical component of the language, because every utterance is grounded in the socially constituted relationships of individuals in any given interactional context. In his study on the indexicality of the linguistic sign, Gurdin (1994: 60) argues that within social and cultural communities, individuals index themselves against others 'in creative ways, manipulating and transforming categories and their social identities'. Thus, the use of particular linguistic forms coincides with the ideologies that shape these social categories. Social and cultural context orders particular linguistic choices and prescribes the use of particular discursive practices. If any linguistic form indexes a context in which it was used, some linguistic choices are more ideologically marked than others.

Discursive practices are considered here in the narrow sense, because they only concern the politeness strategies preferred by different Wikipedia language communities. Discursive politeness strategies are analyzed across multilingual Wikipedia pages, which explain to new contributors the rules for creation or improvement of pages. The highly democratic character of the Wikipedia project, where anyone can contribute, has necessitated the explicit governance of new contributions, in order to avoid conflicts in the Wikipedia community and to structure online free knowledge (O'Neil 2011). O'Neil notes that 'the crucial fact about Wikipedia's rules is indeed that there are more and more of them and that 'non-encyclopedic work, such as discussion, procedure, user coordination, and maintenance activity, such as reverts and vandalism, is on the rise' (O'Neil 2011: 317). In fact, a lot of special pages explain the politeness strategies for countless Wikipedia contributors: *Fundamental Principles*, *Five Pillars*, *Civility*, *Etiquette*, *Consensus*, *No personal attacks*, and *Dispute Resolution*. Most of these pages are created in multilingual versions. All these pages are representative of Wikipedia politeness discourse as they satisfy all four of Foucault's criteria: its 'statements refer to the same object, are made in the same enunciative modality, share a system of conceptual organization and share similar themes and theories, which Foucault calls strategies' (Sawyer 2012: 436).

### **Linguistic politeness theory: traditional approach**

Reviewing approaches to analyzing politeness, Fraser (1990) identifies four basic approaches. Arguing that the social-norm view is more historical than that actually adopted by the researchers, he analyses the remaining three.

The conversational-maxim view implies Lakoff's and Leech's politeness maxims. In fact, Lakoff has reformulated Grice's notion of Cooperative Principle on the basis of pragmatic rules, but her threefold classification of politeness – polite, non-polite and rude – makes real discourse analysis inefficient, since the perception of polite or impolite action is a function of situational assessment. Therefore, Fraser argues that it is problematic for the speaker or listener to assess what level of politeness is required in interaction, whether formal, informal or impersonal. Leech defines 'absolute politeness' through five functions involving different communicative acts (Trosborg 1994). The collaborative function would correspond better to the Wikipedia community discourse, because of the collaborative character of knowledge production on Wikipedia. But for Leech, the collaborative function relates only to acts whose illocutionary goal is indifferent to social goal, e.g. assertion, reporting, announcing, and instructing. Politeness cannot be all that relevant to these acts; Leech defines them as neutral towards politeness.

The next approach examined by Fraser is Brown and Levinson's face-saving model. Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a linguistic politeness theory for intra-cultural communication, widely known as the B-L model, based on Goffman's notion of face. Either the speaker or the addressee possesses two faces, negative (NF) and positive (PF). The needs of the NF are privacy, personal space and the right not to be embarrassed. The needs of the PF are to be approved of by others. Communication is considered as a chain of face threatening acts (FTAs), that is, speech acts which threaten the PF or NF of either the speaker or the addressee. The B-L model envisages four types of discursive strategies: Bald on-record strategies are not at all polite, as they don't mitigate the addressee's face at all. Positive politeness strategies attempt to minimize the harm to the addressee's PF and prove that the speaker has the same intentions as the addressee. Negative politeness strategies manage the addressee's NF by avoiding risk to his autonomy. Off-record strategies, finally, are also called indirect strategies because of the evasive language that the speaker employs to obscure his real communication intention, so that FTA is not committed. Through communication, the speaker should manifest facework, in order to manage NF and PF of the listener, but at the same time remembering to manage his own faces.

The B-L model has been criticized for its individualistic and ethnocentric notion of face (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Trosborg 1994), whereas Goffman's theory of ritual interaction has introduced a socially and culturally dependent concept of face (Goffman 1972: 31). The B-L model stresses one's individual personality, which is considered a sacred thing (Brown and Levinson 1987: 11). The more significant criticism to the B-L model regards its rationalist conceptualizing of the speaker and the addressee as model persons who are able 'to choose the appropriate way in which s/he should use the Gricean maxims in the effort to maintain the mutual maintenance of face for both her/himself and the addressee in the most efficient way' (Watts et al. 2005). Although Fraser (1990) notes that the B-L model is systematically challenged, nevertheless he underlines that it represents the more fully articulated version.

