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Leave-Taking Formulas in Contemporary Russian Language

1. Introduction

Farewells are universal speech acts that have received limited attention in empirical studies (Baehren 2022) and are rarely discussed in their own right (Ameka 1999), a trend that also applies to the Russian language. Along with greetings, farewells are considered fixed formulas devoid of propositional content (Searle 1969); thus, they tend to be understudied from a sociopragmatic perspective.

For instance, according to Meibauer (2017: 40), the question 'How are you?' functions as a greeting: "If it is a kind of greeting, a reaction like 'Fine' would suffice, with all further information being a violation of Grice's maxim of Quantity. Despite having a literal reading, 'How are you?' is standardized as a greeting formula". As suggested by Pinto (2011: 229), the routine greeting 'How are you?' does not reflect a sincere inquiry into the Hearer's well-being, but instead serves to make the Hearer feel comfortable and create a positive impression.

It is recognized, though, that such formulas tend to be culturally specific. Flanzer (2019) reports that Brazilians often end their social encounters with expressions such as *a gente se vê* 'see you' or *aparece em casa* 'show up at my place' which are not meant to be taken literally. Similarly, the English phrase 'We really must get together sometime' can lead to a pragmatic failure if interpreted literally as a sincere suggestion by non-Americans (Thomas 1983: 108). Finally, Ameka (1999: 257) describes learning the Dutch expressions *tot ziens!* 'till seeing' and *tot straks* 'till later'. She discovered that the latter is not used as a formulaic expression but only when a further contact during the day is expected. Being a cause of pragmatic failures, these formulas tend to be a difficult topic for foreign language speakers.

One of the ways of coming to grips with the phenomenon of ritualized verbal behavior is through the analysis of 'politeness formulas' (Ferguson 1981) or 'conversational routines' (Coulmas 1981; Aijmer 1996), which act as a "social lubricant" (Watts 1992: 45) in an ongoing conversation. They are "highly stereotyped", can be altered only for special effect (Ferguson 1981: 25), and function as automatic responses to recurrent features of the situation (Aijmer 1996: 2; Rachilina *et al.* 2021). From this perspective, language teaching materials often present ritual behaviour within formal and informal settings, offering lists of expected phrases (Wolfson, Judd 1983; Formanovskaja 2002; Balakaj 2004).

However, as will be demonstrated in this study, the realization of these formulas is prone to social variation according to more than just (in)formality. Greeting and parting rituals depend heavily on sociopragmatic variables such as 1) social distance between interlocutors; 2) social status; and 3) the length of time elapsed between previous and future encounters (Ferguson 1981: 29). Both the type of relationship between the interactors and the specific setting influence the way greetings and leave-taking are performed. Differences can be observed between individual and group interactions, face-to-face and distant communication, prior acquaintance of the parties involved, the conventional or emotional nature of the occasion, the probability and frequency of contact, etc. (Firth 1972). As separation requires mitigation, there is a need to identify 1) the strategies speakers employ when they end interactions; and 2) the social variables that influence their choices.

People opt for routinized formulas to maintain the stability of a relationship, defer to the authority of a superior, or protect the psychological self-image of the person (Bryant 2008: 26). Thus, conventional interactional exchanges implicate multiple goals, both egoistic (self-promoting) and altruistic (relational goals). Accordingly, leave-taking routines can have propositional content, and they can include a wide array of options, such as thanks, apologies, justifications, good wishes, and promises, which are used to promote reciprocity and collaboration and/or express emotions (Flanzer 2019).

Based on these premises, this study compiles verbal strategies of leave-taking behavior used by native Russian speakers. The research question addressed is: What strategies of leave-taking behavior are attested in the contemporary Russian language? The findings may have pedagogical implications for raising awareness of appropriate speech behavior in Russian.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents an up-to-date literature review on leave-taking formulas focusing on the Russian language. This is followed by Section 3 in which the methodology of data collection and analysis is discussed. Section 4 offers the results of the study on farewell formulas in the contemporary Russian language. Finally, section 5 concludes with implications to be drawn for future studies.

2. *Farewell Formulas in Russian*

2.1. *Previous Research on Leave-Taking Formulas*

As far as leave-taking behavior is concerned, a three-stage development is recognized: 1) the pre-closing phase, where one of the interactants signals an intention to terminate the encounter; 2) the leave-taking phase, often involving social rituals such as expressions of gratitude and phatic talk; 3) the final departure (Schegloff, Sacks 1973: 317; Aijmer 1996).

The use of leave-taking formulas, triggered by the social ritual of parting, is frequently extended by supportive face-enhancing moves, such as promises of future contact or well wishes. The behavior associated with parting ranges from the use of conventionalized expressions (*poka* 'bye', *do svidaniya* 'goodbye') to concluding remarks involving multiple turns. When one participant decides to end the interaction, they usually begin by signal-

ling their intent and then proceed with conversational moves aimed at maintaining interpersonal rapport. As Goffman (1967: 41) put it, a farewell is needed to “sum up the effect of encounter upon the relationship and show what the participants may expect of one another when they next meet”. This perspective is supported by Knapp *et al.* (1973), who outlined the functions of leave-taking as follows:

- signal inaccessibility to continue the interaction;
- signal supportiveness to express one’s pleasure for having been in contact and to indicate hope for renewed contact.

