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Blogosphere as an Integrative Multicultural Bio-social Environment: Manifestations of the Orientational Language Function

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This article covers the field of orientational language function in the specific American English blogosphere. Given the fact that contemporary intra-language, inter-language and cross-cultural communication is undergoing considerable changes, blogs are viewed herein as an efficient biological socio-cultural environment easily accessible via the Internet. Such cognitive mechanisms as metaphor and metonymy are subjected to multifaceted analysis in order to illustrate orientational as well as particular discursal powers and their impact on the entire flow of the blog-based conversation.

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, language functions, blogosphere, blogging, orientational function of language, discursal language function, discourse, metaphor, metonymy.

Introduction

*Language is an extension of more
biologically fundamental capacities of the
human mind.*

John Searle, 2007

It is widely acknowledged that due to the irreversible process of rapid technological development in modern post-industrial society human communication has recently been undergoing serious transformations. Furious life pace, globalization process and its effects, the lack of personal space and time has lead to more people irrespective of age, gender, language and culture preferring modern, easy-to use, quick and promptly accessible ways of

communication (such as on-line web interaction, video-conferences, electronic correspondence, e-books and e-press, chats, social networks, mobile communications technologies etc.) to some conventional information transfer methods which are now generally considered by the young generation as out-of-date or even useless.

Apparently all the changes to the form or manner of communicative acts have a dramatic correspondent impact upon the matter of communication viewed here as a vivid ongoing process that is represented in the language and analyzed with the help of language. The study of language used in contemporary communication methods furnishes a clue to various problems apart from linguistic changes, including the

problem of global and local socialization, social interaction, cross-cultural integration and influence, gender relations, cultural and business ethics and so on. In this respect the study of speech acts and the study of the discursal use of language within the framework of cognitive linguistics is absolutely essential not only to linguistics in general and the philosophy of language, but also to interdisciplinary scientific fields like sociolinguistics, internet linguistics, computational linguistics, psycholinguistics etc.

It should definitely be emphasized that language regarded therein as a specific dimension of the cognitive domain of interaction (Kravchenko, 2005: 179) and observed in the modern forms of communication is able to provide a slight access to different stages of the meaning formation process such as cognition, perception, conceptualization and categorization. As signs (including language signs) have meanings only within particular life history of their interpreters, these meanings may never be universal, thus depending on interpreters' life experience as well as various external factors of a particular communicative act these constructed meanings would be different. Deeper analysis of integrative forms of language used in communication would further support necessary background, possible prerequisites for and valuable outcomes concerning cultural and social changes within the language and national world picture, as well as specify the techniques applied to influence the shape of the communicative act and to orientate the recipient of the information in accordance with the intentional aims and goals of an illocutionary act (as defined by J.Searle).

Point of View

Blogging as a Multifaceted Linguistic, Social and Cultural Phenomenon

The present research deals with modern methods of communication in general and with

blogging in particular regarded herein as one of the fastest-growing internet communication means. It is stated that blogs are a multifaceted linguistic, social and cultural phenomenon, moreover blogs are also an effective constantly developing linguistic and intercultural environment that is characterized by freedom and variety of techniques to actualize or exert itself, to provide and divulge firsthand information and to exert particular influence upon its users.

Blogs or weblogs have come a long way since 1997 when John Barger invented the term 'weblog' to describe the list of links on his Robot Wisdom website that 'logged' his internet wanderings. For the present day there are more than 100 million active blogs (according to Technorati, real-time search for user-generated media). Blogs have already re-shaped not just news and entertainment, but also publishing, culture, politics and public relations. Furthermore, blogs have become important news sources in their own right. Behind-the-scenes footage and reports emerged abundantly during crises like the South Asian tsunami, the Hurricane Katrina aftermath and the Burmese uprising, when coverage from traditional outlets was scarce.