Wilson's criticism of the B-L model's assumption that 'all FTAs can be analyzed by looking at decontextualized speech acts' (Wilson et al. 1992: 218) forms the basis of the fourth approach examined by Fraser (1990: 232): the conversational-contact view. The conversational interaction in this approach is considered as a 'set of rights and obligations that will determine [...] what the participants can expect from the other(s)'. According to this view, politeness is not a result of the participants' concern for face-loss, but of their negotiations through the interaction. A similar approach to analyzing rights and duties is suggested by

Moghaddam and Triandis (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003). Taking into account the individualism-collectivism dimension of cultural variation, they distinguish rights-based and group-based societies where politeness concerns could be explained by 'weighting' the rights of positive and negative valence, duties towards the group and duties to self. Interdependence between rights and duties implies self-other relationships, which allow different interpretation of polite behavior (Bhatia 2000: 306).

To overcome the ethnocentric aspect of the B-L model, Ting-Toomey (1988) has suggested Face-Negotiation Theory (F-N theory), an interactional approach for intercultural communication. F-N theory analyses facework strategies applied by people of different cultures. In order to identify specific cultures, she chooses two dimensions: Hofstede's individualistic-collectivistic dimension and Hall's low-high context dimension (Hall 1997). Individualistic cultures prefer solution-oriented styles in communication, whereas in collectivistic cultures one chooses affective-orientated styles. On the individualism scale, for instance, Russia scores 39, France 71, the USA 91, the UK 89, and Canada 80.<sup>3</sup> In low-high context cultures we find opposing attitudes towards verbal explicitness-implicitness of interactions. Low-context cultures don't appreciate verbal implicitness (e.g. US, UK), while verbal interactions in high-context cultures are implicit (e.g. Russia, France). Ting-Toomey assumes that individualism is correlated with low-context communication while collectivism is correlated with high-context communication. Her analysis suggests that individualistic, low-context cultures choose rather direct modes of communication, emphasizing *I*-identity and competitive strategies that primarily preserve the NF. Whereas collectivist, high-context cultures affect indirect communication mode with emphasis on *WE*-identity, people identify with their in-group (Earley 1997: 137). They prefer other-face and collaborative strategies that preserve primarily PF.

### Linguistic politeness theory: the postmodernist approach

In the absence of a clear definition of politeness, researchers (Watts et al. 2005: 3) still need to distinguish between first-order and second-order politeness. First-order politeness corresponds to various ways in which polite behavior is perceived and talked about by the members of socio-cultural groups. Second-order politeness, on the other hand, is 'a theoretical construct, a term within a theory of social behavior and language usage'.

A postmodernist view of polite behavior has arisen from the postmodernist theory of language. Watts (2005a: xli) notes that the postmodernist conceptualization of politeness suggests that perceptions of what is polite or impolite 'vary considerably from speaker to speaker, from community of practice to community of practice and even from one situational context to another in the case of individual speakers'. Thus, politeness is perceived as a dynamic concept. Ehlich (2005: 79) points out that perceptions of politeness are always open to adaptation and change in any group, at any age and at any moment of time that arises through interaction. The postmodernist interpretation of polite behavior has proved quite fruitful, by allowing for different theoretical frameworks for analyzing socially constructed appropriateness in verbal interactions.

Watts (2005b: 51) has proposed to distinguish polite and politic behavior by supposing a broader variety of forms of behavior perceived 'to be more than socially required'. Janney and Arndt (2005) make a distinction between social politeness based on Goffman's theory of ritual interactions and tact understood as an interpersonally supportive way of behavior. Werkhofer (2005) proposes a new understanding of politeness, which is based on calculating the rights and duties of participants and considering the appropriateness of their behavior regarding their position in actual interactions. Watts (2005b: 55) argues that all frameworks suggested by the postmodernist approach to politeness can be considered as attempts to reach out beyond the confines of the B-L model. According to Hough (2007) their theoretical contributions for developing the theory of politeness have given rise to new challenges such as the place of the analyst vis-à-vis the participant in interpreting interactional context. In a detailed review of discursive perspectives to politeness, Hough (2007: 313) points out that in 'attempts to construct an alternative theory of im/politeness, it is important to consider

the question of where politeness should be located within such a broader theoretical framework'. But none of the postmodernist or discursive approaches to polite behavior suggests such fully articulated and practically useful procedures as the B-L model, able to analyze the linguistic choices of interaction's participants for applying politeness strategies.

In the lack of a more appropriate model for describing discursive politeness strategies, it can be argued that Brown and Levinson's FTA concept could be used to study discursive forms because it indexes im/polite behavior in a given context. There are a lot of criticisms about the FTA concept, but, to date, it is certainly the most convenient for empirical research. An additional argument for using FTA analysis is the fact that the notion of face and face-threat mitigation, being theoretically redefined, is widely applied in different postmodernist approaches (e.g. by Watts, Sell, Werkhofer). The FTA concept is used in this line of research as a unit of discursive strategies in a broader perspective than it was in the B-L model. FTA's interpretation in a given interactional context takes into consideration Hough's observation of 'variability in the evaluations of behavior' (Hough 2007: 313) resulting from the interactional negotiations of the participants. Moreover, if the FTA concept is challenged in the theoretical framework of politeness, Watts (2005a: xix) points out 'a shift of emphasis away from the attempt to construct the model of politeness which can be used to predict when the polite behavior can be expected or to explain post factum why it has been produced'. Thus, to date, the FTA concept appears to be the most appropriate in empirical research which aims to explain how politeness strategies develop in interactions.

