

# Strategy and Tactics of Communication Arts in the Works of Blanche Staff (1845–1911)

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**Abstract** — The article is devoted to studying the recommendations of the communicative behavior of French high society representatives at the end of the 19th century. The study is relied on the most famous works of Blanche Staff (1845-1911) where the guidance of good manners, applied to different situations of communication in the defined sections of society, was described. The author's concepts about the rules of good tone and demands for the strategy and tactics of conduct's rules are rejected in the introduction of her books. Verbal and non-verbal aspects of behavior are treated as elements of the institutional communication system. In this article the author's remarks on the French status-oriented discourse are also analyzed.

**Key words** — *French, communication, communication theory, art of communication, institutional discourse, small talk*

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the new directions in the study of language nature in the late twentieth century is communication which is largely stimulated by the emergence of a significant number of new means and methods of communication in modern technologically advanced society. That is why in recent years, within the framework of the new linguistic ontology, more and more attention has been paid to the problems associated with the study of the “Homo communicans” (Man Communicating). In this regard, the study of typical or recognized reference models of representatives' behavior is of considerable interest not only for different societies and different linguocultures, but also of different eras. Hence, heightened attention to sources representing and, to a certain extent, reconstructing the peculiarities of a person's communicative behavior in different situations of communication is paid. In this regard, manuals describing patterns of behavior recognized in society as a

reference are of considerable interest. The works of Blanche Staff (1845–1911), which enjoyed great success at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, are among them, as evidenced by their numerous reprints.

A complex analysis technique was used in this study combining the techniques of communicative linguistics, textology, and diachronic linguistics. Empirical data were obtained by analyzing the most popular works of Blanche Staff which describe the rules of behavior in different communication situations adopted in French high society at the end of the 19th century. The study also involved the methods of linguoculturology, since the material under study is considered as an integral part of the linguocultural tradition of its time.

## II. REVIEW OF NORMS AND COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE SOCIETY

Many modern scholars pay attention to the impact of various means of communication on languages, their status and their scope. Compared with the invention of writing, and then printing, the twentieth century radically changed the communicative space, having invented for humanity radio, television, telephone, and at the end of the century - information, or computer technology [1–5].

Evidence of awareness of the processes associated with the fate of languages and with communicative human behavior in modern society which is commonly called the “communication society”, was the term “Homo communicans” proposed by F. Breton and it entered into use. The scholar's remark that modern communication has created a peculiar paradox seems to be significant: it led to a planetary standardization of tastes, norms, human behavior, and universal space. Moreover, it contributed

to the creation of a world where individualism is becoming increasingly stronger and where the individual is usually turned not to the interlocutor, but to oneself [6].

The well-known French linguist J. Mousseau [7, 8]. In particular, he notes that the existence of various kinds of technical means (*machines à communiquer*) designed to ensure communication does not only contribute, but, on the contrary, destroys the laws of communicative behavior that have been created and perfected over the centuries. He believes that the informatization of society has led to a cacophony in the field of communication, since it has replaced genuine communication with an abundance of information. Meanwhile, communication in the proper sense of the word is nothing but high art, which existed both in the oral and in the written sphere of communication in the first half of the twentieth century. And without regret, the scientist notes, if in the XVII-XVIII centuries this art was a kind of a business card of French society, which it owned perfectly, but in modern times it has practically been lost [8].

We can get an idea of this unique phenomenon to the history of the French language and the history of communication based on the memos of well-known representatives of French culture and aristocrats, who are talking about a refined atmosphere of communication. In the circle of connoisseurs of the “art of conversation”, everything was important - from a well-chosen word and impeccable knowledge of syntax laws to the ability to include an elegant anecdote or profound remark in the conversation. Among the most famous French authors, in the writings of which such information was reflected, we can mention *Mademoiselle de Scuderie*, *Count de La Rochefoucauld*, *J.-J. Rousseau*, *Madame de Stael*. The works of these authors occupy today a well-deserved place in the studies of diachronists and literary critics, as well as specialists in the theory of discourse and communicative linguistics.

No less valuable material for expanding information about the art of communication characteristic of French linguistic culture can be gathered from other types of sources that until recently remained outside the field of view of scientists. We are talking about special benefits addressed to a fairly narrow circle of persons belonging to high society, where information is presented in the form of free discourse about different communication situations and the corresponding behavior of communicants, as well as various kinds of information about the norms of refined French speech.

