ETIQUETTE INTERACTIONS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: TRANSFORMATION OF NORMS AND PRACTICES AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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Abstract

This paper explores the behavioural strategies employed by the young residents of Russian megalopolis when using public transportation.

Contemporary Russian society is marked by a manifest contradiction between a need to preserve and transfer common behavioural norms required for a coherent social order, and a devaluation of traditional normative systems especially apparent in youth culture.

Traditionally, rules of public transportation behaviour have constituted an important part of etiquette. These etiquette situations are characterized by the communication between the members of different social groups who do not know each other personally. This creates a situation of pure status interaction free from any other factors (such as personal attitudes to a specific individual communicator, mutual obligations, role interference, etc.). These considerations have allowed us to interpret human interaction on public transportation as a case that provides information on the importance of status differences in everyday communication.

The authors propose a hypothesis that today we witness the gradual unravelling of the traditional etiquette norms and models of interaction based on the importance of social distinctions (gender, age, social status, etc.). These differences are becoming obsolete within the practices of everyday interaction.

To test this hypothesis, we have conducted a participant observation of the behaviour of college-age young people on public transportation. The observation was conducted in 2018. To compare gathered data on behavioural practices with the existing etiquette rules, we have turned to the etiquette guides published in the 1980s–2010s.

The results of our research demonstrate that Russian society experiences change in value attitudes used in everyday communication. Value-oriented motivation of etiquette behaviour is being replaced by a pragmatic motivation. Young people do not see ascribed statuses of the interaction participants as sufficient grounds for following an etiquette norm. Symbolic meaning of public behaviour is also changing: traditionally it used to reflect respect towards seniority status, while today we witness the increasingly overt insistence on status equality.

Keywords: Etiquette, social interaction, behaviour in public transportation, youth, social status.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the behavioural strategies employed by the young residents of Russian megalopolis when using public transportation.

Contemporary Russian society is marked by a manifest contradiction between a need to preserve and transfer common behavioural norms required for a coherent social order, and a devaluation of traditional normative systems, which is especially apparent among the younger generation.

Public transportation is a particular type of socio-cultural space that reveals status and role expectations of the participants in communication, as well as values of a given society as they are embedded in everyday communicative practices. This space is characterized by several distinctive features. First, it is a transitory space, where people spend a relatively short amount of time, and a turnover of participating parties is fast. Second, public transportation pitches together members of different social groups who do not know each other personally. This creates a situation of pure status interaction free from any other factors (such as personal attitudes, mutual obligations, role interference etc.). Third, this space exhibits its own norms of two different types: formal procedural norms and etiquette communication norms. Norms of the first type are codified by the formal "Rules of Public Transportation Conduct", a prerequisite document hanging inside every public vehicle. They regulate formal aspects of interaction. Norms of the second type can be found in books aimed at various age groups (children and adults) and included into a system of parenting and educational practices. These considerations have allowed us to interpret human interaction on public transportation as a case providing information on the importance of status differences in everyday communication and on a degree to which these norms are reflected in actual behaviour.

Various aspects of public transportation behaviour have been actively studied by the researchers in different fields: anthropologists, sociologists, economists, geographers, etc. The researchers regularly explore socio-economic foundations of the public transportation systems, as well as society's demands towards public transportation and the degree to which these demands are satisfied. Among the most widely researched aspects are: the questions of transportation geography (Jaramillo, Lizárraga, Grindlay, 2012, pp. 340–357); how specifically public transportation is used by the different categories of passengers, including passengers with disabilities (Vella-Brodrick, Stanley, 2013, pp. 236–242); activities used to occupy transit time (Urry, Watts, 2008, pp. 860–874). Russian researchers actively study levels of satisfaction with transportation services (Kriger, Kvyatkovskaya, 2012, pp. 123–128), everyday routes of urban residents (Lychko, Mosijenko, 2016, pp. 256–273; Vozianov, 2011, pp. 359–387), spatial and temporal codes of passenger practices (Gorokhovskaja, 2012, pp. 133–138), and body issues on public transportation (Ivanova, 2014, pp. 70–93; Sorokina, 2009, pp. 105–110). At the same time, these authors often focus on the pragmatic aspects of public transportation behaviour, stating that they are not interested in the etiquette of interpersonal communication. On the contrary, our paper specifically focuses on the etiquette aspects of the passengers' communicative practices. The goal of this paper is to analyse the transformation of norms and practices of the etiquette interactions by contemporary Russian young people on public transportation.