Our discursive approach is based on the typology of politeness strategies suggested by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1998) as an improvement of the B-L model. She has redefined negative politeness; off-record strategies having been reexamined according to their pragmatic goals through positive and negative politeness. New typology for positive and negative politeness allows overcoming one more criticism addressed to the B-L model in which negative and positive politeness are considered as mutually exclusive and only one type of face can be threatened at any given time. Positive politeness supposes enhancing the other's positive value by addressing especially strengthened Face Flattering Acts concerning both the positive and negative face to addressee. Negative politeness consists of avoiding, reducing, or softening FTAs to both faces. For Kerbrat-Orecchioni negative politeness can be implemented in two ways, by substitution and supplementary strategies. Realizing their linguistic choices, the interlocutors take part in face-working negotiations. Such FTAs as request or order are usually formulated with the imperative mood and perceived as the most threatening act, i.e. bald on-record strategies in the B-L model. Using substitution strategies can mitigate the threat, which substitute the imperative mood with speech acts perceived as less damaging, e.g. modal or impersonal constructions. Supplementary strategies attempt to mitigate the FTA while an explicitly threatening statement is supplied with additional linguistic forms anticipating the future FTA before committing or repairing the FTA already committed. One can explicitly announce the future FTA before committing it, strengthen apologies for the FTA before or after committing it, or give a supplementary compliment to repair the damage for the committed FTA or advance arguments to justify committed FTA. Certainly a very exhaustive list of linguistic forms implied in positive and negative strategies is suggested by Kerbrat-Orecchioni only for the French; however, variable techniques of minimization in FTAs appear to be similar to different socio-cultural communities. The following analysis of politeness strategies in English, French, and Russian Wikipedia proves that many of them are equally used in Russian and English communication.

The discursive approach is articulated through the flexible interpretation of statement viewing as a speech act which variable meaning always depends on the position of interpreter. Thus no single speech act can be intrinsically threatening like it was in the B-L model. Beyond interactional context, it is impossible to perceive the speech act as threatening to anyone's face; only the situational analyses allows understanding the pragmatic sense of statements in a given context and their mutual interpretations.

On the other hand, the discursive approach is articulated through empirical material chosen for the research. Wikipedia pages explaining politeness strategies for new contributors deal with first-order and second-

order politeness. To the extent that these pages explicitly define the rules for interaction between the members of the Wikipedia community, they refer to first-order politeness. Nevertheless, problematic politeness arises in these pages as a theoretical framework by those responsible for Wikipedia content governance, so their reflections appear to be linked to second-order politeness. Finally, speculating on politeness in Wikipedia, the anonymous authors of Wikipedia pages adopt – this time implicitly – different linguistic forms which index discursive politeness strategies differently for different language communities. In agreement to Foucault's discourse analysis approach (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002: 13), however, it will be demonstrated that, despite the different languages involved and the resultant 'infinite number of ways to formulate statements... the statements produced within [this] specific domain of knowledge are rather similar and repetitive', reflecting the fact that the governing principles of Wikipedia (Lovink and Tkacz 2011: 12) result from 'the global politics of knowledge production' common to all contributors.

### Discursive politeness strategies in Wikipedia pages

Linguistic forms used by Wikipedians in different languages relate to specific social and cultural choices. They reflect, primarily, the dominant form of politeness discourse in their particular linguistic context. In applying a discursive approach to Wikipedia pages, we must begin by asking which linguistic forms are considered dominant in different Wikipedia language communities. In analyzing discursive politeness practices we intend to compare statistical data regarding the use of politeness strategies. In the case of negative strategies, we count substitution and supplementary strategies separately. From the B-L politeness model, specifically, we have adopted the notion of bald on-record strategies, i.e. speech acts perceived in the given context as threatening and committed without any damage repair.

#### *Five Pillars*

*Five pillars/Principes fondateurs/Пять столпов* is the Wikipedia page with the same multilingual content summarizing basic Wikipedia norms and rules for newcomers. In order to avoid unnecessary wording some request forms are directly formulated as FTAs, but for all languages different politeness strategies are mostly applied to mitigate imposition of norms and rules governing Wikipedia content production.