According to the viewpoint of David Crystal, blogging has brought about new ways of writing diaries and from a linguistic perspective, the language used in blogs is language "in its most naked form" (Crystal, 2005) published for the entire world to see without undergoing the formal editing process. This is what makes blogs stand out because almost all other forms of printed language have gone through some form of editing and standardization. In his numerous papers and studies dedicated to Internet linguistics David Crystal stated that blogs were 'the beginning of a new stage in the evolution of the written language' (Crystal, 2005) due to the fact that many present language changes including newly invented and assimilated linguistic forms like cacography,

the way of deliberate misspelling and units such as neologisms, abbreviations, loan words have originated from blogs. Blogging as the process of making, maintaining and using blogs has become so popular recently that blogs have now expanded beyond just written forms of communication, with the emergence of photoblogs, videoblogs, audioblogs and moblogs. These changes in the development of interactive blogging have created new linguistic forms, units and styles, with even more expected to arise, set about and spread in the nearest future.

While most researchers acknowledge the fact that ways of extra-lingual, inter-lingual and cross-cultural communication are changing rapidly, their opinions about the nature of these changes differ drastically. Some of them support the idea of the universality of the blog-based communicative platform, stating that blogging presents an excellent way of establishing several streams of cross-cultural discourse (Blood, 2002), others express the views about serious consequences the blogosphere has on the political and cultural constituents of the global human relations (Rodzvilla, 2002; Stefanone, Chyng-Yang Jang, 2007), whereas many hold a pessimistic view of the increasing role of weblog journalism and independent reporting for modern mass media and the negative influence of them on the reporter's sphere as a whole, like the entire transformation of the press (e.g. Gillmor, 2004), many argue that blogging has already brought genuine, productive and transformative changes into such spheres as marketing, public relations, advertising etc. (Buss and Strauss 2009; Ives and Watlington, 2005). Without claiming the changes to be good or bad, we would simply like to denote that they obviously exist and are well demonstrated not only in intercultural communication, politics, press and entertainment, but in various forms of language use as well.

It is widely recognized that initially the language environment for blogging was the English language which has naturally influenced the process of its further development, nevertheless today almost all world languages and cultures are represented in the blogosphere. Blogs have also had an influence on minority languages, bringing together scattered speakers and learners; this is particularly so with blogs in Gaelic languages. Minority language publishing which may lack economic feasibility can find its audience through inexpensive and easily-accessible blogging.

Blogging from the Cognitive Linguistics' Standpoint

The language of blogs in the present paper is viewed in the aspect of biological and realistic approach within the fundamentals of the second generation cognitive science according to which 'a human subject is treated as an empirical phenomenon constitutive of the surrounding world that particular subject perceives, conceptualizes and categorizes' (Kravchenko, 2006). Such categorization and conceptualization have become manifested in modern cognitive linguistics as a permanent human-specific and natural (biological or bio-social) activity characterized by embodiment (Johnson, 1987; Varela, Thompson and Roch, 1995; Maturana 1970; Tomasello, 2000, Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Andy Clark and Davis Chalmers, 1998). These linguistic manifestations are generally understood as 'knowledge' which is seen as a result of cognition as a biologically or naturally determined purposeful activity (Kravchenko, 2006: 51). The goal of this activity is to acquire experience of the world and to use it to the advantage of human-beings in their permanent interactions with the surrounding bio-social environment.

The basic tenets of the present paper are based upon the main principles of the second

generation cognitive science and are summed up as follows:

Cognition is a bio-social phenomenon and can be understood only as such.

Everything said is said by an observer to another observer who can be himself or herself (Kravchenko, 2003, 2006).

Active living systems and active users of the blogosphere in particular are interaction units that all exist in the surrounding environment which includes Internet as well. Moreover they are inferential mental systems, and their domain of interaction is a cognitive domain.

The basis of communication in general and of bloggers' communication in particular is the enlargement with the help of the nervous system of the cognitive domain which makes possible non-physical interactions of organisms in which interacting organisms orient each other with regard to interactions with each others' cognitive domain.

In the orientational interactions of the active living systems or active users of the blogosphere their behaviour and intentions as extra descriptive features of any communicative act cause specific ad-hoc state of relative biological, mental and physical activities stated as neuronal activities by A. Kravchenko (Kravchenko, 2006: 75) in the nervous systems of the actants of communication.

The result of the orientational interaction in the blogosphere is the reaction of blog-users correspondent to the core and extra descriptive features of Internet communication and dependent on the surrounding bio-social environment and the user's individual cognitive domain.

The present research of the blogosphere's language based on the long-term observation of the orientational interaction within the acts of Internet communications submits the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Any weblog in particular and the blogosphere in general are domains of specific extralinguistic, interlingual and cross-cultural interactions.

