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## **Towards a Russian Multimedia Politeness Corpus**

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### **Abstract**

Communication involves an exchange of information as well as the use of linguistic means to begin, sustain, and end conversations. Politeness is seen as one of the major language tools that facilitate smooth communication. In English, politeness has been an area of great interest in pragmatics, with various theories and corpus annotation approaches used to understand the relationship between politeness and social categories like power and gender, and to build Natural Language Processing applications. In Russian linguistics, politeness research has largely focused on lexical markers and speech strategies. This paper introduces the ongoing work on the development of the Russian Multimedia Politeness Corpus and discusses an annotation framework for oral communicative interaction, with an emphasis on adapting politeness theories for discourse annotation. The proposed approach lies in the identification of frames that encompass contextual information and the selection of relevant spatial, social, and relational features for the markup. The frames are then used to describe standard situations, which are marked by typical intentions and politeness formulae and paraverbal markers.

**Keywords:** politeness, discourse, multimedia corpora, speech act, sociolinguistics

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## **Мультимедийный корпус вежливости русского языка**

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### **Аннотация**

Коммуникация включает в себя обмен информацией, а также использование языковых средств с целью начала, поддержания и завершения разговора. Вежливость рассматривается как один из основных языковых инструментов, сглаживающих общение. В английском языке вежливость представляет большой интерес для прагматики, различные теории и подходы к аннотации корпусов используются для понимания взаимосвязи между вежливостью и социальными категориями, такими как власть и гендер, а также для создания приложений для обработки естественного языка. В традиции русской лингвистики исследования вежливости в основном сосредоточены на лексических маркерах и речевых стратегиях. В данной работе представляется текущая работа по разработке Мультимедийного корпуса вежливости русского языка и обсуждается структура

аннотации для устного коммуникативного взаимодействия с акцентом на адаптацию теорий вежливости для разметки дискурса. Предлагаемый подход заключается в идентификации фреймов, которые охватывают контекстную информацию, и выборе соответствующих пространственных, социальных и реляционных характеристик для разметки. Затем фреймы используются для описания стандартных ситуаций, которые отмечаются типичными речевыми намерениями и формулами вежливости, а также паравербальными маркерами.

**Ключевые слова:** вежливость, дискурс, мультимедийный корпус, речевой акт, социолингвистика

## 1 Introduction

Communication involves not only the exchange of information between speakers, but also the use of a whole set of linguistic means to begin, sustain, and end conversations. These means belong to the language, but are largely determined by social and cultural preconditions, and the strategies of their use are usually denoted by the term *politeness*. Politeness in English has long been a subject of great interest in pragmatics, from classical politeness theories, where politeness is seen as a result of rational communicative behavior (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987) to discursive ones focused on the analysis of the dialogue interaction and its evaluations by the participants of communication (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009).

Findings from these theories have been used for annotation of politeness corpora which served various purposes: from the analysis of the relationship between politeness and such social categories as power, status and gender (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al., 2013) to the NLP applications of adjusting the degree of politeness in written communication (Madaan et al., 2020) and creating a politeness adaptive dialogue system (Mishra et al., 2022). Recently, more and more interest has been drawn to the research of how politeness affects users' perceptions in chat-bots (Liebrecht et al., 2020; Rana et al., 2021; Shan et al., 2022).

Research of politeness in Russian linguistics has mostly been concerned with the use of lexical markers, which constitute a system of stable communicative formulae for establishing contact and maintaining communication in a chosen tone (Krongauz, 2004; Formanovskaja, 2002). In a broader context, there have been works on speech strategies in interactions between interlocutors in situations of persuasion and provocation (Issers, 2009), functions of imperative verb forms in a situation of request or prompt (Paducheva, 2010), and extralinguistic conditions of spontaneous speech interactions (Zemskaja et al., 1981). Most of these studies describe qualitative traits of communication while quantitative studies have been confined to the tasks of automatic detection of speech aggression and detoxification of online communication (Dementieva et al., 2021; Dementieva et al., 2022). The aim of our project is to develop the annotation framework for oral communicative interaction that on one hand takes into account approaches from linguistic politeness theories and on the other could be used for qualitative research and the NLP applications.