Among this kind of didactic literature on the art of communicative behavior demanded at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries, the works of the French writer *Blanche Staff* (1845-1911) can be named. The most famous of her writings of this kind is the book “*Règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne*” (The rules of etiquette in modern society), which became a kind of bestseller of that time. This is evidenced by the number of its reprints in a relatively short period of time: if its 24th edition was published in 1891, after only six years the book was published for the 122nd time [9, 10].

The real name of the writer is *Blanche-Augustin-Ange Sawyer* (*Blanche-Augustine-Angèle Soyer*). However, she was known under the pseudonym “*Baroness Staff*”. She appropriated this aristocratic title, which she had never

rightfully owned, in order to strengthen the authority of the connoisseur of the French elite life through one. The success of her writings on the rules of good form and elegance of manners was to a certain extent ensured by this literary pseudonym [11].

She was born in 1845 (according to other sources in 1843) in the *Givet* canton, in eastern Champagne, in the *Ardennes*, died in 1911 in the town of *Savigny-sur-Orge* (*Savigny-sur-Orge*) not far from Paris [12]. She came from a family of hereditary soldiers, among whom there were two generals [13], so she knew the manners and customs of the representatives of the French elite to a sufficient degree.

During its relatively short literary activity, *B. Staff* wrote about two dozen books that were intended primarily for a female audience and had educational value. In the atmosphere of rapid changes in which France lived in the 80-90-ies. XIX century, she acted as a teacher of women of the new time (“*l'éducatrice de la femme moderne*”) [*Baroness Staffe*: <https://>]. In addition to books describing the morals and life of French high society, she published articles on various topics of social life in major Parisian journals. In the period between 1892 and 1900. She collaborated with such prestigious publications as *Notes mondaines*, *Gazette des cours*, *La Nouvelle revue* (heading *Carnet mondain*), *la Revue illustrée*, *Paris-Mode* and *Paris-Province* [13].

The success of the writings of *Baroness Staff* was promoted not only by the aristocratic flair of the author's pseudonym, but also by the persistently repeated idea in them that the courtly behavior and the special culture of communication are an exceptional feature of the French nation. Such statements not only flattered the vanity of French readers, but also met the demands of French society, in which the ideas of national identity and patriotic spirit, broken as a result of the Franco-Prussian war, were again in demand [14].

Let us consider how the strategy and tactics of etiquette behavior typical of the French elite at the end of the 19th century are reflected in the most famous work of *B. Staff* “*Règles du savoir-vivre dans la société moderne*”. Let us dwell on the following questions: the author's views on the good tone rules set forth in the preface; non-verbal aspect of institutional behavior prescribed for representatives of this social group of French society; main features of francophone status-oriented discourse.

The author's preface helps to understand the position of the author regarding the content stated in the book. As noted by *L.G. Vikulova*, the communicative goal of any preface, which is an important part of the paratext of the book, is to establish a kind of dialogue with the reader, which is expressed in various kinds of strategic approaches of the author to adapt his work [15].

*I.V. Chernigov* identifies the following communication strategies in the presentation of the work: a) self-presentation strategy; b) the strategy of work valorization; c) interactive strategy; d) the strategy of creating optimal conditions for reading an innovative work [16].

All these strategies are fully implemented in the paratext of the books of *B. Staff*. Interestingly, in almost all of her writings on standards of reference behavior, as a rule, there is one

preface (Avant-propos) [9,17,18]. However, in the 1897 edition [10] there are two prefaces, each of which in its own way implements the communicative strategies for the presentation of this publication.

The first preface (Avant-propos) is a stylistic modification of what is usually presented in her books about the rules of good form. The dominant strategies in this part of the book are the dialogue strategy and the strategy of creating optimal conditions for reading this essay. Made in the tradition of the author's preface genre, this text is aimed at presenting the main idea of this work, in which the key term is "genuine elegance" (La véritable élégance) [10: V-XII]. It is precisely in this part of the book that its ethnocultural urological dominant is clearly marked - the courtly behavior as a feature of exclusively French society: "La politesse de notre temps allégée d'abus peut avoir ses petits mérites. Elle Estoujoujoulejoufouleourenteoute et al., Pouring débarassée dénée le cénère parcouru, de l'attirail des autres siècles, elle néen est paste moins restée la généreuse courtoisie française toujours à imiter hors frontières" [10: VI-VII].