These functions are consistent with Laver’s (1981: 302-303) categorization into mitigation and consolidation ascribed to the linguistic routines of parting. While mitigatory comments appeal to the Hearer’s negative face to ‘signal inaccessibility’, justifying the Speaker’s withdrawal, consolidatory expressions, such as solitudes, appreciations, benedictions, hopes for the continuation of the relationships, address the Hearer’s positive face by ‘signalling supportiveness’. In his review of farewell functions, Clark (1985) mentions some which essentially overlap with Laver’s proposal of consolidation moves, such as the need to express pleasure about each other, indicate continuity in the relationships for future contact, and wish each other well. These observations highlight the importance of analyzing leave-taking expressions not merely as standard routines but as pragmatically rich tools for managing social relationships. The rationale can be summarized as such:

Firstly, it allows the participants to achieve a cooperative parting, in which any feeling of rejection by the person being left can be assuaged by appropriate reassurance from the person leaving. Secondly, it serves to consolidate the relationship between the two participants using behavior that emphasizes the enjoyable quality of the encounter, the mutual esteem in which the participants hold each other, the promise of a continuation of the relationship, the assertion of mutual solidarity, and the announcement of a continuing consensus for the shape of encounters in the future (Laver 1975: 231).

Accordingly, conversational closings in English tend to follow an observable pattern (Ishihara, Cohen 2022: 177-178) and include pre-closing moves and terminal exchanges:

- 1) Pre-closing signals, which mark the Speaker’s intention to end the conversation without adding new information:
 - a. Arrangements (‘I’ll see you in the morning’);
 - b. Announced closing (‘Ok, let me get back to work’);
 - c. Appreciations (‘Thank you’);
 - d. Solitude (‘Take care’).
- 2) Terminal exchanges: actual take-leaving, with formulaic expressions such as the canonical ‘goodbye’.

Conversational routines are considered challenging to teach because they are culturally bound and because their formal features and situational frames are highly complex (Yorio 1980). For example, a study of farewell formulas in Persian identifies nine distinct strategies used when a guest leaves a house. Although these strategies reflect universal face maintenance patterns, they are formulated according to specific cultural and religious norms (Poliščuk, Godrati 2022). Despite there being several studies on teaching speech acts (Judd 1999; Yates 2004; Martinez-Flor, Usò-Juan 2010; Ishihara, Cohen 2022, to name just a few), conversational routines do not receive much attention, as they are treated as fixed formulas associated with the (in)formality of the occasion.

However, as previously mentioned, goodbye formulas are “highly conventionalized” (Firth 1972: 2), yet they are inherently variable; their actual realization depends on the specific situation, social factors of the participants (such as age or gender), the nature of the relationship between them (social distance and dominance) and individual preferences (Flanzer 2019: 8). When routine formulas do not accompany leave-taking, it violates social expectations (Adato 1975)¹. The actual wording of leave-taking is licensed by mutual recognition of each other’s meaningful presence. Farewells, as well as greetings, signal social cohesion within a group; otherwise, people “virtually do not recognize having been together” (Adato 1975: 257). As part of phatic communication, people pay attention to the Hearer’s presence, thereby expressing their benevolence. Indeed, more acquainted individuals are more likely to say goodbye, though it is optional for those less acquainted (Clark, French 1981). This suggests that verbal leave-takings are regulated by contextual information on the nature of relationships. Abruptly opting out of a conversation can jeopardize future interactions.

When applied, linguistic routines in the closing phase of a conversation are often elaborate, suggesting a high risk to face (Laver 1981: 231). They can vary in their degree of conventionality, and the choice of formula depends on factors such as intimacy, relative status, length of contact, and expected time apart (Betholia 2009: 111). The perceived likelihood of future encounters may also influence the expansiveness of the salutation, even among people who are not very intimate.

Although sociopragmatic factors influencing the choice of a leave-taking move are discussed by researchers (Betholia 2009; Flanzer 2019; Ishihara, Cohen 2022), it remains unclear how to establish concrete correlations between these factors and appropriate supportive moves. For instance, how does the expansiveness of the salutation determine the choice of a specific leave-taking formula? If the duration of separation is a variable to consider, should the same formula be used if the next meeting is in a week, in a month, or a year? The answers to these questions remain impressionistic and subjective.

¹ Interestingly, a Russian saying *ujti po-anglijski* or a Polish *wyjść po angielsku* (both translated as ‘leave as English do’) are the counterpart of the English ‘to take French leave’, meaning to leave suddenly without notice or permission. The presence of these proverbs also implies that this kind of behavior is perceived as disruptive.