Since the corpus is centered around oral communication, data for annotation are taken from excerpts of modern Russian movies, series, talk shows and phone conversations. One of our current goals has been the adaptation of politeness theories for practical discourse annotation. In addition, since politeness is acquired through the process of socialization and therefore is influenced by a large number of contextual and social factors, the second goal was to select appropriate factors to include in the markup.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide an overview of existing politeness theories and politeness-related corpora for English and Russian. Then we focus on defining the scope of the discourse unit that should be taken for annotation. The last section is devoted to the description of contextual and social features that are included in the markup. In the last section we present some of the high level statistics of the current corpus.

## 2 Related work

### 2.1 Politeness theories

Politeness has been one of the major research fields in pragmatics since its scientific establishment in the last century. The first wave of research took Grice's Cooperative principle (Grice, 1975) and its assump-

tion of rational communicative behavior as a starting point and proposed general politeness principles that serve a purpose of smoothing friction in interpersonal interaction (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983). Following the same rational principle, the seminal Universal Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) considers politeness as measures to preserve the social face (of a speaker and that of an addressee) by mitigating face-threatening speech acts (FTAs) and describes a number of strategies a speaker could use when performing an FTA. The social context is included in the speaker's account of how threatening a given speech act is. According to the theory, the speaker can assess the weight of the threat by taking into account the social distance between them and the addressee, the power (status) distance, and the level of imposition.

Despite still being popular among the researchers, the Universal Politeness Theory was vigorously criticized for the universality of norms it claimed, its focus on individual speech acts, and static social context. The reliance on individual speech acts makes it impossible to account for the politeness in communicative situations – the interlocutors' reactions and responses, as well structure of the dialogue. As a result, the second wave of politeness research was centered around the context of a particular interaction and the interpretation of speech activity by the communicants themselves (Ide, 1989; Werkhofer, 1992; Marriott, 1993; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003; Ogiermann, 2009). In these discursive theories norms were considered changeable and constituted by interpersonal interactions. The main challenge of the discursive approach lies in rejection of any generalizations and consideration of all possible contextual and personal features that could influence the politeness markers. The third wave of politeness research aimed at overcoming the shortcomings of both classical and discursive theories by integrating them in one another. Its main interest lies in oral communication and the analysis of discourse pieces that can be generalized (Arundale, 2013; Haugh, 2021; Kádár and Haugh, 2013; Terkourafi, 2005b).

The Russian tradition generally distinguishes between politeness and etiquette. Karasik posits that politeness is concerned with the manifestation of respect for another person, whereas etiquette constitutes a set of rules that govern human social behavior (Karasik, 2002). He additionally argues that etiquette research covers not only verbal units, but non-linguistic means of communication and the determination of the parameters of etiquette social variability. Formanovskaja agrees and makes further distinction that speech etiquette constitutes a socially defined and national-specific set of rules that govern speech behavior in interactions, conditioned on social roles of the communicants and their relations (Formanovskaja, 2002). For her, politeness draws from Leech's Politeness principle, whereas etiquette manifests in a separate class of etiquette speech acts. Common broad and repetitive situations in which speech etiquette is analyzed are similar to the ones explored in politeness theories discussed above: getting someone's attention, greeting, acquaintance, farewell, apology, compliment, consolation, condolence, etc. (Prokhorov and Stepin, 2006). In similar fashion, Larina discusses the difference between politeness in Russian and English, mainly leaning on the classical politeness theories (Larina, 2009). Since research of politeness and speech etiquette are much less formalized in Russian linguistic tradition and the distinction between them for most part is not well defined, we prefer using the term *politeness*.

## 2.2 Politeness and multimedia corpora

Most of the studies related to the development of the politeness corpora are focused on English. In the English-speaking environment, there is a tendency to refine existing well-known corpora to solve problems related to polite communication. One of the examples is the Enron corpus (Klimt and Yang, 2004), which consists of e-mail correspondence of an American corporation (1.39 million sentences). In its polite version (Madaan et al., 2020) the sentences were first automatically scored for the degree of politeness using the pre-existing classifier (Niu and Bansal, 2018) and then the top-scoring ones were used as training data for the politeness transfer task. Another example is the large MultiDoGO dialogue dataset (Peskov et al., 2019), which contains conversations between an agent and a customer in several domains (airline, fast food, finance, insurance, media, and software). For the polite version, each utterance was annotated with one of four fine-grained politeness classes to be used in a politeness adaptive dialogue system (Mishra et al., 2022).