For the first pillar, English, French, and Russian have chosen the same substitution strategy. The statements explaining to newcomers how Wikipedia differs from other information sources, such as dictionaries or newspapers, use negative forms of indicative mood (1) rather than the imperative mood, which, in this context, could be perceived as explicit FTA. Affirmative statement in this context is not considered as applying any strategy (1\*) since it only supposes describing the starting position:

- (1) *It [Wikipedia] is not a dictionary, a newspaper/ Wikipedia n'est pas un journal, un hébergeur gratuit/ Это [Википедия] не газета и не сборник исходных документов.*
- (1\*) *Wikipedia is an encyclopedia: it combines many features of general and specialized encyclopedias, almanacs, and gazetteers.*

To prevent newcomers from taking wrong steps, the statements using negative forms of indicative mood (2) define the prohibited actions on Wikipedia, instead of prohibiting them:

- (2) *Wikipedia is not an advertising platform/ Ce n'est pas l'endroit où faire part de vos opinions/ [Википедия] не беспорядочная свалка информации, не каталог ссылок.*

In the French version, a substitution strategy is applied through the modal construction to express obligation imposed on the contributors (3):

- (3) *Tous nos rédacteurs se doivent de respecter l'interdiction sur les recherches originales (dits aussi «travaux inédits») et de rechercher une exactitude aussi poussée que possible.*

The English version briefly enumerates what Wikipedia is not, while the French and the Russian versions are much more verbalized, due to supplementary statements designed to prevent newcomers from taking wrong steps. In English, the argumentation is only used once (4):

- (4) *It [Wikipedia] is not [...] a collection of source documents, although some of its fellow Wikimedia projects are.*

The supplementary arguments on the French page are mostly given through the participle construction (3, 5):

- (5) *Wikipédia n'est pas une compilation d'informations ajoutées sans discernement.*

On the Russian page, the supplementary arguments are given in an assertive statement through modal (6,7) and impersonal (8) constructions and embedded clauses (7,8). There are statements which apply two strategies at once, e. g. (7): the modal contraction realizes the substitution strategy and the embedded clause the supplementary one.

- (6) *При работе над каждой энциклопедической статьей следует стремиться к максимальной точности и проверяемости.*  
 (7) *[...] сведения, вызывающие сомнения и не подтверждаемые ссылками, могут быть удалены, поэтому не забывайте указывать источники вашей информации.*  
 (8) *Оригинальные идеи, толкования, результаты самостоятельно проведённых исследований невозможно проверить, а потому они здесь неуместны.*

For the second pillar, the English version differs from the French and Russian ones by the stressed use of the pronoun *we* (9), which emphasizes the collaborative character of Wikipedia community:

- (9) *We avoid advocacy and we characterize information and issues rather than debate them.*

However, the *we* of community solidarity could be perceived by newcomers as a will to underline the distance between themselves and experienced contributors. A modal construction with *must* stressed by an adjective, *all* (10) is also considered as a sign of imposition:

- (10) *All articles must strive for verifiable accuracy [...].*

In the French and Russian versions modal (12, 14) and impersonal (11, 13, 15) indicative constructions are preferred to mitigate impositions for newcomers which are implicitly addressed in the statements. Only one English statement uses the same implicit strategy instead of prohibiting the contributors to refer to their own personal experiences, interpretations, or opinions (11):

- (11) *Editors' personal experiences, interpretations, or opinions do not belong.*  
 (12) *[...] les articles ne doivent pas promouvoir de point de vue particulier.*  
 (13) *Parfois, cela suppose de décrire plusieurs points de vue.*  
 (14) *Не следует представлять то или иное суждение как «единственно верное» или как «истину в последней инстанции».*  
 (15) *Соблюдение НТЗ также означает необходимость предоставления ссылок на проверяемые авторитетные источники [...].*

Twice, the English version substitutes prohibition with a comparative, e.g. of personal point of view (9, 16):

(16) [...] *we describe multiple points of view, presenting each accurately and in context rather than as 'the truth' or 'the best view'.*

For the third pillar, the English and Russian versions use the bald on-record strategies (17, 18), which are avoided in the French version that employs only modal and impersonal constructions (19):

(17) *Respect copyright laws, and never plagiarize from sources.*

(18) *Не размещайте в Википедии материалы, нарушающие авторское право [...].*

(19) *Les obligations sont [...] de créditer les auteurs originaux.*

To stress the contributors' rights over their articles, all three versions use supplementary modal lexical means, such as *anyone can/all editors/no editor/any contributions can*, e.g. in (20, 21, 22). Thus, in the given context, the use of lexical means that increase the rights of contributors articulates positive strategies:

(20) *Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute.*

(21) *Cette licence autorise chacun à créer, copier, modifier et distribuer le contenu de Wikipédia.*

