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## Expressing REQUEST in German and Russian: a Communicative-pragmatic Field Analysis

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### Abstract

The paper analyzes the speech behavior pattern of REQUEST in Russian and German. The first part of the paper discusses a definition of the illocution of request in terms of Natural Semantic Metalanguage. The second part is focused on the contrastive research. Firstly, the situations in which both languages express REQUEST are described. Secondly, the possibilities of expressing REQUEST in Russian and German are analyzed using the method of communicative-pragmatic field.

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### 1. Introduction

The present article is a part of the ongoing research on the communicative behaviour of Russian and German speakers. The aim of the research is to identify similarities and differences in functioning of the utterances realizing pragmatic intention of the major speech behaviour patterns (such as AGREEMENT, REJECTION, GRATITUDE, ADVICE, REQUEST, APOLOGY etc.) and to define prototypical and peripheral means expressing them in these two languages. The innovative methodology of the research is based on the synthesis of ideas about the prototypical structure of categories and the possibility of presenting various linguistic phenomena in the form of a field. The aim of a

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communicative act or its illocutionary force is regarded as a field dominant, which provides a possibility to consolidate all possible speech act realizations in a language with a given illocutionary force into a field. This field is called a communicative-pragmatic field. The set of speech utterances that make up each particular field is determined by socio-pragmatic, cultural and linguistic factors, specific to its functioning in each of the languages (cf. Kotorova, 2014). What follows is the analysis of the speech behaviour pattern of REQUEST in Russian and German using the communicative-pragmatic field approach.

## 2. Definition of the speech behavior pattern REQUEST

REQUEST is a speech behaviour pattern aimed at persuading the Hearer to perform a certain action which is for the benefit of the Speaker. The Hearer is free to choose whether s/he is going to implement the proposed action or not (Trosborg, 1995, p. 187; Blankenhorn, 1998, p. 45-46; Larina, 2009, p. 212). REQUEST may also consist in inducing the hearer to delay or cancel some previously planned action.

With respect to the “freedom of choice” parameter, REQUEST, in contrast, for example, to ORDER, belongs to a group of non-obligatory (non-categorical) directive speech acts called *Requestives* which are characterized by beneficialness of the action for the Speaker. In addition to REQUEST, this group includes such speech acts as ENTREATY, INVOCATION, IMPLORATION (cf. Petrova, 2008, p.131). Other researchers, however, do not distinguish between these specific speech acts and consider them to be various types of REQUEST itself (cf. Glovinskaya, 1993, p. 180-181; Ermakova, 1990, p. 27).

Various definitions of the illocutionary purpose expressed by REQUEST formulated in terms of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage can be found in the early works of Wierzbicka (1972, p. 129; 1983, p. 129). They can be generalized as follows:

- (a) I assume that you can do it or not do it;
- (b) I want to cause you to do it;
- (c) I say: want you to do X.

In our opinion though, a definition of REQUEST should also incorporate the following two important “preparatory rules” proposed by Searle (1970, p. 66-67) with respect to directive speech acts: 1) H is able to do A, S believes H is able to do A; 2) It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.

Thus, considering these two rules, it seems plausible to expand Wierzbicka’s definition with the following two points:

- (d) I assume that you are able to do it;
- (e) I know that X cannot happen if someone does not do something to cause it to happen.

Indeed, as (d) states, one usually does not ask for something that is obviously impossible to be done, for example, to get a star from the sky. Likewise, there is no sense in asking for something that can happen by itself, for example, to move the legs while walking, as is indicated in (e).

It should be noted that Wierzbicka (1987) gives in her semantic dictionary of English speech act verbs different semantic definitions to certain English verbs (*ask, request, beg* etc.), which she merges into the group ASK<sub>1</sub>. In Russian, all these verbs correspond in most cases to the verb *prosit’*, in the German – to the verb *bitten*. Therefore, a united generalized definition for the illocution of the REQUEST pattern is necessary.

Taking into account the broad meaning of the speech behavior pattern of REQUEST in Russian and German, it seems reasonable to follow Glowinskaya who defines the presupposition of this speech behaviour pattern not as “X wants Y to do P,” but rather as “X wants that it will be P” (Glovinskaya, 1993, p. 181). This makes it possible to cover cases where the desired action is performed by a third party, for example:

- (1) *Po schuch’emu velen’yu, po moemu hoten’yu – stupayte, vedra, sami domoy!*
- (2) *Ich bitte dich, das Kind dazu zu bringen, gesund zu essen.*

Summarizing all mentioned above, we propose to define the illocution of REQUEST as follows:

- (a) I assume that you can do it or not do it
- (b) I want to cause you to do it
- (c) I believe that you are able to do it
- (d) I know that X can not happen if someone does not do anything to make it happen
- (e) I say: I want to see X happen

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