Proposition 2: Linguistic structures or units applied in the blogosphere have an ability to exert orientational and particular discursal influence upon blog-users in a communicative act. Orientational influence is exerted by any utterance or a part of an utterance in discourse and is a fundamental condition for communication, while discursal influence is a particular variation of the orientational language function in a given act of communication and thus it can be modified due to specific internal and external communicative factors.

Proposition 3: In accordance with the accepted rules of active living systems' linguistic behaviour and the orientational influence of graphic representations of linguistic signs of natural human language and non-linguistic signs in communicative acts the interpreters (the readers or users of blogs) are able to establish a specific point of reference in the specific bio-social environment. This point of reference is a reflection of personal cognitive domain on the one hand, and particular bio-social and cultural conventions on the other.

Examples

In conformity with the first proposition of the research, blogs are domains of specific social, cultural and linguistic interactions. In the present paper these domains are subjected to multifaceted analysis from the point of view of language and culture of the particular Internet communication actants.

In accordance with the second proposition of the present research, linguistic structures of various levels and types applied in the blogosphere have an ability to exert orientational influence upon the blog-users in blog-based communication.

Certain external and internal discourse-related circumstances define the type of discursive orientational influence in blogs as integrative cultural and social environments. The level of discursive influence may vary depending on the type of language forms applied in a particular communicative act, as well as on a number of extralinguistic communicative factors.

In the present paper such language structures with univocal orientational and discursive functions as cognitive or conceptual metaphor and metonymy have been studied and analyzed. Herein metaphor and metonymy are regarded as complex cognitive mechanisms originally and perceptually peculiar to human-beings and applied when a language form (such as a word, a collocation, an utterance, an expression etc.) is used instead of the supposed or proper language form due to referential or conceptual contiguity of the referred objects or events named by these language forms. The reason for the particular interest to metaphor and metonymy within the present research is that they are matters of thought and not merely of language, thus the deep analysis of a cognitive point of reference in metaphorical and metonymic linguistic use within a particular language and cultural background may provide an excess to the process of meaning formation and association with regard to cultural, social and individual pre-existing knowledge structures. These background cognitive structures may be referred to as frames (a prototypical version of information shared by everyone within a social group) or scripts (pre-existing knowledge structures involving event sequence) (Yule, 2000: 85-86).

Cognitive metaphor and metonymy are viewed as both static and dynamic linguistic and cognitive aspects. As a static phenomenon metaphor and metonymy are presented in the papers by N. Arutyunova, Lakoff and Johnson, where they are claimed to be language

mechanisms being able to reflect the process of cognition. According to Lakoff and Johnson's theory a person's cognitive system is made up of a number of metaphorical models or schemes, in accordance with which a human-being perceives, conceives, reacts and acts. Due to Lakoff and Johnson's research metaphor is now understood as the integral characteristic of human mental activities.

The dynamic approach to metaphor is presented in papers by L. Cameron, R. Maslen, Z. Todd, J. Maule, Peter and Stanley Stratton. According to this approach, metaphor is no longer viewed as a static fixed mapping, but a temporary stability emerging from the activity of inter-connecting systems of socially situated language use and cognitive activity. This dynamic perspective on metaphor raises new possibilities for investigating metaphor in discourse and holds the idea that metaphoricity depends on the evolving discourse context, thus can only be understood in discourse by examining how it works in the flow of talk or text (Cameron et al., 2000). In relation to blog-based talk, the analysis of metaphorical units is reliable and valid as long as the blog discourse presented by a written text is limited only by the use of the Internet environment, language and other sign systems (like the system of smile signs, punctuation marks etc.), not allowing for physical or affective features essential for a conventional conversation and relevant at the time and space, including visual information from clothes, intonation, gesture and facial expression, situational influences such as the design of the room or the temperature, and affective influences on speakers such as moods, state of health and the like.

All metaphorical and metonymic examples are viewed with regard to their discursive function (the ideas, attitudes or judgments that metaphor and metonymy are used to assert, negotiate, endorse or resist) and orientational function (that

is affecting the receiver in a certain way in order to get a stipulated type of reaction either physical or mental as a result). The examples below illustrate the analysis of metaphoric and metonymic use in the flow of blog-based discourse. All the examples are taken from corpse of texts made of topic-related comments and analyzed with respect to the topical discourse, its features, goals, as well as social, cultural and language-specific traits.