The second preface (Préface de la nouvelle édition), dated March 12, 1897, is one of the classic examples of a paratext of a book in which the author's self-presentation strategy and the work's valorization strategy dominate. This is due to the fact that this preface precedes the 122nd edition of her book (122nd revision et augmentée). The exceptional success of this work, undoubtedly, was the subject of particular pride of its author; therefore in the preface to this edition it is mainly about the book itself. As noted by E.F. Serebrennikova, personalization as a special kind of human subjectivization in a discursive universe can be expressed in establishing the coordinates of an expression either from a subject of utterance to the world, or from world to a subject in a dialogue with the Other [19]. B. Staff's self-presentation strategy in this preface to the 1897 edition is marked according to all the rules of good taste and the norms of "genuine elegance": it is expressed predominantly implicitly in the frame of reference from the subject of the utterance to the world, that is, to the reader.

### III. THE BARONESS STAFFE'S IDEAS ABOUT THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF ETIQUETTE BEHAVIOR

Let us turn to the non-verbal aspect of institutional behavior prescribed for the elite of French society. This type of communication of representatives of high society in the book by B. Staff is given much more attention than comments on the methods of verbal communication. An explanation of this kind of asymmetry in the description of the norms of communicative behavior can be found in the works of modern experts in communicative linguistics. In particular, V.I. Karasik writes that non-verbal indices of a person's social status are more significant than verbal ones [20]. That is why B. Staff meticulously described in the book the rules of the standard nonverbal behavior of a secular person in different situations of communication. At the same time, it is casually noted that since each person is an individuality, it is not customary in the circle of people of the world to resort to speech patterns and clichés that level his personal qualities.

A significant place in the book about the rules of good tone is given to the description of the norms of behavior prescribed

for various kinds of visits. Among them are the following types: Visites de cérémonie, Visites du Jour de l'An, Visites de digestion, Visites de convenances, Visites de condoléances, Visites intimes, Visites de congé et de retour, Visites d'arrivée. For some of them, recommendations related to discursive behavior are given. For example, when it comes to a person leaving the city, it is prescribed by the rules of good form to pay visits to acquaintances to notify them of their departure. If during the application of the visit it was not possible to catch the owners of the house, it is permissible to leave them a business card with the "RRS" mark (pour prendre congé) [10]. Upon returning to the city, the rules of politeness prescribe the next series of visits to those who are familiar in order to indicate their presence and the opportunity to resume communication. Samples of replicas are given for such situations: "Vous savez, je reprends mes lundis ou mardis, à compter de la semaine prochaine". It is noted that it is appropriate to add: "Je me plais à vous compter parmi mes fidèles" or: "J'espère que vous n'aurez pas désappris le chemin de maison" [10].

A rather extensive section is devoted to the description of strict rules imposed on business cards (Etiquette de la carte). It is noted that their use at the end of the XIX century went beyond the limits of high society and became the property of a fairly wide range of people: "L'usage de s'adresser réciproquement un petit morceau carton, témoignage de souvenir, au renouvellement de chaque année, cet usage, qui a ses détracteurs, se répand de plus en plus dans les classes moyennes de la société" [10]. Considerable attention in this section is given to the subtleties associated with the cardholder: his status in society, age, gender identity, etc.

There are quite extensive chapters describing the responsibilities of the hostess of the house in relation to the guests, as well as the behavior of people during various kinds of holidays: Christmas, New Year, Easter, etc. The ceremonial of religious and secular traditions is painted in detail, for example, "La fête de baptême", "Le gâteau de la fête", "Les œufs de Pâques", "La corbeille de noce", "Le mariage civil", "Le mariage religieux", "Façon d'être des jeunes mariés", "Secondes noces", "Noce d'une demoiselle d'un certain âge", "Noce d'argent", "Noce d'or" and others. The system of interpersonal and intrafamily relations existed in French society at the end of the XIX century is presented in the book by B. Staff as not only a reflection of the etiquette behavior of a narrow stratum of French society, but also as the wealth of the linguistic and ethno-culture of its time with its inherent benchmarks.

Separate attention is given to the composition by B. Staff of the description of various kinds of greetings then accepted in society (Les différentes manières de saluer). The author, not without irony, notes the phenomenon of a noticeable democratization of this aspect, which is important for a successful communication strategy: "Il est claircourse le pétére du salut prosterné" (côté des hommes) "À la duchesse" qui étaient le complément obligatory de la poudre et des paniers. Examples of traditions adopted by different nations are given; in particular, the greeting ceremony for Muslim women, who in deference to each other bring their hands to their hearts, lips and foreheads [10], is colorfully described.