In an earlier work on politeness corpora the area of interest were requests (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil

et al., 2013) as one type of speech acts that pose threats to the addressee's social face according to the Universal Politeness Theory. For this study a portion of data from Wikipedia and Stack Exchange requests was annotated with domain-independent lexical and syntactical features (e.g. polite formulae like please and hedges), as well as politeness scores obtained from crowdsourced annotation. It was then used to train a politeness classifier for automatic labeling of the remaining data. Preliminary analysis of the relation between the degree of politeness and social features showed its variation conditioned on power, status, gender.

In linguistic studies of politeness, the British National Corpus <sup>1</sup>, both text and audio, is also often used (McEnery et al., 2002; Deutschmann, 2006; Vizcaíno, 2007). Additionally, there are a number of works on polite communication that use a range of multimedia corpora: political comics corpora (Abdel-Raheem, 2021), the Santa Barbara series corpora (Brown, 2014) and studies on TV charity commercials (Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio, 2013). These studies show that corpora annotated with paraverbal features are important for a deeper study of politeness.

Although there are no corpora annotated for politeness in Russian language, several corpora within toxic communication research exist. Namely, the Russian Language Toxic Comments dataset (Belchikov, 2019), the Toxic Russian Comments corpus (Semiletov, 2020) and the RuToxic data corpus (Dementieva et al., 2021), which is based on the former two. These corpora contain comments from the social networks Odnoklassniki, Pikabu and the Dvach forum. Studies in sociolinguistics often use corpora of oral communication (Sherstinova, 2009; Bogdanova-Beglarian et al., 2016; Cui, 2019). The most representative corpus of oral communication in Russian is the ORD ("One Speaker's Day"), which contains 240 hours of recordings of everyday telephone conversations (Asinovsky et al., 2009; Sherstinova, 2009).

### 3 Basic data unit for annotation

One of the most important tasks in the development of an oral politeness corpus is a delineation of a minimal discourse unit that should be considered for annotation. Approach that should be chosen to resolve this task depends on the theoretical politeness concepts. If we adhere to the assumption of rational communicative behavior (theories based on Grice's principle), it should be the elementary discursive unit (EDU) as proposed by Kibrik and Podlesskaja (Kibrik and Podlesskaja, 2009). EDU is a quantum of oral discourse, the minimum step by which the speaker moves the discourse forward. It correlates with the notion of the speech act in the classical politeness theories, with the former being determined to a large extent by prosodic features, the latter being mostly defined by the speaker's intention.

However, reducing a politeness to an individual EDU, as well as speech act, does not allow for the analysis of composite polite utterances or a combination of formulae. If we consider, for example, a composite greeting: "Hello, hope you are doing well today." – it is clear that it consists of two speech acts (greeting and expressive), however, it could be considered as one long greeting.

On the other hand, the discursive approach can be considered, in which politeness is based on an understanding of discourse as a dialogic transaction between the participants (Watts, 2003; Locher and Watts, 2005). Thus, marking a statement as polite or impolite is possible only in the case of a match/mismatch between the addressee's expectations and the signals provided by the speaker (Jary, 1998). In data annotation for politeness, it is necessary to consider the broader communicative context, which includes the discursive interaction of the speaker and listener, their social and cultural characteristics, as well as standard communicative expectations and responsibilities.

To designate this level of discourse analysis, we specify the term *frame*, by which Terkurafi understands "immediately observable, indispensable extra linguistic information about a situation" that is "summarised together with information about the appropriate linguistic politeness marker(s)" (Terkourafi, 2005a). Thus, the frame contains prerequisites for the use of politeness markers and social parameters that regulate the choice of linguistic means. At the current stage of our project, we distinguish the following types of prerequisites: the beginning or the end of communicative contact, compensation for causing damage or inconvenience and doing good.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>

The frames contain *standard situations* which are marked with an occurrence of typical intentions of the EDU. A *standard situation* then is a special case of a frame realization in which ritualized politeness formulae (and non-verbal markers) manifest themselves (in greetings, acquaintances, farewells, apologies and gratitude). Thus, the structure of our data suggests the descriptions of intentions and formulae that determine the type of polite interaction, as well as broad social and communicative context that reflects discursive approaches to politeness.

