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Technologisation of Discourse Practices: Globality Versus Cultural Specificity

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The issues raised in the article are connected with vivid communication trends of the 21st century: namely, its increasing technologisation and unprecedented integration, as well as national and cultural discourse markedness in the context of their existence within a certain linguaculture.

Keywords: globalization of discourse, technology, discourse practices, technologisation of discourse practices.

Introduction

The process of human communication can be seen as a global anthropological technology. We live in the age of total “grasping” by communication, a social trend related to globalisation and rapid development of discourse technologies. In their practical activities most people are involved in the domain of communication technology as performers and participants in the scenarios: public, advertising, commercial, corporate, etc.

Cultural identity today is being fragmented (‘broken into pieces’) by the communicative impact of one’s own and foreign discourse culture. Communication that uses a human being as a “fragment” is a modern social technology. I believe that these are the key touches to the “portrait” of modern communication processes.

In this article I use the term ‘discourse practices’ as it largely reflects the social and practical side of human existence in communication. In this regard, discourse

practices are understood as socially established, conventional and articulated actions to address recurrent communication problems and intentions in the corresponding linguacultural society in the areas of institutional and non-institutional communication.

Thus, the modern world is increasingly representing the global communicative and communications space and discourse practices are correspondingly growing on a global scale and acquiring a technological character.

Technologisation of discourse practices

The term ‘technologisation of discourse’ emerged in the end of the last (i.e. 20th) century in the works of the well-known English linguist Norman Fairclough, who in a certain way developed the research of Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman. Analysing discourse technologies as a variety of government technologies Fairclough

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connects technologisation of discourse with three domains of practice:

1) research into the discursal practices of workplaces and institutions; 2) design of discursal practices in accordance with institutional strategies and objectives; 3) training of personnel in such designed discursal practices (Fairclough, 1996; in: Plotnikova, 2011, p. 22).

A number of Russian authors, primarily S. Plotnikova, are also currently developing the theory of discourse technologisation, distinguishing the main features and functions of modern discourse technologies (Plotnikova, 2011).

The methodological background provides an opportunity to formulate an understanding of discourse technologisation as a process of minimising communication efforts to effectively control subjects in discourse interaction. The mechanism of technological ‘packaging’ of discourse practices is based on organising a sequence of communicative actions as regulated, standardised operations to achieve the maximum (guaranteed) result at the least cost. The technology of discourse practice makes the recipient believe in the sincerity and truthfulness of face-to-face or mediated communication.

Globalization of modern discourse

It is noteworthy that reference to the phenomenon of globalisation, particularly drawing on McLuhan’s metaphor of the ‘global village’ and notion of implosion, has long been focused almost exclusively on technological characteristics of communicative environment, namely development of information and telecommunications systems, mass media, Internet resources, ‘squeezing’ the geographical space and time and allowing you to instantly carry out human interactions in a dialogue, an interactive mode. Therefore, by the way, new

information and communication technologies of the 20th century were assumed to be radio, film, television and computer.

However, the relevant attribute and characteristics of modernity is the development and expansion of not only communication (technical media), but also communicative and discursal (content) sphere in globalisation. The research interest of my talk is directed, first of all, and most of all, at the second constituent of the modern social world.

Linguo-communicative analysis of discourse reality reveals numerous examples of discourse practices globalisation in different institutional spheres that I will try to demonstrate in this article. In this regard, the world’s modern interactive television broadcasts programs identical in nature. In unified shows Russians, Americans, Germans and French are trying to win a million by answering quiz questions, guessing words, spinning the roulette wheel, etc., thus reflecting the symbolic trend of globalisation of discourse practices, especially in the virtual space.