(22) *Следует иметь в виду, что статьи могут редактироваться кем угодно [...].*

The fourth pillar deals with civility rules and it uses the most bald on-record strategies in the imperative mood (23) which evidently results from a strong imposition of formal Wikipedia rules and norms that are briefly enumerated in all three versions. Some the imperative mood statements are not perceived as bald on-record strategies, since they are supplied with arguments commonly expressed in the embedded clauses (24). On the French and Russian pages, some of the imperative mood statements are substituted with modal constrictions (25). In (25) the imperative mood of the modal verb *efforcez* is not perceived as a bald on-record strategy, but it uses the substitution strategy:

(23) *Apply Wikipedia etiquette, and don't engage in personal attacks.*

(24) *If a conflict arises, discuss it calmly on the nearest talk pages [...].*

(25) *Efforcez-vous d'être ouvert, accueillant et amical.*

The imperative mood in (26, 27) is not perceived as a FTA; by contrast, this statement can be considered as applying a positive strategy. Encouraging newcomers to contribute through use of a imperative construction gives an argument for participation:

(26) [...] *remember that there are 4,686,547 articles on the English Wikipedia to work on and discuss.*

(27) *Ne perdez pas de vue qu' il y a 1.577.876 articles différents sur la Wikipédia francophone, sur lesquels vous pouvez travailler et discuter.*

In the fifth pillar, all versions use positive strategies to encourage newcomers to contribute and to not be afraid of making mistakes (28, 29). In these statements the imperative mood is not perceived as a FTA, but as a positive strategy, because of its meaning in the given context:

(28) *N' hésitez pas à être audacieux dans vos contributions*

(29) *Смело правьте, переименовывайте, изменяйте статьи — в этом заключается удовольствие от редактирования [...].*

The statistical data presented below (Table1) point out the politeness strategies occurrences on the pages *Five pillars/ Principes fondateurs/ Пять столпов*.



language	politeness strategies	Negative politeness strategies		Bald on-record strategies	Positive politeness strategies
		substitution strategies	supplementary strategies		
English ( <i>Five pillars</i> )		15	14	13	2
French ( <i>Principes fondateurs</i> )		15	13	6	3
Russian ( <i>Пять столпов</i> )		15	13	8	3

**Table 1.** Politeness strategies in the Five Pillars page

Positive politeness strategies are applied in three languages only to encourage collaborative practices from newcomers. Negative politeness strategies are much more frequent, since they allow the mitigation of Wikipedia community impositions for the newcomers. For all languages, negative strategies are realized by substituting the imperative mood with modal and impersonal constructions and assertive forms. Supplementary strategies are presented in embedded clauses, which justify committed FTAs.

The imperative mood involving FTAs in bald on-record strategies, without minimizing the threat to the newcomers face, is employed as strong imposition of Wikipedia rules to issues of respect. One should underline that for all languages the majority of explicit politeness claims are formulated in the imperative mood (e. g. *seek consensus, avoid edit wars, act in good faith, be open and welcoming to newcomers*). They are less frequent in the French and Russian versions than in the English one. A peremptory style is proper only for the English version.

### *Etiquette*

*Etiquette/Règles de savoir-vivre/Этикет* is a multilingual page in which English, French, and Russian versions differ in presentation structure, size, and composition. Therefore, a statistical analysis has only been made for the introductory part, which has similar composition structure and topics in all three versions. This page describes the interactional behavior to be adopted by all members of Wiki-community regardless of their cultural differences. Only the introduction to the English version mentions the multicultural dimension of the Wikipedia project as a supplementary reason to give special consideration to effective collaborating.

The Russian version prefers statements that do not personally imply the reader (1), while the English and French versions alternate between the impersonal (2, 3) and the personal through the pronoun *you* (4, 5).

- (1) *Википедия призывает всех авторов смело вносить изменения, представляющиеся им (после ознакомления с правилами) полезными.*
- (2) *Criticism of another's edit [...] ought to be made clearly, directly, and explicitly [...].*
- (3) *[...] tous les participants se doivent avant tout d' arriver à un consensus.*
- (4) *Keep in mind that sarcasm cannot easily be conveyed in writing and may be misinterpreted.*
- (5) *Gardez à l' esprit que ceci est une encyclopedie [...].*

Substitution strategies are applied by means of assertive statements, which do not personally address the reader. Instead of being imposed with a rule to respect, the newcomer is implicitly advised without being personally addressed (1, 2, 5).

The English version uses the same personal structure for both parts of the statement, which is formed in the imperative mood with FTA, and the second one applies supplementary strategy to mitigate the imposition (6). In the French version, some supplementary strategies are applied through embedded clauses with personal addressing through the pronoun *you*, and substitution strategies are applied through the statements that do not personally address the reader (7).

- (6) ***Avoid** use of unexplained scare quotes and other means of implying criticism or making indirect criticism when you are writing in edit comments and talk pages.*
- (7) *Sivous vous sentez mal à l'aise à l' idée de changer le travail d' un autre, et **que vous vouliez** ajouter vos pensées, question ou commentaires sur l' article, **l'endroit pour faire cela est la page de discussion de l'article.***

In all versions the imperative mood statements do not imply bald-on record strategies. In the English and Russian versions, only once imperative FTA is mitigated with supplementary strategies through the embedded clause (6, 8), while, the English and French versions, such as *keep in mind*, *gardez à l' esprit*, *essayez d'éviter*, do not impose any action but reinforce the substitution strategies applied by means of assertive statements (4, 5).