## 4 Context features

### Broad context

As it is evident from the previous sections, context and individual characteristics of the interlocutors influence the way politeness is manifested. In order to give the users of the Russian Multimedia Politeness Corpus an opportunity to conduct research on its various aspects, we chose to annotate macro-level dialogues along with the social context of a frame in which a standard situation takes place. In the following we describe different levels of context that are annotated and illustrate them on an excerpt from a Russian movie called “Exercises in beauty” (*Uprazhneniya v prekrasnom*, 2011):

(1) *Hotel employee: Ah, Evgeny Sanych, good afternoon. Do you remember, you have stayed here two years ago?*

*\*Evgeny nods\**

(2) *Hotel employee [hands over keys]: Here is your suite, second floor.*

*\*Evgeny nods\**

(3) *\*Evgeny starts leaving but the hotel employee blocks his way\**

(4) *Hotel employee [holds out a piece of paper and a pen]: Can I also ask for an autograph for my niece Liza? And here is the pen... It doesn't write... [holds out another pen] To Lizunchik from...*

*\*Evgeny signs the paper shoves it back (5) and leaves (6)\**

We first specify the place and time of the discourse fragment in a separate entity called an episode. In our example those would be a hotel lobby and the action takes place after the main characters arrive in a new town.

The next level of annotation is to identify the frames that are present in the fragment. As mentioned in Section 3, currently there are four types of prerequisites for the usage of politeness markers and these are used to mark the frame type. In our example the frames are the following: the beginning of the conversation (1), doing good (2), compensation for causing inconvenience (3), doing good (5), the end of the conversation (6). Additional frame – request (4) – is not included in the annotation yet.

On the lower annotation level we enter the frames themselves, which are confined to specific timestamps and the dialogue boundaries. Here we annotate the interlocutors (Evgeny and the hotel employee). Further, it is determined whether the frames are realized and, if so, they are annotated with the standard situation type. In our case these are just greeting (the beginning of the conversation frame) and gratitude (the doing good frame (2)). The frames (3), (5) and (6) are not annotated with standard situations since there are no verbal or paraverbal markers that label typical communicative behavior. The standard situations are then annotated with timestamps, text, presence of non-verbal markers and address terms (*Evgeny Sanych* as in (1)).

### Basic social features of interlocutors

According to our approach, the choice of politeness strategies and markers is influenced by social and cultural factors that are specific to different interaction situations. We have identified two types of features: basic social features and relation features. Basic social features are constant characteristics of the communicators that influence their speech behavior. These features are fixed and do not change during the course of the interaction. Relation features, on the other hand, are characteristics that become important during the interaction between communicators. These characteristics are often not fixed and may change depending on the context of the interaction.

It is commonly agreed in psychological and sociolinguistic research that various psychological and social characteristics of individuals are marked in speech in general and in how politeness is manifested as well. Among those are age (Helfrich, 1979; Bella, 2009), gender (Smith, 1979; Holmes, 1995; Mills, 2003) and belonging to a particular social group (Brown and Levinson, 1979; Mahmud, 2013).

All of these features are annotated in our corpus, with the social group reflected in profession and education if available. Both of these features can assume one value from an open list which is populated throughout the annotation process. If there is no information about a character's age, an age bin is assigned instead. It is also worth noting that although social status of a character is not annotated separately, it can be inferred from the combination of age, profession and education. In our running example, Evgeny would be assigned the following values: male, 40 years old, adult, actor, Russian Institute of Theatre Arts. Similar for the hotel employee, however, for him exact age and education features are missing: male, young man, hotel employee.

### **Relation features**

Following the inclusion of the status variables in the Universal Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 74), we annotate symmetric relations of social distance between the interlocutors: degree of familiarity in the frame (strangers, little-known to each other and acquaintances) and relationships (co-workers, friends, spouses, relatives, etc.). In the same way asymmetric relations are taken into account in the form of hierarchy. This includes two features: one interlocutor's position relative to the other (higher, lower or equal) and the specification of such a position (age difference, status, rank, etc.).