The same trends in the formation of a new phase of globalisation are demonstrated by network discourse in the numerous national and international social networks, such as Facebook, Wikipedia, ‘Vkontakte’, ‘Odnoklassniki’, etc. The feeling of global communication technology is also caused by monitoring the international dating website “www.edarling.org”, a fairly new discourse practice designed for the situation of on-line communication. This practice of virtual interaction is based on the technology called ‘matching’. In general, implementation of this technology has an exceptionally global nature, because discourse in the format of a dating website in different countries is unified within the same cognitive scenario, namely a kind of psychological compatibility test for clients of network communication space. In addition, monitoring websites for network clients from

different countries finds standardised semiotic and composition markers: mostly the same visuals, the identical structure of profiles starting with gender stratification, the same text material literally translated into different languages, “*Register for free and find a partner for serious relationship*” (the site for Russia); “*Melden Sie sich kostenlos an und finden sie den Partner, der wirklich zu Ihnen passt*” (sites for Austria and Germany).

Even these characteristics suggest reproduction of globally organised discourse practice. Its technology uses all the available ‘discourse manipulations’ (Marcuse), psychological ‘inventory’ and growing dependence of a human on the information medium. Deconstruction of communicative practice of virtual dating in the aspect of ‘customer’ of the disclosed technology reveals the primary intention of technologists producing this type of discourse on a global scale. The data show that we primarily deal with the phenomenon of industry / commercialisation of communication. Its aim in the studied fragment of reality is not cross-cultural marriages, but specific commercial interests, which confirms the possibility of instrumental application of discourse as a resource of management, impact and financial benefits.

However, despite the obvious global trends of discourse practice in virtual dating, its detailed analysis allows us to talk about the specific national and cultural character of this interaction. In particular, communication conventions in the Russian-speaking environment tolerate intrusion into a private sphere which is clearly reflected in the profile questions for Russian clients of the websites. For instance, the requested information identifies the applicant’s ethnicity, “*Which of these groups do you belong to: European, African, Asian, Arab? / Welcher ethnischen Gruppe gehören Sie an: europäisch, afrikanisch,*

asiatisch, arabisch?” The image of the client is designed largely in terms of external parameters, such as the interviewee’s height. This question is missing in the form for European applicants, because in accordance with the communicative norms of this cultural space it is identified as unauthorised access to personal information. By the same token, protection of the client’s private information in the materials of, for example, the German website ‘ElitePartner’ is excessively explicated by the warnings, “*Andere Mitglieder sehen nur Ihr Alter, nicht Ihr Geburtsdatum*”, or “*Ihre Antworten auf die einzelnen Fragen sind für andere später nicht sichtbar*” (*other users will see only your age, not your date of birth. Your answers to individual questions will not be available to others*). This discourse delicacy is not found on the corresponding websites for Russians. Thus, within the global technology of virtual dating the corpus of analysed material demonstrates cultural markedness of relevant discourse practice.

Consumerist discourse in its various forms is a vivid reflection of globalisation and technologisation of discourse practices. Let us consider, for example, communicative textual space of contemporary hospitality. As a rule, high-rate hotels in Russia have a large number of signs and information plates only in English without Russian equivalents, ‘*Reception*’, ‘*Concierge*’, ‘*Staff only*’, ‘*Exchange*’, ‘*Luggage Room*’, ‘*Cloak Room*’, ‘*Lobby Bar*’, ‘*No Smoking Area*’, ‘*You are in a no – smoking room*’. Obviously, knowledge of a foreign language (mostly English) by Russian-speaking guests is presumed and / or the information is addressed to foreign recipients which generally reflects the globalisation of tourist flows and, consequently, of communication. It is interesting to note that in German hotels, as the empirical evidence shows, the same model of bilingual (German-English) discourse environment is observed which allows

us to identify the use of English as a global lingua franca, the technology of the modern business in general. In addition, technologisation of discourse practice in this case is clearly manifested in the staff's communication effort minimisation, optimization and economy of communication input in dealing with foreigners.

As a part of the same processes accommodation rules in Russian hotels are verbalised almost everywhere bilingually, thus reflecting the desire for ostentation, quality, service, and social prestige of the hotel, which can be clearly designated as a discourse technology of presentation consumerism.

In the last decade discourse practices in corporate communication are being actively technologised. Corporate structures are developing their own technologies, as a rule anonymous in terms of authorship, produced for the internal and external organisational environment. First of all, it is the interaction with customers, consumers, job applicants, etc. In the process of technological discourse construction of corporate reality all its formal and conceptual aspects are being strictly conventionalised.