2 METHODS

The academic tradition that theorizes social practice to understand etiquette interaction dates back to the "civilization" studies by Norbert Elias (Elias, 1978). Using methodological principles established by this theory, we can study both the actual cases of etiquette interactions and the value and normative "background" underpinning them. In this research, the study of practices provides an opportunity to explore to what extent young people employ the codified etiquette norms in their actual behaviour, as well as determine the implicit rules followed by the members of this social group in communicative etiquette situations. By examining etiquette interactions under this angle, we can elucidate the deeper, non-explicit layers of the process that leads to the establishment of new etiquette norms.

Empirical part of our research employs the method of participant observation that allows to document the respondents' behaviour and emotional reactions within their natural everyday circumstances simultaneously with the unfolding situation.

Field observation was conducted covertly and systematically in naturalistic conditions from September to December 2018.

The goal of this observation was to analyze etiquette interactions in everyday communication practices of Russian young people within the space of urban public transportation.

The individuals observed can be divided in two categories: young, predominantly college-age people (males

and females) and the so-called people with a "special passenger status": elderly women and men, people with disabilities, pregnant women, adults with small kids. Interactions between these categories of passengers comprise the basis of our empirical research.

The observed situations were localized in Ekaterinburg streetcars No. 8 and No. 22. The choice of these specific routes was motivated by the fact that they are commonly used by many college students, since both tram lines connect the two largest city universities with the more distant urban districts. Besides, the length of these routes is conductive to an observation of a variety of communicative situations; it also intensifies the pragmatic motives of interaction thus allowing to better grasp the validity of the etiquette rules compared to individual utilitarian interests.

The observation was conducted according to a pre-designed plan. All observations were noted on observation sheets specifically designed for this research. The observation sheets included: 1) communicative situations that presuppose etiquette behaviour (there are no free seats on a public vehicle; new passengers enter; these new passengers hold a special passenger status: they are elderly men or women, people with disabilities, pregnant women, women with small children) and 2) possible reactions of the observed young people: they may offer their seats; not offer their seats; offer upon the request from a new passenger; offer upon a request from a ticket seller.

To compare these data on behavioural practices with the existing etiquette rules, we have turned to the etiquette guides published in the 1980s–2010s: that is, relevant to the upbringing of the studied participants of communicative interactions. The corpus of analyzed texts included both books written by Soviet/Russian authors and translated etiquette guides by European and American authors. The research was based on the interpretative methods of text analysis.

3 RESULTS

During the observation research, we recorded 489 situations of etiquette interaction between young people and people with special passenger status on urban public transportation.

In the vast majority of cases, the etiquette rules were ignored. Young people of both genders *did not* offer their seats to people with a special passenger status in 73% of cases. Among those who followed the rule, 19.5% offered their seats voluntarily; 5.2% offered their seats upon request/demand from a new passenger; and 2.3% did this upon request/demand from a tram's ticket-seller.

At the same time, people who were most prepared to give up their seats, did not belong to the group under observation. They included young men who seemed to belong to Central Asian ethnic communities, as well as military personnel in uniform and middle-aged women. Among college-age young people, males were more likely to offer their seats than females.

Those who try to evade the need to offer their seats, use a number of tactics: they close their eyes, wear headphones, turn their heads off and stare into a window, or concentrate on their gadgets.

We have also discovered a correlation between the amount of people in a streetcar and the probability that etiquette rule will be observed: during morning and evening rush hours, when the carriages are packed, people tend to give up their seats less often; when a carriage is relatively sparsely filled, the passengers are more likely to follow the etiquette rule.

To determine the codified rules of behaviour on public transportation, we have analysed 39 etiquette guides published between 1981 and 2016. The results show that during the past decade rules of public transportation behaviour are increasingly often absent from such guides. Even when such rules are included, they are often described ambiguously or inconsistently.