In our example, Evgeny and the hotel employee are little-known to each other and do not have any relationship. In the given context Evgeny's social role (famous actor) is hierarchically higher in relation to the hotel employee. This is partially confirmed by the observed verbal behavior (Evgeny does not use politeness formulae where those would be expected) and the fact the hotel employee asks for his autograph. Thus, in the annotation the specification of the hierarchy for these two characters would be Evgeny's higher position due to his status.

### **Gestures and address terms**

Gumperz termed the social and cultural factors which facilitate politeness in interaction as "signaling mechanisms" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 16). These mechanisms are often not consciously used by the participants, making them useful resources for analyzing the results of communicative exchanges. Important signaling mechanisms we focus on include nonverbal cues (e.g. gestures) and politeness features not tied to a particular frame (such as addressing and pronoun switching at the future stages).

Gestures can either support the corresponding speech act or alter its meaning. Indeed, if we consider a polite utterance thank you accompanied by a rude gesture, the overall intention would not be an expression of gratitude. Furthermore, the communicative act can be performed in multiple modalities and the speaker generally is not restricted to choose a verbal strategy (e.g. to nod instead of saying *hello*) (Arndt and Janney, 1985; Ambady et al., 1996).

Address terms (names, titles), on the other hand, are usually used as supportive mechanisms to either show respect or confirm the existing relationship, as in our running example. They could also serve a double function – for example, as an attention getter or as a greeting. Furthermore, address terms are frequently used to model politeness (Voigt et al., 2017; Yeomans et al., 2018).

As mentioned above, there is one address term in our example – in the frame (1), the standard situation of greeting. Furthermore, in the standard situations of both greeting and gratitude Evgeny's response is a nod which would be annotated as a gesture in the corresponding situations.

Figure 1 illustrates the overall conceptual schema for the proposed annotation, including social features and general metadata.

## **5 Preliminary annotation results**

In this section we present the results of annotation that have been achieved and the current corpus volume. The data for annotation came from fifteen movies and series released after 2000. At the first stage of the project it was decided to focus on fiction media which closely reflect modern life and communication.

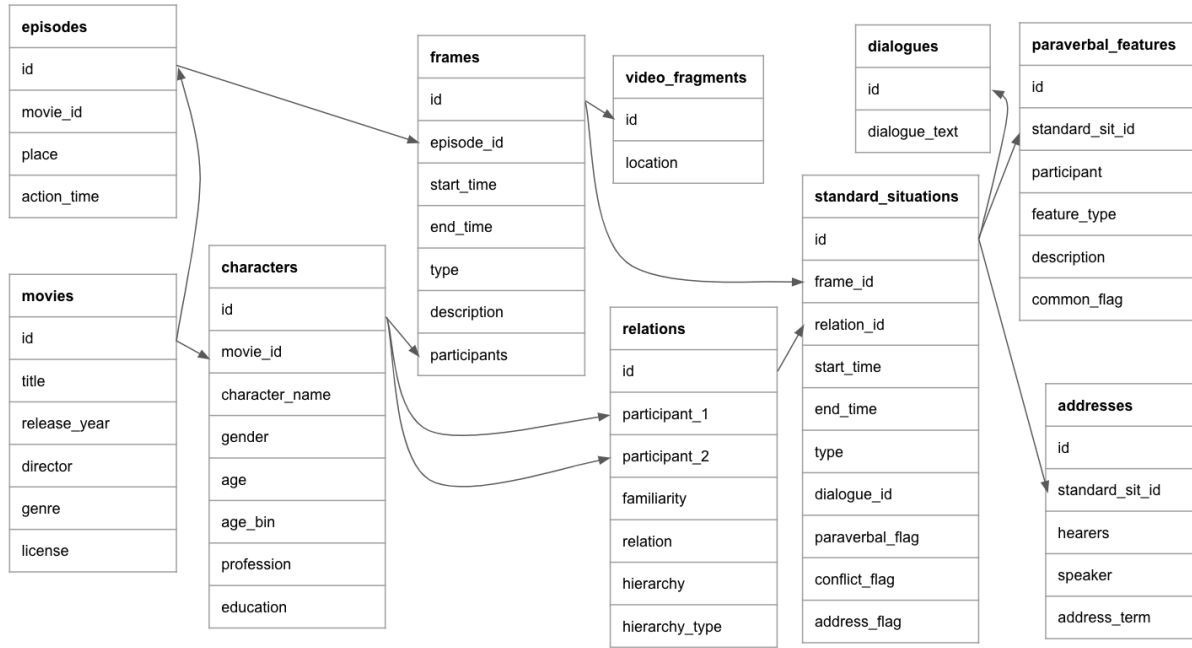


Figure 1: Conceptual schema for the proposed annotation.