2.2. Farewell Formulas in Russian

Most studies on closing patterns in the Russian language are based on researchers' intuitions about appropriate etiquette norms (Čerepanova 2008; Chučinaeva 2017; Čurejeva 2020; Dorfman 2012; Gladrov 2014; Kokhan 2011; Lukojanova 2011; Rabenko, Sulejmanova 2018). Several works illustrate prescriptive norms of speech behavior based on social dos and don'ts (Balakaj 2004; Formanovskaja 2002). The lack of empirical studies is attributed to the view that ritual speech behavior follows established social scripts:

Učastniki etiketnoj rečevoj situacii strogo sledujut vnešnej, ritual'noj tradicii vedenija besedy, predstavljaja sebja v kačestve vežlivogo člena jazykovogo kollektiva (Rabenko, Čerepanova 2008: 175).

[Participants in an etiquette speech situation strictly follow the external ritual tradition of conducting a conversation, presenting themselves as a polite member of the speech community]².

Rečevaja etika – eto pravila dolžnogo rečevogo povedenija, osnovannye na normach morali, nacional'no-kul'turnych tradicijach (Graudina, Širjaev 2008: 90).

[Speech ethics is a set of rules of proper verbal behavior based on moral norms and national-cultural traditions].

According to these studies, linguistic behavior is shaped by cultural values that impose social constraints:

Formuly rečevogo etiketa otnositel'no ustojčivy. Oni predstavljajut soboj nabor verbal'nych stereotipov, kotorye ne sozdajutsja, a vosproizvodjatsja kak celoe v processe obščeniya. V zavisimosti ot uslovij obščeniya vybiraetsja formula s opredelëнной stilističeskoj okrasokoj: Proščajte! – knižnoe, Do svidanija! – nejtral'noe, Poka! – razgovornoe (Voroncova 2011: 102).

[Etiquette formulas are quite stable. They are verbal stereotypes that are not created but are reiterated during interactions. Based on the conditions of the interaction, speakers choose a formula with a specific stylistic connotation: *Proščajte* (bookish), *Do svidanija!* (neutral), *Poka* (colloquial)].

However, research notes significant variation in speech etiquette, especially in greetings and farewells (Pachomova *et al.* 2020). The variability that undermines the stability of etiquette behavior is often attributed either to the looseness of the young generation, who do not strictly adhere to norms:

Takim obrazom, molodye ljudi pytajuťsja rešit' stojaščuju meždu nimi dilemmu: vosproizvesti normu etiketnogo rečevogo povedenija i v to že vremja skazat' svoë sobstvennoe slovo (Rabenko, Čerepanova 2008: 175).

[Thus, young people attempt to solve the dilemma: to reproduce the norm of etiquette speech behavior and at the same time say their own word].

² Here and afterwards, unless otherwise indicated, the translation is mine (VT).

or to the influence of the English language, as in the case of duplication of *poka-poka* (from English ‘bye-bye’) (Lukojanova 2011; Krongauz 2017; Pachomova 2012). Prescriptive norms also influence not only what to say but also when to say goodbye, for example, in service encounters. This norm can also be challenged by ‘Western corporate etiquette’. Lukojanova (2011) discusses a shift towards ‘European norm’ when greetings and farewells have become necessary between a salesperson and a client: “*skladyvaetsja oščuščenie, čto obe storony vosprinimajut privetstvija i proščanija v dannoj situacii kak neestestvennyje, formal’nye, a potomu nenužnye*” [I got the impression that both parties perceive greetings and farewells in this situation as unnatural, formal and unnecessary] (Lukojanova 2011: 229)³. The observation of the mentioned author is not supported by the data.

However, several studies do analyze actual verbal behavior. A large-scale survey of student-to-student interactions (aged 11–18) with 1411 recorded responses identified 17 different types of leave-taking expressions (Grabovskaja *et al.* 2018). The farewell *poka* (‘bye’) was used 1086 times, while other fixed formulas have less significant frequency. For instance, a good wish expressed with *udači* (‘good luck’) was found 127 times while *chorošego dnja / večera* (‘[have] a good day/evening’) was mentioned only 17 times.

There are other genitive constructions for leave-takings as in *želat’* + GEN used with the verb *želat’* ‘to wish’ omitted, for instance, *chorošego dnja* + GEN ‘[have] a good day’, *vsech blag* + GEN ‘all the benefits’, *vsego dobrogo* + GEN ‘all the kind’ (Skrebцова 2023). A similar structure found in the Russian National Corpus involves another leave-taking formula *ščastlivo* (happy-ADV), being part of *zasim / zatem + daj Bog / želaju + DAT tebe / vam + ščastlivo + Infinitiv* (‘with that – let God - wish you – happily – Verb’) (Bobrik 2021: 74), which has undergone a pragmatic extension from an authentic wish to a farewell formula. Among other formulas, the discourse marker *davaj* is found. Čurejeva (2020: 160) hypothesizes that it can be an elliptic form of *Davaj(te) proščat’sja* (‘Let’s take leave’⁴). It is claimed that this formula has begun to be widespread in informal settings (Krongauz 2021: 41), although empirical evidence is lacking.