4 DISCUSSION

There are several groups of norms that govern behaviour on public transportation:

- Norms that determine the category of "people with a special passenger status";

- Norms that regulate the interactions between this category and other passengers;

- Norms that determine who is supposed to offer their seats to whom on public transportation;

- Norms that govern the processes of entrance and exit to/from public transportation;

- Verbal communicative expressions.

In this paper, we have focused on the first three groups. Etiquette guides offer differing interpretations of these rules of public transportation behaviour. Firstly, there is a clear difference between the guides published in different time periods. In late 20-hundreds, public transportation was the main form of everyday movements in Russia. Consequently, interaction between people as passengers constituted a major part of everyday communication – communication that serve as a background of everyday life. Therefore, etiquette guides included an obligatory section on the rules of behaviour on public transportation. Rules of etiquette were often reinforced by legal framework. Predictably, the older etiquette guides present a prescriptive, compulsory, obligatory interpretation of these rules of behaviour. Today, public transportation has become only one of several means of urban transportation, sharing this role with the taxi cabs and personal cars. Therefore, these interpersonal interactions are becoming less important. Within the etiquette guides, sections covering the public transportation behaviour are becoming optional. The compulsory strictness of the rules has also become a thing of the past – in modern guides, these rules look more like recommendations.

Following the changes in writing style, the content of the rules is also changing. It is important to note that the etiquette norm itself is dynamic and often ambiguous. First of all, etiquette guides differ in determining the special category of individuals who should be offered a seat. It may include elderly people, people with disabilities, pregnant women, women with small children (Jagodinskij, 1991, p. 40; Nikolajeva, Illarionov, 1993, p. 34): these groups constitute the core of this category. The list may also include small children (Bud'te dobry, 1985, p. 134), as well as female acquaintances (Kamyczek, 1981, p. 47; My zhivem sredi ljudej, 1989; Kobzeva, 2000, pp. 49–50).

Characteristically, these lists combine two opposing grounds for this rule. On the one hand, there is a motive of respect. Among people who should be offered a seat are those who traditionally hold a higher etiquette status (elderly people, women). In this case, offer of a seat serves as an action confirmation of an established social hierarchy: according to the traditional interpretation, proximal opposition of "seating /standing" encodes "senior/junior" relationships. On the other hand, there is an equally obvious motive of compassion: one is supposed to offer one's seat to a weaker individual. The result is the relatively equal distribution of comfort: people who are better equipped to tolerate the physical discomforts of public transportation transit, voluntarily choose less comfortable positions. While the first situation puts emphasis on status distinctions, compassionate motive implies a tendency to equalize participants of the situation. Presumably, this duality of meaning also explains the dynamic character of this etiquette norm and its internal ambiguity that often creates conflicts in real-life situations.

Another typical characteristic is the ambiguity of the supposed addressee of these rules. Although their main subject of action is a man (implicitly a young or middle-age man), many etiquette guides also provide explanations and elaborations on female behaviour, describing situations in which a young woman should adopt "male" behavioural strategy, i.e., offer her seat to another passenger. Such situations usually are based on a compassionate motive. They also include a traditionally ambivalent etiquette situation "young woman/elderly man", where age and gender factors conflict with each other (Chernysheva, 1983, p. 17).

Tracing the dynamics of changes in the rules of public transportation behaviour as described by the etiquette guides, we may say that the time period under consideration is characterised by the gradual dissolving of the status foundations of etiquette. Alongside with women with children (this rule is based on the idea of making a woman more comfortable) and small children, we see that today the category of passengers who should have a priority right to a seat also includes children without any age qualifications (Leksikon horoshih maner, 1991, p. 15; Pravila etiketa, 1992, p. 16). The strictness of the requirements is also becoming more relaxed. While in the books published in the end of the 20th century, rules of behaviour on public transportation are interpreted as mandatory norms, modern books increasingly often stress the importance of a concrete situation in practical implementation of these rules. Books published earlier notice that the passengers whose status is lower *must* offer their seats to those who are higher. Although they still recommend that passengers belonging to a group of "special transportation status" should be given seats, the books regularly state that a young passenger who is tired or unwell also has a right to seat down (Leksikon horoshih maner, 1991, p. 15). Common sense factor features increasingly often: a situation participant makes a decision based on her own assessment of a given situation.