The full list of the movies is presented in Table 1, the current version of the corpus includes 3,000 potential frames and 525 frames that have been verified by mark-up match among annotators.

Table 1 presents statistics on the verified annotated data. The standard situations in which frames are realized are shown in Figure 2. The largest share is occupied by greetings, which correlates with the distribution of frames, since greetings are included at the beginning of communication. This can be explained by the peculiarities of the media taken for marking, since in films the situations of meetings and acquaintances are more significant for the narrative.

At the level of the participant feature labeling Figure 3 (Subfigures 3a, 3b, 3c, we can note some skew, which is manifested in the gender composition of the interactors (a greater number of men); age characteristics (Adult 1 dominates (range of 35-40 years old)); as well as types of familiarity degree, where communication between acquaintances occurs more often. *Undefined* means a mixed group of different genders, ages or familiarity degree to the speaker.

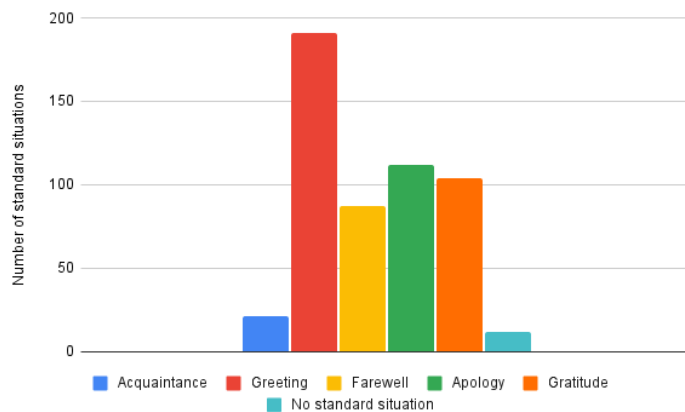


Figure 2: Distribution of the standard situation types. *No standard situation* means that the corresponding frame was not realized.

Movie	Number of frames	Min duration	Max duration	Total
Arrhythmia (2017)	34	0:00:01	0:00:24	0:03:30
The geographer drank away the globe (2013)	36	0:00:02	0:01:12	0:06:29
Fool (2014)	30	0:00:02	0:00:48	0:05:47
Speakerphone (2018)	34	0:00:01	0:02:28	0:04:42
Exercises in beauty (2011)	39	0:00:01	0:00:36	0:05:58
Inadequate people (2010)	31	0:00:02	0:01:57	0:09:29
Stories (2012)	53	0:00:02	0:02:52	0:12:00
Radio day (2008)	36	0:00:01	0:00:25	0:03:44
The stroll (2003)	29	0:00:02	0:02:36	0:09:21
Major (series, 2004)	30	0:00:02	0:00:24	0:03:45
Peter FM (2006)	30	0:00:02	0:00:43	0:04:35
What Men Talk About (2010)	37	0:00:01	0:00:39	0:04:02
Last minister (series, 2020)	47	0:00:01	0:00:25	0:07:55
Election day (2007)	41	0:00:02	0:00:38	0:05:57
This is what's happening to me (2012)	18	0:00:16	0:03:03	0:19:49

Table 1: Number of frames and general durations of video fragments per annotated movie