The Russian everyday speech corpus “One Speaker’s Day” with 54 informants (ORD) (Ermolova *et al.* 2019) shows a divergence between textbook etiquette (Balakaj 2004; Formanovskaja 2002; Vvedenskaja *et al.* 2001) and actual usage. Among 240 leave-taking episodes, the most mentioned formulas are *ladno, vsë* ‘alright, bye now’, and *davaj/davajte* ‘okay then’, especially in a closing exchange of phone calls.

According to a textbook on Russian etiquette and culture (Vvedenskaja *et al.* 2001: 147), farewell formulas express:

³ Krongauz (2017) explains this point. If politeness is seen as an avoidance of conflict, it means that the recognition of other people can be described with the mindset “I am with you so and I cannot threaten you”. On the other hand, if you ignore the other person, it probably means “You do not exist so I cannot threaten you”, which is claimed to be a quite common behavior in the Russian cultural setting.

⁴ If possible, I adopted word for word translation.

- Hopes for a new contact (*skoro uvidimsja* ‘we’ll see each other soon’);
- Doubts about a new contact (*proščaj* ‘farewell’);
- Good wishes (*udači* ‘good luck’, *chorošego otдыхa* ‘good rest’, *vsego dobrogo* ‘all the kind’).

In Balakaj’s dictionary on Russian speech etiquette, which includes 6000 words and expressions for ritualized behavior, there is a list of 231 closing formulas, including proverbs, fixed expressions, and loan words with different degrees of (in)formality and frequency of usage. Based on the semantics of these formulas, we identified prototypical situations of parting that require the use of fixed expressions :

- preclosing moves of a guest who decides to leave (*zasidelsja* ‘stayed too long’, *zapozdnilsja* ‘it was late’, *nado i čest’ znat’* ‘let’s not overstay our welcome’);
- wishes for the person who is leaving⁵ (*s Bogom* ‘with God’, *v dobryj put’* ‘in a good trip’, *gladkoj dorožki* ‘smooth way’, *mjagkoj posadki* ‘soft landing’, *poputnogo vetra* ‘fair wind’, *skatert’ju dorožka* ‘let the road be a tablecloth’, *ščastlivo dobrat’sja* ‘get there happily’, *ščastlivogo puti* ‘happy way’, *pišite piš’ma* ‘write us letters’, *vetra v parusa* ‘let the wind blow in your sails’);
- wishes for the person who is staying (*byvajte zdorovy* [živite bogato] ‘stay healthy [live a rich life]’, *ne zabyvajte nas* ‘don’t forget about us’, *ne pominajte lichom* ‘don’t remember bad things about us’, *ostavajtes’ s mirom* ‘stay in peace’, *byvajte* ‘stay well’).

In the same dictionary, there is a list of general good wishes such as *vsego dobrogo* ‘all the kind’, *vsego lučšego/nailučšego* ‘all the best’, *vsego chorošego* ‘all the good’, *vsech blag* ‘all the benefits’, *bud’ zdorov* ‘stay healthy’. Interestingly, there are no instances of *chorošego dnja/večera* ([have] a good day/evening) that are quite common to hear nowadays during service encounters (Skrebcova 2023). Contrary to what can be assumed regarding the tendency to use loan words, the use of *adieu*, *arrivederci*, *bye-bye*, *salute*, and *ciao* has declined.

Finally, it is worth mentioning some formal situations in which saying goodbye is subject to a prior negotiation because the leaving person should ask for permission to go (*pozvol’te otklanjaj’sja?* ‘let me bow out’, *pozvol’te ujt’?* ‘may I take my leave?’) while their interlocutor grants this permission (*možete byt’ svobodnymi* ‘you can be free’). This holds for hierarchical relationships, which were not addressed in this study.

⁵ As a part of a parting ritual in Russia there is a tradition explained as follows: “Before you say farewell, you have to sit on your case. What happens is that the departing person sits down on or near the packed suitcase. [...] It is simply a few minutes’ reflection amongst people who will soon lose each other’s company” (Lundmark 2009: 114-115).

3. *A Pilot Study on Farewell Expressions in Russian*

3.1. *Data Collection and Informants*

This pilot study investigates ritual farewell formulas employed by a group of native speakers of Russian residing in the Russian Federation.

The instrument for data collection is a specially designed questionnaire comprising two parts. In the first part, a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) elicits a reply containing closing remarks in response to situational prompts. The DCT is an instrument of data elicitation widely used in pragmatic research (Felix-Brasdefer 2010). The language elicited is metapragmatic as the participants write down what they believe to be an appropriate response to the situation based on their experience (Golato 2003). In such a way, it serves the purpose to investigate what is expected to be said in a particular situation. The main disadvantages that DCTs present are their inability to capture actual social behavior or interactive dynamics. Being aware of the flaws of this instrument, the main idea here is to contribute to empirical studies on farewell formulas in the Russian language and to establish correlations between linguistic expressions and sociopragmatic variables.