We believe that an appropriate analogy here would be a comparison between linguistic and etiquette norms. This analogy will help us to describe the observed phenomena in terms of conservative and innovatory norms. In linguistics, conservative norm is a norm that is either already outdated (obsolete) or on the verge of becoming outdated (obsolete) and which is usually used by the older generation of language speakers, while innovatory norms include recently established versions of usage utilized mostly by the members of the

younger age group. There is also a temporally neutral norm – a general standard usage that has neither connotation of obsolescence nor of novelty. These variations of linguistic norm can co-exist over a long period of time. Similar processes can be observed in the etiquette behaviour on public transpiration. Here, the conservative norm is represented by the demand to *always* give a seat to elderly people, people with disabilities and women (especially pregnant women and women with small children). The innovatory norm is represented by the rules that demand to take into account given situation and physical status of its participants. As applied to etiquette, the difference between conservative and innovatory norm also includes the level of strictness and unambiguity. The conservative norm has an obligatory character and utilizes the modality of duty. The innovatory norm is more flexible, adaptive and individual. Many situations of conflict may be interpreted not as the manifestations of young people's "lack of upbringing" or the older generation's unreasonable demands, but rather as a conflict between the conservative and the innovatory norm.

These trends correlate with the results of our empirical research. Moreover, some of the aforementioned characteristics appear more explicitly in everyday behavioural practices.

In 73% of cases, young people, both female and male, *do no*t offer their seats to people with a special passenger status. Among those who *do* follow this rule, 19.5% offer their seats voluntarily; 5.2% offer their seats upon request/demand from a new passenger; and 2.3% do this upon request/demand from a tram ticket-seller.

At the same time, people who were most prepared to give up their seats did not belong to the group under observation. Among those who did it were young males apparently belonging to Central Asian ethnic communities, as well as uniformed military personnel and middle-aged women. Among young college-age people, men were more likely to offer their seats than women.

Still, many young college-age people seem to experience some discomfort as a result of the fact that they occupy the seats that are supposed to be reserved (as a special sign inside every carriage informs) for people with a special passenger status. Therefore, these young people use a variety of tactics: they close their eyes, put on headphones, stare intently out of a window or become engrossed in their gadgets. In so doing, they seem to be trying to create a barrier between themselves and other passengers – a private space where they would not be disturbed – and to avoid a potential conflict. Such a behaviour may be characterized as a "ploy" and a "resistant practice" used against the established rules.

According to the research results, the willingness to follow the rules partially depends on the time of day and the number of people inside a vehicle. During the morning and evening rush hours, people are less prepared to give up their seats than in the middle of the day. This may be explained by the tiredness in the evenings and inadequate night sleep in the mornings: many passengers tend to seat with their eyes closed, either napping or pretending to do so. During the middle of the day, the majority of passengers are more alert and energetic, while the morning and evening commutes are perceived as additional opportunities to get some rest. At the same time, such a behaviour can be interpreted as a defence mechanism: "don't bother me", "I see nothing". On top of this, an overcrowded public transport makes it easier just to remain seated rather than squeeze by other people while trying to offer a seat and bothering several neighbouring passengers.

Besides, here we may be also dealing with a psychological trait that characterizes the residents of large urban areas: a "blasé attitude" or "lack of concern" already described by Georg Simmel (Simmel, 1971, pp. 324–339). In modern conditions this trait is transformed into a de-communicability also noted by other Russian researchers of transportation. Thus, similar processes have been described by L. Gorokhovskaja (Gorokhovskaja, 2012, p. 137) who has conducted a survey of public transportation passengers in Vladivostok in 2010. Aloofness, detachment, avoidance of others, including passengers with a special status, can be interpreted as a particular defence mechanism. It is likely to become more pronounced during the morning and evening hours, when passengers are tired.

It is also important to note that on public transportation one can rarely hear the announcements encouraging people to offer their seats to the special status passengers. Even when such announcements are made, they provoke no reaction either from the young people or from the other passengers and ticket sellers. This fact demonstrates the weakening of the social pressure that could have potentially induced compliance with this rule. In this respect, we agree with A. Lipatov who writes that "often the existing rules are not effective, primarily because no sanctions exist capable of enforcing them" (Lipatov, 2015, p. 15). An etiquette norm is not reinforced by any external regulatory controls.