Example 1. The environment of the space and astronomy related blog Universe Today (<http://www.universetoday.com/>), published by Fraser Cain, with articles and comments added mostly by Americans. The American sources determine the discursal topics (NASA, NEEMO-NASA Extreme Environment Mission Operations, Human Exploration and Operations (HEO) Committee etc.) and conversation directions with native English speakers as authors of blog posts.

Post “No Doomsday” in 2012 by Ian O’Neill on May 19, 2008. The topic arisen discusses the Mayan Calendar and other assumptive scenario of the humanity doomsday. Comment by Marry Morris: /.../ I have to admit and agree with you that people are really morons. “God gave us everything” hate when they say that. What about the nature that gives us everything and we pay back with destroying it so much. If we will have doomsday one day it’s gonna be only because we did it to ourselves by destroying the nature which *feeds us* in every way.

The following response to the comment by Marry Morris. Alexa Betanchour: Well, I don’t believe in all this *mumbo jumbo*... but if it’s true...I’M *MAXING OUT* MY CREDIT CARD :D

The metonymic expression ‘nature that feeds us’ in the comment text originates and develops from the verb ‘to feed’ basic and initial meanings (to give food, to supply with) indicating the act of providing human beings with all the necessities of life due to nature facilities. In the context

given its discursal function is to intensify the affect on the receiver as well as orientational influence makes them pay particular attention to the environment protection.

Furthermore in the response to the comment a phrasal verb ‘max out’ typical for American English can be characterized as conveying figurative meaning as a result of metonymy. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the meaning of the phrasal verb is to ‘use something such as money or supplies so that there is none left; to do too much or to eat too much’. Thus it can be assumed that the existing meaning conveyed by the unit is a derivation of metonymic shift from the process’ attributive feature (the maximum of an object) to the holistic process (applying or using an object to the maximum). Given the context of the discursal response it is eligible to denote the certain orientation power aimed at developing the positive outlook on such a gloomy prophecy noting the fact that the sender calls it ‘*mumbo-jumbo*’ thus perceiving it with an evident distrust.

Example 2. The environment of the space and astronomy related blog Universe Today (<http://www.universetoday.com/>). Blog-based article “SpaceX to Dock With ISS on Next Flight: NASA Maybe – Russia Nyet” by Jason Rhian posted on September 18, 2011, dedicated to the issue of possible problems of Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) in docking the next of its Dragon Spacecraft to the International Space Station (ISS), owned by the Russian government. A response to one of the comments of the blog-post: “/.../As Russia is one of the key partners on ISS – it’s likely that their concerns will be considered. It appears that NASA has *pulled their tweet* on this. Can you please provide some insight as to why?” Metonymy ‘*to pull the tweet*’ exerts discursive influence conveying the idea that the NASA micro-blog at Twitter was supplied with the data taken or pulled away from the original

source. The orientational function of metonymy is to direct the attention of readers towards the original data source and to divert from the post at NASA microblog due to the fact that the information is out-of-date and duplicated.

Example 3. Article “Grocery negotiations deadline passes” by P.J. Huffstutter, Los Angeles Times, posted September 19, 2011. The post is dedicated to the issue of Demonstrators cheer in front of Pavilions in Beverly Hills as motorists honk in support of Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons employees as a possible strike looms. That blog is based upon the interests and problems of American social and cultural environment, with authors of the blog-based posts being native American English speakers in most cases. Again cultural and social background defines the variety of topics discussed within the blog framework.

A comment from pugtvv at 11:08 PM September 18, 2011: “Unions want the support of the middle class, but they consistently *pull stunts* like this. No wonder most middle class people don’t like unions.” Metaphorical expression ‘*to pull stunts*’ in the text is highlighting the process of repetitive strike with no positive outcomes as such one guided by the Trade Unions at Ralphs, Vons and Albertsons grocery store.

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the expression ‘to pull a stunt’ means ‘to do something silly or that is slightly dangerous’, and both characteristics of the process designated by it above are represented in the text of the discussion comment. The orientational influence upon the blog-readers is strong and makes them apprehend such strikes as negative, useless and slightly dangerous procedures accompanied with unnecessary holdups and troubles. The discursual dimension of the metaphorical expression can be attributed to an extremely negative attitude.