The scenarios are chosen based on the following criteria:

- Level of acquaintance (a friend, colleagues of a friend, an ex-classmate, a random person in a queue);
- Intensity of contact (presumably often in contact, a social gathering, a short conversation, a small talk between strangers).

The expected time apart is unclear and not specified, although the potential for future interaction was implied in each situation.

Respondents were asked to provide farewell expressions in the following four scenarios and were instructed to opt out:

- (1) *Ty v aeroportu i provožaeš' svojego blizkogo druga/blizkuju podругu, kotoryj/kotoraja pereez-žet po rabote v drugoj gorod. On/ona uže idët na posadku, i ty govoriš' emu/jej na proščanie:*
[You are at the airport to see off your close friend who is moving to another city for work. S/he is about to go to the gate and you say to him/her as a farewell]:
- (2) *Ty okazalsja v gostjach u kolleg svojego druga/svoej podругi v novogodnie prazdniki. Pered uchodom, poblagodariv za užin, uže na poroge ty im govoriš':*
[During the New Year holidays, you ended up at the home of your friend's colleagues. Before you go, after thanking them for the dinner, you say at the doorstep]:
- (3) *Ty nenadolgo vernulsja v svoj gorod detstva/svoj byvsij rajon i slučajno vstretil na ulice svoju odnosklassnicu/odnoklassnika, s kotoroj/kotorym ne obščaetes' so školy. Pogovoriv neskol'ko minut ob obščich znakomych i nemnogo o rabote ili sem'e, vy rasstaëtes', i ty govoriš' na proščanie:*

[You are back for a little while to your hometown/neighborhood you used to live in. Unexpectedly, you bump into your ex-classmate with whom you haven't spoken since your graduation. After you talked for a couple of minutes about your friends in common and a little about your life and family, you both part, and you say the following as a farewell]:

- (4) *V supermarkete, kuda ty obyčno chodiš' za pokupkami, dlinnaja očered'. Čelovek, kotoryj stoiť pozadi tebja, načinaet žalovat'sja po etomu povodu, ty podderživaš' besedu. Nakonec, vy načinaete vykladyvat' tovary na lentu. On podminaet slučajno upavšuju u tebja upakovku pečen'ja, ty ego blagodariš'. Rasplativšis' na kasse, ty govoriš' emu na proščanie:*

[At the supermarket you usually go to, you are waiting to pay in a long line. A person behind you starts to complain about it, and you participate in the conversation. Finally, you are about to put your groceries onto the belt. Accidentally, a pack of biscuits falls on the floor and the same person picks it up for you, you thank him/her. When you are done with the payment, you say the following as a farewell]:

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions inquiring about words, expressions, or sayings that people think to say more often when saying goodbye to people they know and those they do not know:

- (1) *Kakie frazy, vyraženijsja ili slova tebe kažetsja, čto ty čašče vsego govoriš', kogda proščaeš'sja s neznakomymi ljud'mi?*

[Which phrases, expressions, or words do you think you often use when you say goodbye to people you do not know?]

- (2) *Kakie frazy, vyraženijsja ili slova tebe kažetsja, čto ty čašče vsego govoriš', kogda proščaeš'sja so znakomymi ljud'mi?*

[Which phrases, expressions, or words do you think you often use when you say goodbye to people you know?]

The questionnaire, created on Google Forms⁶, was piloted with five native Russian speakers to validate the questions from the point of view of plausibility and comprehension. It was then distributed by the researcher via social networks, WhatsApp groups, and among students of the Faculty of Philology at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia "Patrice Lumumba". All participants are native speakers residing in the Russian Federation, primarily in the Moscow region. No data were collected on their occupation or educational background. The respondents are aged between 20 and 58, with the majority between 23 and 35 years old. Most of them (75%) are female, and 25% are male. A total of 57 anonymous responses were collected⁷.

⁶ <<https://forms.gle/2r1MxHJXCVXdScB86>> (last access: 10.01.2025).

⁷ The respondents did not leave any personal data.

3.2. *Analytical Framework*

To address the research question “What strategies of leave-taking behavior are attested in the contemporary Russian language?” all responses were manually coded according to the following framework derived from the literature review:

- 1) Pre-closing moves that mitigate the closing:
 - Express the need to cease the contact;
 - Express the pleasure of being in contact, gratitude, or apologies for taking time.
- 2) Post-closing moves that regulate future relationships:
 - Define a new encounter or express hope for a renewed contact;
 - Ask the interlocutor to be responsible for a renewed contact;
 - Express wishes for the interlocutor.
- 3) Actual formulas for terminal exchange.