- (8) ***Вслушивайте** доводы оппонента, **прежде чем укрепляться** в мнении, что ваша поправка целесообразна.*

Only one bald-on record strategy is used in the English version (9):

- (9) ***See also** the essay 'Avoid personal remarks' for a viewpoint on the latter form of criticism.*

Two statements in the French version (10, 11) and in the Russian version (12) can be considered to apply a positive politeness strategy that encourages the contributors to modify the articles' content.

- (10) *[...] n' hésitez pas à modifier les articles des autres.*
- (11) *Vous n' avez meme pas besoin de vous identifier pour contribuer [...].*
- (12) *Хорошо это или плохо, но Википедия призывает всех авторов смело вносить изменения, представляющиеся им (после ознакомления с правилами!) полезными.*

The English version employs more substitution strategies than supplementary, so it lacks additional arguments in statements where imposition is substituted, especially with such 'strong' modal verbs as *ought* or *must* (13). The statements (2, 13) could be perceived as FTAs with the grammatical subject *you*, but they apply a substitution strategy with the subject *criticism*, which causes the imposition on contributors to be perceived as impersonal:

- (13) *Of course **criticism** communicated in any manner and concerning any subject **must** be civil...*

In the French version, if substitution and supplementary strategies are balanced, they are sometimes structured so that two supplementary statements strengthen one substitution statement in order to give additional arguments for substituted imposition (7). Except for (8) and (12) in the Russian version, all other statements are balanced. Both strategies are applied, substitution and supplementary, such as (14) where an embedded clause gives an additional argument for eventual imposition which is substituted in the main clause with an assertive statement with a modal construction:

- (14) *В случае **если** такая отмена была сделана, автор спроной правки **может обсудить** ее правильность.*

The statistical data presented below in Table 2, point out the politeness strategies occurrences on the pages *Etiquette/ Règles de savoir-vivre/ Эtiquette*.

politeness strategies language	Negative politeness strategies		Bald on-record strategies	Positive politeness strategies
	substitution strategies	supplementary strategies		
English ( <i>Etiquette</i> )	8	4	2	–
French ( <i>Règles de savoir-vivre</i> )	9	9	–	2
Russian ( <i>Этикет</i> )	5	6	–	1

Table 2. Politeness strategies in the Etiquette page

On these pages, positive politeness strategies are again rather infrequent. In the French version, contributors are encouraged to participate more than in the Russian version. The same negative politeness strategies are used for all languages. Nevertheless, supplementary strategies are as frequent as substitution ones in French and in Russian. On the English page, they are twice as infrequent. Since supplementary statements support substitution statements with mitigated imposition, the English version is less argumentative than the French and Russian ones. In the English and French versions, most of the FTAs are substituted with modal constructions, impersonal constructions being occasional. In the Russian version, the substitution strategies are realized through assertive forms. The Russian version uses less instances of the personal form *you* when addressing the reader. The English version applies the bald on-record strategy only once, while all the imperative mood forms in French and Russian apply negative politeness strategies.

### Civility

*Civility/Esprit de non-violence/Этичное поведение* is a multilingual page in which the English, French, and Russian versions are significantly different, even if they all describe commonly used appropriate ways of collaborating and avoiding conflicts. A statistical analysis has also been carried out only for the introductory parts, which share similar composition structure and topics.

As on previous pages, the Russian version uses positive politeness strategies once in the same way. The English and French versions use modal constructions to substitute FTAs. The statements addressing the contributors alternate with the statements, which do not personally address the contributors. On the Russian page, personal implications of contributors are always substituted with such grammatical subjects as *participants, editors* or impersonal statements. The French version is the most argumentative, by implying well-developed supplementary strategy statements that explain the reasons of implicit impositions (1):

- (1) *À partir du moment où vous ressentez la nécessité de suivre pas à pas les interventions d'un éditeur en particulier (fût-il réputé pour avoir une orthographe déplorable ou une syntaxe française aléatoire), au lieu de concentrer vos efforts sur votre domaine de compétence préféré, vous êtes sur la voie du conflit de personne.*

The Russian version applies more indefinite pronouns and adjectives, such as *some, other, sometimes* than the English and French ones that do the same, so as to decrease the imposition of any obligation on contributors (2).