Example 4. Article “Plastic and paper bag ban proposed for Los Angeles” by Kate

Linthicum, Los Angeles Times, posted September 7, 2011. A comment from AMERICAN at 12:15 AM September 18, 2011: “This is a crazy plan. Some company wants to create a market for itself to sell reusable bags, with a *kickback* to their GOVERNMENT *cohort*, and the stores get to make *grand theft dough* selling bags in addition to the already overpriced food, etc., and prices will still increase on the consumer.”. Metaphoric expression ‘*kick-back to government cohort*’ and ‘*grand theft dough*’ imply the idea of a plot between Los Angeles officials and reusable bag producers, expressing a strong negative attitude of the sender. Thus discursual function of these metaphors is to warn the receiver and illustrate the real state of events in connection to the supposed negative government intentions. The language structures orientate the receiver for the negative attitude towards the ban and evoke disagreement to the proposal.

Example 5. Blog Lifehacker (<http://lifehacker.com/>), presenting posts on a variety of real-life topics and problems with American, British, Canadian, Chinese authors. Article “Top 10 Ways to Upgrade Your Cat’s Life” by Adam Dachis, Sep 24, 2011 8:00. The author of the post is a native American English speaker, a writer, designer/developer hybrid, and advocate of flexible ethics. A discussion thread analyzed is on the necessity of buying expensive and comfortable storage bins for pets and has aroused a comment from AMDaveyNC @ncwriter: “Believe me, I tried that. Like I said in my OP, I’ve had cats for 20+ years and have tried everything out there but those ridiculous automated contraptions that cost a couple hundred bucks. But the lid on the Clever Cat bin does a superb job at cleaning kitten paws. I *bit my lip* and went for this box and have not regretted it”.

The metaphoric expression ‘*to bite one’s lip*’ in the text conveys a figurative meaning of a person’s decision to purchase a product Clever

Cat regardless of its high price. Orientational influence on the receiver is quite strong and it imposes the idea of the product's necessity due to its high usability and benefit. The discursive function of the metaphoric expression analyzed is to emphasize the need for buying expensive facilities for cats and to prevent the further discussion of Clever Cat product pros and cons.

Resume

To reckon up the assumptions stated in the present paper it should be noted that blog-based discourse holds a variety of language techniques and structures that have an ability to exert orientational and discursive influence upon the receiver of information in a communicative act. Due to the orientational power of cognitive mechanisms like metaphor and metonymy represented by language signs in the process of interaction, the actants of blog-based communication establish certain points of reference in the corresponding bio-social environment that stipulate for their subsequent physical, behavioral or mental reactions.

Blogging as a particular form of Internet communication suggests a variety of methods to orientate blog-users in a given time and space condition, among the most powerful there are metaphor and metonymy which within a certain communicative act provide a unique type of orientational influence that is herein called discursive influence. Thus, orientational function of language is inherent in any communicative act and may have particular discursive variations depending on the external and internal conditions of the given blog-based communication.

Web logs or blogs as a multifaceted social and cultural environment possess vast perspectives for unlimited intercultural human communication, as well as for the development of language as a necessary constituent of bio-social interaction in general and new forms of language in particular. Further study of linguistic, social and cultural interactions within the blog-related environment may reveal traits, cognitive domains and frames typical or atypical for a particular community.

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Блогосфера как интегративная мультикультурная биосоциальная среда: проявления ориентирующей функции языка

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В данной статье рассматривается вопрос об ориентирующей функции языка в особой среде американских блогов. Учитывая тот факт, что в современных условиях внутриязыковая, межъязыковая и межкультурная коммуникация претерпевает значительные изменения, блоги рассматриваются в качестве эффективной и легкодоступной био-социо-культурной среды для осуществления интернет-общения. Такие когнитивные механизмы, как метафора и метонимия, анализируются с точки зрения проявляемого ими ориентирующего воздействия, а также конкретной дискурсивной функции, анализируемой в рамках блог-коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: когнитивная лингвистика, функции языка, блогосфера, блоги, ориентирующая функция языка, дискурсивная функция языка, дискурс, метафора, метонимия.