To better understand the elusive nature of ritualized behavior, the framework was informed by the concept of the situated speech act, which is sensitive to social expectations and contextual factors (Mey 2001; Capone 2005). Accordingly, farewell formulas are specific both to the communicative situation and to the roles of the co-participants in the interaction. These include not only social variables, such as social distance and degree of confidence, but also situated identities, which can be enhanced and challenged based on the expectations of the other party. In the same vein, a situated speech act can be seen as a frame with fuzzy borders which is shaped by past interactions between the speakers, the setting of the exchange, and whether this act occurs for the first time or is repeated (Terkourafi 2005: 247), or, in our case, whether there is a possibility to see each other in the future. In such a way, both general conventions and personal expectations are responsible for enriching the utterance design, which helps to identify a correlation between conventionality and creativity within a common leave-taking ritual. It was hypothesized that while responses to specific scenarios would exhibit variation due to contextual nuance (Section 1), responses to general prompts about interactions with known and unknown people would display greater uniformity (Section 2).

4. *Results and Discussion*

This section presents the speech act set identified for each scenario in the DCT, followed by an interpretation of the conversational strategies observed. In brackets, token counts are provided for explicatory purposes. The findings are not intended to be statistically representative but serve to reveal recurring patterns and tendencies in conversational design.

In the first scenario, “A friend at the airport”, we can identify only post-closing moves which regulate future relationships:

- definition of a new contact or expression of hope for a new contact (16): *do vstreči* ‘see you next time’, *(skoro) uvidimsja* ‘we’ll see each other (soon)’, *na svjazi* ‘we’ll be in touch’;
- delegation of contact responsibility (8): *piši* ‘text me’, *zvoni* ‘call me’, *ne propadaj* ‘do not disappear’.

The most mentioned routine formulas are wishes (49 tokens) divided into two sub-categories:

- wishes for the person who is leaving (28): *chorošego/otličnogo/lëgkogo polëta*, ‘good/excellent/light flight’, *lëgkoj/mjagkoj posadki* ‘light/soft landing’, *chorošo doletet’/dobrat’sja* ‘to arrive/to get there well’.

Out of all the occurrences, only *mjagkoj posadki* ‘soft landing’, is mentioned in the dictionary of Balakaj (2004). The speakers do not rely on a pre-existing list of expressions and show creativity in coining wishes for a standard situation of a future plane trip. The prototypical construction of wishes with a performative verb *želat’* (omitted) + GEN or + a Pfv-infinitive allows variability in the use of modifiers: *chorošego/otličnogo/lëgkogo polëta*, ‘[have] a good/excellent/light flight’, *chorošo doletet’/dobrat’sja* ‘(wish) to arrive/get there well’.

- wishes for the person who is leaving for a long time (21): *udači* ‘good luck’, *pust’ vse složitsja/polučitsja* ‘let everything be achieved’, *sčastlivo* ‘happy-ADV’, *beregi sebja* ‘take care’.

This situation suggests the expression of emotions that show affection for the interlocutor, such as occasionally mentioned *ja budu skučat’* ‘I will miss you’ and *ja ljublju tebjja* ‘I love you’.

Interestingly, terminal formulas like *poka* ‘bye’ are mentioned only 13 times.

To sum it up, the following speech act set was identified:

- define a new contact;
- express travel-related wishes;
- optionally express emotions about the separation.

In the second scenario, “New Year party”, the roles are inverted, as the speaker is the one departing and provides pre-closing moves. In a situation with a new acquaintance, expressing pleasure for being in contact for the first time comes more often than expressing hope for a new contact. Thus, the following are found:

- expressions of gratitude (24): *spasibo za gostepriimstvo/večer/priglašenje* ‘thank you for the hospitality/tonight/invitation’;

- expressions of pleasure for having had the encounter (15): *rada poznamomit'sja* 'I was glad to meet you', *prijatno bylo poznamomit'sja* 'it was pleasant to meet you';
- compliments (8): *vsë bylo super/očen' zdorovo/otlično* 'everything was super/very cool/excellent'.

Four respondents, however, expressed hopes for a new contact (*uvidimsja* 'we'll see each other', *nado čašče vstrečat'sja* 'we need to meet more often'). The wishes which are mentioned by the respondents are intrinsically linked to the situation described, as they are mostly happy New Year wishes.

Closing moves are used more often than in the previous situation (21 times), prompting the need to explicitly mention the goodbye formula when uttered by a person who is leaving.

To summarize, the following pattern is identified:

- express gratitude and pleasure for the time together;
- give compliments;
- use a closing formula.

In the third situation, "Classmate", respondents combined pre-closing and post-closing moves:

- expressions of pleasure for being in contact (27): *rada byla povidad'sja/uvidet'sja/poobščat'sja/vstretit'sja/uvidet' tebja/vot tak uvidet'sja/vstreče* 'I was glad to see you/talk to you/meet you/meet you in such a way/for this meeting'.

The respondents use the structure "be glad Pfv-Infinitive" or "be glad + DAT" which is subject to variation.

- wishes (16): *udači* 'good luck', *sčastlivo* 'happy-ADV', *chorošego dnja* '[have] a good day';
- expressions of hope for a renewed contact (8): *uvidimsja* 'we'll see each other', *do vstreči* 'see you next time', *na svjazi* 'we'll be in touch'; or a delegation of contact responsibility (*piši* 'text me').