- (2) *When discussing these differences some editors can seem unnecessarily harsh, while simply trying to be forthright.*

There is not any occurrence of bald on-record strategies for the French and Russian versions. As on the previous pages, in the English version bald on-record strategies are rather frequent; they are implied by the imperative mood without any mitigation (3):

- (3) *Resolve differences of opinion through civil discussion; disagree without being disagreeable.*

The statistical data presented below in Table 3, point out the politeness strategies occurrences on the pages *Civility/ Esprit de non-violence/ Этичное поведение*.

politeness strategies language	Negative politeness strategies		Bald on-record strategies	Positive politeness strategies
	substitution strategies	supplementary strategies		
English ( <i>Civility</i> )	7	5	6	–
French ( <i>Esprit de non-violence</i> )	7	7	–	–
Russian ( <i>Этичное поведение</i> )	9	5	–	1

Table 3. Politeness strategies in the Civility page

All three versions are highly argumentative, but their structure differs. The French version underlines the two ways that allow the avoidance of conflicts. The first one, suggests avoiding editing wars related to an article's content. The second one, dealing with personal attacks, concerns the communicative style to be used during collaboration. The English and Russian versions also deal with both these sources of conflict, but the explanations about evolving conflicts, their consequences and resolution are not separately structured as is done in the French version. Neither version seems to suggest a strictly argumentative page structure for describing conflicts and resolutions. Although both have a paragraph dealing with incivility, on the English page conflict resolutions are stressed and on the Russian page the consequences of uncivil behavior are described. The first paragraph in English *Avoiding incivility* gives illustrations of uncivil situations and suggestions for avoiding them. The second paragraph describes incivility. In the Russian version, two terms are confused and alternated, civil and ethical behavior, with no distinction made between them. The English and Russian versions appear to be more empirically based than the French one. Since they give a lot of examples in describing conflict situations, they can be grounded in the contributors' personal experiences gained from Wikipedia collaborative practices. Both pages are more verbalized and more circumstantial than the French version, which attempts to give the most generalized presentation of conflict resolution. The French version deduces a very important thought proper to second-order politeness discourse. It states that impartiality of collaborative work would not result from individual will, but from the common effort of all members of the Wikipedia community. Thus, if politeness in the discursive approach indexes the dynamic aspect of social language use, the appropriateness of linguistic behavior, which Watts (Watts 2005b: 43) has termed as politic behavior, is 'geared towards maintaining the equilibrium of interpersonal relationships within the social group'.

## Discussion - Conclusions

Analysis of politeness discursive practices has been applied on three Wikipedia pages discussing interactional behavior recommended to the members of the Wiki-community. The rules that govern Wikipedia content production are found to be imposed on all contributors, regardless of their cultural differences. In order to mitigate imposition of rules, different politeness strategies are applied on these pages for all languages. Empirical data on linguistic forms are preferably chosen in politeness discourse in different Wikipedia linguistic communities, stressing the discursive practices adopted in each of them.

The Wikipedia pages that talk about politeness in the collective work of contributors implicitly involve first-order politeness, since linguistic forms applying politeness strategies are chosen. As politeness topics, such as correlation between indirectness and politeness or politeness as dynamic social construct are discussed on the English and French pages, they can be considered as second-order politeness discourse. The results obtained from different pages are quite stable for every language. The emphasis of every Wikipedia linguistic community on particular linguistic forms which imply particular politeness strategies allows for double interpretation,

culturally and/or ideological. Strategies stressed by different Wikipedia linguistic communities can index cultural preferences in politeness discourse impelling the language; however, the choice of strategies can be explained by ideological transformations in Wikipedia.

(a) *Cultural interpretation*

Our findings about politeness discursive practices on Wikipedia pages point out that the English version is less verbalized in comparison with the French and Russian ones. As Holtgraves and Yang (1990) have shown, the perception of imposition varies inversely with the wording costs for the addressee, while, more verbalized statements are usually considered as more flexible for the addressee, since imposition forms are mitigated through additional statements. Both the French and Russian versions are verbalized through participle constructions, namely embedded and independent statements. Excessive verbalization on these pages allows giving newcomers necessary arguments that explain why the Wiki-community not only imposes interactional rules, but also meticulously observes their adherence. The English version is perceived as more peremptory. In short, the imposition is less mitigated on English pages where indirectness is deliberately avoided. These results confirm Ting-Toomey's speculation (1998) about individualistic-collectivistic, low-high context cultures.

The Trompenaars cross-cultural studies (Trompenaars and Woolliams 2003) confirm that French and Russian communication styles are really defined as collectivistic and high-context. Trompenaars and Hofstede's<sup>3</sup> research view French and Russian cultures as collectivistic even if Trompenaars seems to be surprised by the result obtained through his studies, since France is commonly perceived as attached to individualistic values. However, he underlines that the French are highly devoted to the social community, whereas they become individualists in other social encounters. Russian and French communication styles are described as high-context ones. People in high-context cultures adopt a role-orientated style emphasizing the social roles held by the participants and different scripts are used depending on role relationships, so they prefer an indirect communicative style that is confirmed in high verbalization of the French and Russian versions.