This becomes apparent in the situations of conflict, which happen often on public transportation. In a situation of conflict, or if someone simply refuses to follow the rules, most of the passengers prefer *not* to interfere showing that this is not their business. Ticket sellers often behave in a similar manner: they are

indifferent to such situations and frequently don't interfere. However, even when the ticket sellers take part in such situations, they usually position themselves not as the arbiters, but rather as equal participants, thus provoking and deepening a conflict.

Inter-generational conflicts on public transportation recreate an opposition between the conservative and the innovatory etiquette norms. In conflict situations, certain positions become asserted again and again. The older generation generally exhibits a "you ought to"/"you must" attitude, while the young people counter it with their stance of "I owe you nothing and it's not my duty". The idea of duty invoked by the members of older generation and most ticket sellers, goes back to the etiquette norms and models on which they were raised. On the contrary, young people tend to follow more pragmatic and situational norms that are closer to the modern etiquette recommendations.

However, these behavioural practices reveal not only their situational and goal-oriented character described by the modern etiquette guides. Codified rules described in books stress the humanistic motives: a seat should be given to an individual whose need at the moment is greater. Summarizing our observations, we witness the prevalence of strictly pragmatic considerations. Moreover, youth culture demonstrates one of the most fundamental trends in modern etiquette: the transition from an etiquette system based on the value of an ascribed status to a behavioural norm based on the importance of an achieved status. The main status oppositions of the traditional etiquette are based on the ascribed statuses, namely age and gender ones. Modern behavioural practice of young people often shows indifference towards such statuses. As for the achieved statuses that *can* command their respect, these are unlikely to be demonstrated during the public transportation commute.

Young people present themselves as a "liminal" group that is based on the equality of all passengers who enter or exit a public vehicle. At the same time, as noted by L.G.Gorokhovskaja, "in this case the idea of equality has no connection with the declared legal equality of rights, but is rather understood as a certain "implicit norm" that constitutes a "natural order" interpreted as an equal right to use public transportation, as a non-hierarchical, non-status-based space occupied by the bodies, and as a right to choose what place to occupy" (Gorokhovskaja, 2012, p. 136).

To sum up, our research shows that everyday communicative practices constitute the new rules. They habituate the new behavioural practices that are based on the negation of status and role positions of the interaction parties on public transportation. At the same time, to cite an apt observation by Peter Burke, "the notion of a fixed cultural rule goes out, replaced by the idea of improvisation" (Burke, 2004, p. 92). Compliance with the particular etiquette rules becomes more and more occasional in character.

5 CONCLUSION

The results of our analysis of behavioural practices of young people and etiquette guides show the changes both in codified and implicit rules of behaviour on public transportation.

Etiquette guides differ in their interpretation of these rules. First of all, there is a clear difference between the guides based on their publication date. Books published earlier notice that the passengers who are junior in status *must* offer their seats to those who are senior. Public transportation used to be the basis of everyday transit – consequently, the sections covering passenger behaviour used to be obligatory. The older guides presented a prescriptive, compulsory, obligatory interpretation of the behavioural rules. Today personal vehicles and taxi cabs are used increasingly often – a fact that is reflected in modern etiquette guides. They often lack a section on public transportation behaviour, and the rules themselves are rather situational than prescriptive.

These trends appear even stronger in the behavioural practices of young Russians. According to our observation, in vast majority of cases young people do not offer their seats either to their seniors or to people with a special passenger status. The choice of a particular behavioural strategy is determined by a number of factors dominated not by status distinctions but by the pragmatic circumstances (how tired a person is, how full a carriage is etc.).

To sum up, the conducted research shows that both older and newer etiquette norms co-exist in Russian society: the first one is characterised by rigidity and the importance of status distinctions, while the second one is variable and situational. Modern etiquette of public transportation behaviour is based on a principle of practicability, which in everyday interactive practices often turns into pragmatism. Symbolic meaning of public behaviour is also changing: traditionally it used to reflect respect towards higher status, while today we witness an increasingly overt insistence on status equality.

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