Finally, the closing formulas are expectedly informal (30 times), such as *poka* 'bye', *davaj* 'okay then', *poka-poka* 'bye-bye', *nu vsë davaj poka* 'well that's it, okay then', *nu poka* 'well, bye'.

We have a similar pattern as in the previous situation, probably due to a vague possibility of having future contacts. What changes, though, is the novelty of the formulas with which the gratitude for the time together is expressed. The respondents showed more creativity in this situation and provided different verbs and nouns in a fixed formula of pleasure expression, probably in correlation with the amount of time passed since graduation. We observed the following pattern:

- express pleasure at reconnecting;

TABLE 1.
Formulas used with unknown people

Formula	Tokens
<i>Do svidanija</i> 'goodbye'	36
<i>Vsego dobrogo/chorošego</i> 'all the kind/good'	25
<i>Chorošego dnja/večera</i> '[have] a good day/evening'	23
<i>Udači</i> 'good luck'	4
<i>Sčastlivo</i> 'happy-ADV'	3
<i>Eščë uvidimsja</i> 'we'll see each other again'	3
<i>Poka</i> 'bye'	4
Other (<i>na svjazi</i> 'we'll be in touch', <i>spasibo za vstreču</i> 'thanks for meeting', <i>do novych vstreč</i> 'see you next time')	3

101 responses

- make good wishes;
- optionally express hope for a new contact;
- use the closing formula.

For the last scenario, "Supermarket", an interesting observation concerns the possibility of avoiding the closing exchange. In fact, 15 respondents chose not to say anything upon parting, suggesting that leave-taking is considered optional in brief encounters with strangers. The remaining 42 respondents thanked the Hearer again for helping (10) and proceeded directly to the terminal exchange with *do svidanija* 'goodbye' (9) with or without general wishes (*chorošego dnja/večera* '[have] a good day/evening') (19) and *vsego dobrogo* 'all the kind' (9). There is no internal variability in the expressions chosen. This shows that the respondents are more prone to use fixed formulas when they talk to people they do not know.

We observed the following speech act set:

- Offer brief wishes;
- Use a conventional formula or no farewell at all.

It is worth mentioning that across all 285 responses, only 6% (17 responses) included a farewell formula *do svidanija* 'good bye' or *poka* 'bye' without any supportive moves.

In the open-ended responses, 101 expressions used with unknown people were gathered, as most of the respondents proposed more than one option (see TABLE 1).

TABLE 2.
Formulas used with known people

Move	Examples	Tokens
Express need to cease the contact	<i>my pobežali</i> 'we need to run'	1
Express pleasure for being in contact	<i>byla rada vstreče</i> 'I was glad to meet you' (4)	4
Define a new encounter or express hopes for a renewed contact	<i>do vstreči!</i> 'see you next time' (17), <i>uvidimsja!</i> 'we'll see each other' (5) <i>na svjazi</i> 'we'll be in touch' (4), <i>do zavtra</i> 'see you tomorrow' (2), <i>do skorogo</i> 'see you soon' (1), <i>spišemsja</i> 'we'll text each other' (1)	30
Ask the interlocutor to be responsible for a renewed contract	<i>napiši, kak budeš doma</i> 'text me when you get home', <i>pozvoni</i> 'call me'	2
Wish good for the interlocutor.	<i>chorošo dobrat'sja do doma</i> 'get home safe' (3), <i>ščastlivo</i> 'happy-ADV' (8), <i>chorošego dnja</i> '[have] a good day' (4), <i>udači</i> 'good luck' (1)	16
Terminal exchange	<i>poka</i> 'bye' (30) <i>poka-poka!</i> 'bye-bye' (10), <i>do svidanija!</i> 'good bye' (4), <i>davaj, poka</i> 'okay then bye' (2), <i>poka, davaj</i> 'bye okay then' (1), <i>pokasiki</i> 'bye-DIM-PL', <i>nu poka</i> 'well bye' (1)	49

102 responses

Almost half of the responses account for *do svidanija* 'goodbye' as a default option. However, we notice 23 occurrences of *chorošego dnja* '[have] a good day', which is not registered as a leave-taking formula in speech etiquette dictionaries. This fact could unveil a recent tendency to use wishes for a good day or evening in service encounters. There is a small incidence of wishes, such as *vsego dobrogo/chorošego* 'all the kind/good', *udači* 'good luck', *ščastlivo* 'happy-ADV', and even suggestions for a new encounter *eščë uvidimsja* 'we'll see each other again' or *na svjazi* 'we'll be in touch'.

As far as the farewell formulas addressed to known people are concerned, we can attest to more variability. In total, 102 responses were gathered, tagged as pre-closing and post-closing moves, as well as terminal exchange formulas (see TABLE 2).