Guirdham (1999: 153) argues that for people of low-context cultures, such as with Anglo-Saxon, interactions are much more ritualistic. In low-context communication one uses a personal style, which emphasizes personal identity over social position. Since role relations and status differences are less important, communication style is less formal but more logical and linear. This can explain why on all English pages analyzed above, more bald on-record strategies can be identified than on the French and Russian ones. The English version attempts to avoid indirectness, willing to be easily understood by the contributors for whom English could be the second language. Therefore, using the pronoun *you* more frequently, they prefer to directly address the addressee, in contrast to the French and Russian versions. The explicit style of imperative enunciations of English versions is preferred in low-context communication emphasizing *I*-identity.

According to cross-cultural studies, the individualistic low-context cultures, such as the Anglo-Saxon choose a solution-orientated style, while collectivistic high-context cultures, such as French and Russian, prefer affective-orientated style. The pages considering conflict resolution confirm the divergence of communicative styles. The English version gives a long list of advice about how to resolve the conflict situation before describing it, whereas the Russian version points out the affective consequences of conflict situations. Both the solution-oriented and affective-oriented styles, can explain highly empirical descriptions of conflict situations in English and Russian. A number of different cases mentioned allow suggestions for various ways of conflict resolution in the solution-oriented English version. For the Russian affective-oriented version, the same illustrative structure of presentation underlines emotional implications of conflict situations, in order to persuade the contributors to avoid them or resolve them efficiently.

Divergence of communicative styles can also explain why positive politeness strategies are more frequently applied on French and Russian pages than on the English pages. Positive politeness is not functionally and rationally grounded in the pages that impose rules. The only goal for applying positive politeness is to support contributors in their willingness to participate and collaborate in the project, which is

obviously not the topic of these Wikipedia pages. Therefore, the English version does not apply the strategy, which has no pragmatic issue in the given context.

Although most of our findings can be interpreted with cross-cultural studies, more profound analysis of politeness discursive practices on Wikipedia will allow a greater understanding of how individual linguistic choices impact oriented linguistic preferences culturally and socially. Since cross-cultural explanation for different politeness discursive practices on Wikipedia needs more detailed research, we suggest one further interpretation for divergence of Wikipedia politeness practices.

*(b) Ideological interpretation*

Stegbauer, in an interview (Stegbauer and Currie 2005) on cultural transformations in Wikipedia, treats the cultural aspect completely different to its common use. His interpretation focuses on Wikipedia community's ideological profile. Stegbauer points out a shift in the Wikipedia project from 'emancipation ideology' to 'production ideology'. The principal task of Wikipedia was completion and the key concept was 'everyone can participate', which contradicts the idea of 'expert knowledge' provided by trusted and selected experts who produced encyclopedic content. The Wikipedia participatory model was based on voluntary collaboration of people who were motivated to participate by the motto: *Everyone can contribute a piece of knowledge – the first steps are easy!* However, the participative or emancipation ideology has been changed to: *Good authors are always welcome here – the first steps are easy!* This shift from quantity to quality supposes: *'not everyone is suited to write articles. To honor the requirement of quality, it is necessary to implement certain parameters for production'*. Stegbauer argues that:

although newcomers are theoretically welcome, they are considered problematic for causing additional work by more experienced users who understand the negotiated standards or have experience with disputes, or maybe because of cultural differences. Experienced users who have been around for a while wind up distancing themselves from less active or new participants. (Stegbauer 2005: 342)

Each ideological change implies the transformation in power discourse when new discursive dominant features appear. In fact, Stegbauer confirms that a '*ruling class*' has appeared in Wikipedia that is:

composed at the top by formally endorsed administrators. Admins are selected according to a special electoral procedure; in order to stand for election, a user must have attained a certain level of trust by adhering to the norms and establishing a committed position on topics. (Stegbauer 2005: 346)

We suggest that this ideological shift should be referred to in Wikipedia politeness discourse. Besides linguistic cultural dimensions, ideological dimensions would explain divergence of politeness strategies. Our hypothesis, which requires more in-depth research about multilingual Wikipedia pages, supposes that 'production ideology' and 'emancipation ideology' apply different politeness strategies. 'Production ideology' shared by a '*ruling class*' of experienced users, which consider newcomers problematic, tends to apply bald-on record strategies without any mitigation for newcomers, use more direct communicative style, and stress *we* forms in order to underline the solidarity of community and to distance newcomers. 'Emancipation ideology', on the contrary, stresses positive politeness strategies and various forms of mitigation for any imposition, in order to attract newcomers to produce cooperative knowledge.

## NOTES

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki> [accessed April 25, 2015]
2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>[accessed April 25, 2015]
3. Geert Hofstede. <http://geert-hofstede.com/> [accessed April 25, 2015]

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**Svetlana Sheypak**, Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russia. E-mail: [svetlana.sheipak@gmail.com](mailto:svetlana.sheipak@gmail.com)