The book by B. Staff presents a detailed description of the behavior of men who use a hat as a sign of non-verbal communication, gallantly removing or raising it as a sign of respect for those who are present, depending on their social status, age and gender. As examples, there are cases of a special kind of gallant behavior of noble persons in relation to people of lower social status. Among them Louis XIV is as evidence, known for his arrogance and even arrogance towards others, was in the habit of raising his luxurious hat decorated with feathers even at the sight of a washerwoman [10].

Let us now consider the comments of B. Staff regarding the French status-oriented discourse. Among the forms of speech etiquette to which she pays attention, an important place is occupied by the formula of addressing the interlocutor, greeting, farewell, acquaintance, apology, gratitude, compliments, toasts during the feast, invitations to dance during the ball, etc. The key word around which is built description of the verbal behavior of representatives of the nobility or experts in good manners is a "conversation" (conversation). Thus, the focus of attention is the kind of discourse that reflects interpersonal relationships.

The system of discursive strategies and tactics reflecting the rules of good tone includes the following aspects: "Direction de la conversation", "La charité dans la conversation", "Les règles de la conversation", "Elégance du langage et de la conversation", "Mots et calembours. Since, for the author of the book, the concept of "elegance" is considered as the determining condition for successful communication, it is fully applicable to the art of conversation. Emphasizing that genuine elegance of well-educated people is manifested in simplicity and naturalness, she gives recommendations reflecting the subtleties of flawless in this sense of speech, referring to questions of French pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary.

So, she recommends not to use liaisons too often, especially if the sounds that form it are in close proximity to each other, because, as she notes, "Trop fréquentes, trop accusées, les liaisons blessent l'oreille et le goût" [10]. To the same extent, for the socially oriented norm of this circle, to which, according to B. Staff, pedants and people of refined taste belong, is characterized by the desire not to use forms of imparfait du subjonctif in speech, which she refers to as "ce maudit imparfait", and phrases with these grammatical forms are "ugly" (laides) [10]. Such remarks extend the information about the axiological norm in the history of the French language, revealing invisible mechanisms governing language changes.

In addition to the recommendations regarding the standards of the reference speech, B. Staff gives a detailed list of tips on the features of communication in the written field. The following headings deserve special attention: "Lettres d'invitation à la bénédiction nuptiale", "Faire part du mariage et réponses", "Lettres d'invitation à un convoi, faire part du décès et réponses", "Invitations au bal, à un dîner, Réponses à une invitation. As you can see, they all relate to small forms of writing (invitations, apologies, congratulations, etc.).

The recipes proposed at one time by B. Staff for successful communication among the French elite, as she predicted, turned out to be in demand outside of France. At the end of the XIX century they were repeatedly published in the original language,

since French was the language of communication of the European elite. At the beginning of the twentieth century a compilation of her recommendations was translated into Russian and published in the form of lectures addressed to the female audience of the Russian Empire [21].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the works of Blanche Staff, devoted to the art of communication, reflects the sociocultural realities characteristic of the French elite of the late XIX century. The author's ideas about the rules of good tone and information about the strategy and tactics of etiquette behavior are reflected not only in the main part of her books, but also in the paratext part presented in the preface. The description of the verbal and non-verbal aspects of institutional communication is asymmetric: the dominant is non-verbal communication. The main features of the French-speaking status-oriented discourse are presented in the form of relatively brief recommendations, focused on the simplicity and naturalness of oral communication, as well as tips on small forms of writing. The study of the literary and didactic heritage of B. Staff can be continued from the point of view of such areas of modern linguistics as communication, discourse theory, textology, genre, diachronic linguistics. Unlike works of fiction, her works are among the sources that adequately represent the characteristics of the etiquette behavior of their time.

It would seem that the works of a hundred years ago about the art of etiquette and the culture of communication, addressed to a rather narrow circle of people, can hardly be of interest to the general public these days. Moreover, lately the recently adopted rules of good form have been significantly modified and new standards of communicative behavior have been formed. Meanwhile, the fact of reprinting the books of B. Staff in modern France [22,23] testifies to the demand for this kind of literature in modern society, shifting attention from the art of communication to the theory of communication.

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