We can deduce that face-enhancing strategies are more present in the interactions with people we know, as there are 30% of occurrences in which they define a new encounter to signal that the separation will not be long. Among closing formulas, the most mentioned is *poka* (30 times) with a smaller proportion of reiterated *poka-poka* 'bye-bye', *davaj* 'okay then', *pokasiki* 'bye-DIM-PL'. Interestingly, the wishes for the interlocutor in this case

include *ščastlivo* ‘happy-ADV’ (8 times), which was not attested with unknown people. While *chorošego dnja* ‘[have] a good day’ is the second mentioned category of wishes used with strangers, the same formula is used only four times with acquaintances.

5. Conclusions

This study aimed to collect data on the pragmalinguistic means that native Russian speakers use before parting.

Firstly, the presumed verbal behavior of respondents varies according to the situational and relational constraints that bind two communicators. Although terminal formulas such as *poka* and *do svidanija* remain widely used, they are rarely employed in isolation. Instead, speakers supplement them with pre-closing and post-closing moves based on the degree of confidence, the length of time passed since the last encounter, and the expected length of separation. On the one hand, speakers use face-enhancing strategies to ensure the continuity of the relationship. On the other hand, if future encounters are not expected, the speakers may opt out of the leave-taking exchange.

Secondly, a leave-taking formula proves to be a standardized reaction to separation. However, the situation of parting does not possess static properties, as it is shaped and negotiated by the interactants’ relationship history. Even if the leave-taking patterns observed in this study are traceable, they remain situationally bound. Possible variability may concern the symmetry of the parting, whether the Speaker or the Hearer is about to leave, or whether both need to negotiate the separation. The options available to respondents do not necessarily correspond to the list of expressions found in etiquette dictionaries. Standard leave-taking situations described in such dictionaries (e.g., guests leaving the house, someone going on a trip) still require consideration of interpersonal variables, especially in emotionally charged contexts.

Thirdly, the boundaries between etiquette formulas and supportive moves are blurred. It is necessary to explore the epistemic status of conventional wishes (*chorošego dnja* ‘[have] a good day’, *udači* ‘good luck’, *vsego dobrogo* ‘all the kind’) and arrangements (*do vstreči* ‘see you next time’, *uvidimsja* ‘we’ll see each other’) along with the routine terminal formulas (*do svidanija* ‘goodbye’, *poka* ‘bye’). The present study argues that the former expressions may lose the illocutionary force of expressives (the speaker wishes that P comes true) or commissives (the speaker commits to the future action P). This suggests they may instead serve to signal a benevolent attitude and/or cohesiveness before separation, thereby fulfilling a specific leave-taking function.

Finally, the study attested politeness routines not previously mentioned in speech etiquette dictionaries. These include *chorošego dnja/večera* ‘[have] a good day/night’, which appears to be used predominantly with strangers, and *na svjazi*⁸ ‘we’ll be in touch’, which

⁸ Note that this formula is used by Bec (2021) with a different preposition *do svjazi* which proves the flexibility of farewell formulas.

occurs sporadically across the described situations. Although the reasons why these formulas have entered Russian speech behavior lie beyond the scope of our study, it can be noted that *spišemsja* ‘we’ll text each other’ may now function as a contemporary alternative to *uvidimsja* ‘we’ll see each other’ or *sozvonimsja* ‘we’ll call each other’ reflecting the influence of communication via messaging apps.

As outlined in previous empirical studies, discourse markers such as *nu*, *vsë*, *ladno*, and *davaj* often co-occur with a standard leave-taking formula *poka*, producing a range of extended formulaic expressions as *nu vsë poka*, *nu poka*, *ladno davaj poka*, *davaj poka*, *poka davaj*.

The rationale behind choosing appropriate strategies is highly relevant to foreign language learning and teaching. Arguably, the ritual formulas such as *poka* and *do svidanija* typically presented in formal and informal registers do not spark any explanatory discussions. As the study demonstrates, various moves associated with leave-taking behavior should be considered to enhance learners’ communicative competence. This includes recognizing the limited reliability of speech etiquette dictionaries, which do not always reflect actual verbal behavior. Pragmatic reasoning should guide the choice of strategy that best suits a particular communicative situation.

The analysis has certain limitations. First, there is a need to engage more participants to provide statistically robust data on leave-taking behavior. Second, the results should be correlated with spontaneous speech data. Nevertheless, the findings of this pilot study offer insight into current tendencies in Russian leave-taking behavior and provide practical implications for teaching Russian as a foreign language.

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Abstract

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Leave-Taking Formulas in Contemporary Russian Language

This article investigates leave-taking strategies behavior in contemporary Russian. After reviewing recent literature on leave-taking formulas, with a particular focus on Russian, the article presents the results of a pilot study examining farewell expressions and conversational moves. Data were collected using a purpose-designed questionnaire that elicited situationally bound responses and compiled a pool of words, expressions, and sayings that speakers reported using when saying goodbye to both acquaintances and strangers. The results support the hypothesis that parting interactions are context-sensitive rather than fixed. The choice of terminal exchange formulas and supportive moves varies depending on factors such as the degree of familiarity, the time elapsed since the previous encounter, and the anticipated duration of separation.

Keywords

Leave-Taking Formulas; Russian Language; Politeness; Conventionality; Ritual Behavior.