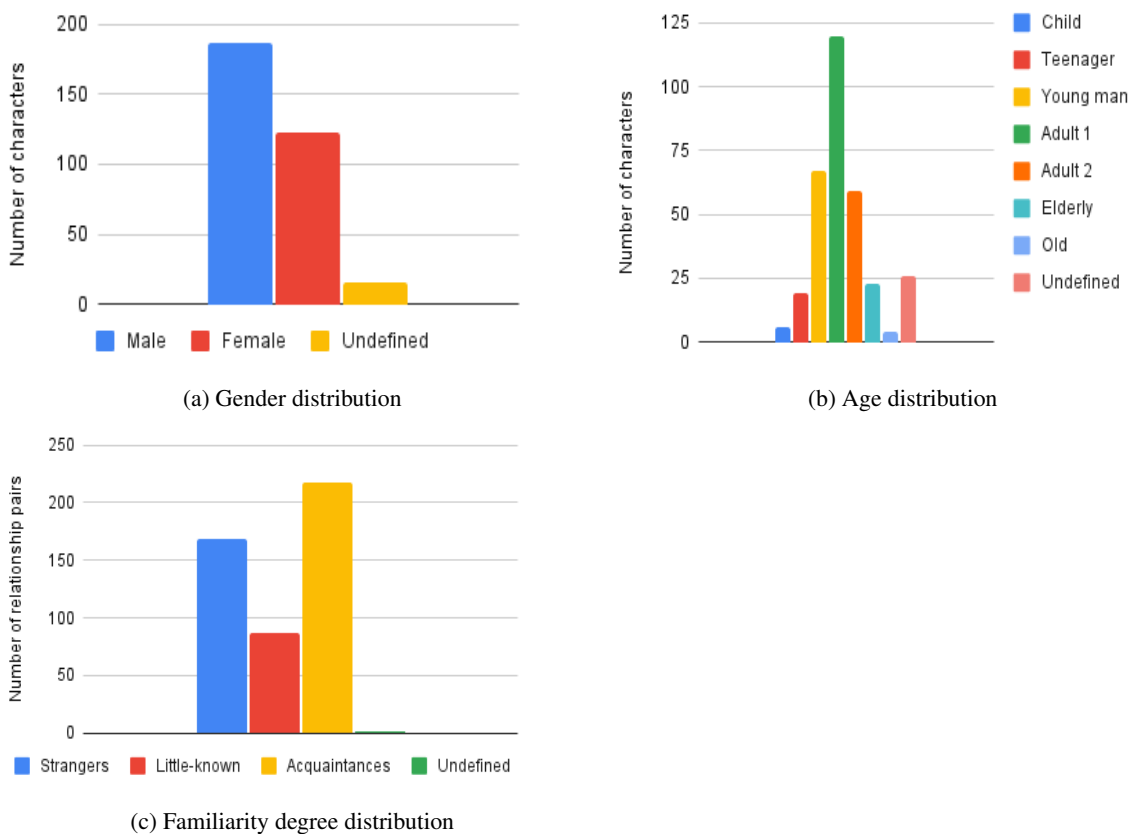


Figure 3: Statistics on characters' features



## 6 Conclusion and future work

Politeness research is a well-established scientific area in English, however relatively little attention has been paid to systematic studies of politeness in Russian. With growing interest from both sociolinguists and NLP practitioners in how politeness in oral communication can be modeled, which strategies and formulae are used and how they can be integrated in natural language processing applications, it seems natural to attempt to construct a language resource that could be used for research in these areas. In this paper we introduced the ongoing work on such an attempt – the Russian Multimedia Politeness Corpus.

One of the main intricacies in the construction of the corpus is delineation of the discourse piece that should be annotated. Classical politeness theories operate on the single speech act level, whereas discursive approaches tend to consider much longer sequences and dismiss any effort for generalizations. Therefore, our suggested approach is based on frames, which encompass extra linguistic information about the communicative situation and can consist of one or several standard situations in which conventionalized politeness manifests itself. Currently, we annotate the frames that are concerned with the beginning or the end of communicative contact, compensation for causing damage or inconvenience and doing good. Then, the corresponding standard situations are greetings, acquaintances, farewells, apologies and gratitude.

Being a part of oral speech, the choice of politeness strategies and formulae are too influenced by a great variety of contextual factors. The one included in annotation can be split into three groups: spacial (place and time of the action), social features of the interlocutors (age, age bin, gender, profession and education) and relational features between the interlocutors (degree of familiarity, relationship, hierarchy). Additionally, we annotate gestures as they can align with, alter the meaning of or replace actual utterances, and address terms for they play an important role in the confirmation of the existing relationship and have several pragmatic functions.

Currently the corpus consists of 3,000 potential frames and 525 frames that have been verified. The descriptive statistics of the latter data shows skews in the distributions of social features, as well as frames and standard situations. If the asymmetry of social features should be balanced at the future stages, the distribution of frame types might be explained by the media chosen for annotation or be representative of Russian oral communication in general.

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