As an example, let us consider discourse practices of a modern banking corporation based on the scripts and regulatory documents made available to the author by courtesy of one of the city's banks. Technological communication repertoire of a specific organisational and corporate culture involves in terms of our interest rules of addressing the customer, rules of telephone conversations and business correspondence, instructions for the image and behavioural characteristics of an employee as a corporate identity, as well as the basic guidelines for interpersonal interaction with clients of the bank.

In this regard, the technological model of the 'right' communication with customers is embodied in the following guidelines for employees:

1. *Address the customer strictly by formal 'You' and by name and patronymic, regardless of his/her age. The exception can only be made in case of addressing by first name and only at the client's request.*

Note: It is better to write down the client's full name in the organizer in order to remember it, and pronounce it just before the meeting, especially if it is a difficult combination of words.

2. *In case of a few guests remember their names on first listen. You can write them down in the organizer according to the guests' location in the meeting room.*

3. *Use only words with positive meaning like 'thank you', 'please', 'can you ...?' etc.*

Note: Use the minimum number of specific professional banking terms. Do not use professional slang and diminutive word endings.

4. *Comment on any necessary absence when providing customer service.*

For example, "Unfortunately, I have to leave you" / "Sorry, I need to make a copy of the document / get documents signed by the manager", etc. / "It will take no more than 5 minutes", etc.

5. *When meeting a Customer you need to introduce yourself in the first place; pronounce your first and last name and position clearly. Next, you need to pause to give the opportunity to the guest to introduce himself/herself. And only if he/she did not do it for some reason, you should inquire. If it is a tripartite meeting, you should introduce the third party giving the second guest's first and last name, position and organization.*

This fragment showing in fact the perfect development of bank clerk's discourse behaviour supports the idea that some technologies "depersonalise the human completely, so that he/she becomes similar to all other speakers / writers having the same role in the standard situation" (Plotnikova, 2011, p. 42). In this case, the intentional logic of this technology

order is dictated by the bank management and is apparently based on the image policy, “*Bank image is an integral pattern combining business style with a friendly, positive attitude, polite and amicable communication with customers, partners and colleagues.*”

One can certainly talk about the didactic side of technologisation. In this sense, people that produce the so-called discourse ‘template’ have to learn, memorise and repeat developed texts and principles of normative interaction with their customers and partners conducive to the objectives of the corporation.

Discourse practice of business conversations on the telephone includes no less specific and detailed list of customer-oriented requirements:

1. *When answering the telephone you should introduce yourself.*

2. *If the Customer did not give his/her name, you should ask him/her in a tactful manner to introduce himself/herself.*

3. *Make a pause and listen carefully for the reason the customer calls.*

4. *It is unacceptable to give negative evaluations of the customer’s words, opinions, or actions.*

5. *Before ending the conversation, you should always summarise to avoid misunderstanding.*

6. *At the end of any conversation you should:*

Thank the customer for calling.

– *Let the client know that you greatly appreciate his/her information, request.*

– *Hang up after the client has done it.*

7. During outgoing calls you should also say hello, give the name of the Bank and your name.

NOTE:

– *You cannot say the name of the customer on the phone, especially when there is another customer in the room (confidentiality)*

– *Keep promises and call back to the Customer at the agreed time*

– *It is necessary to return all missed calls*
– *Telephone conversation must be constructive and short*

– *You cannot do other things during telephone conversation.*

The technological linguasemiotic image and corporate behaviour of bank employees require formalization of such aspects as personal qualities: *presentable appearance, customer orientation, result orientation, communication skills, active lifestyle*, as well as the appearance of the staff, “*Compliance with the appearance rules is an integral part of the customer-oriented conduct adopted by the Bank. The employee must adhere to the principles and rules with regard to the business style and is responsible for compliance with the Standards of service. ... Casual clothing (Business Friday) on Fridays is not accepted.*”

The given discourse technologies are certainly closed; access to them is open to a certain group of people, representatives of this corporate culture. As noted by S. Plotnikova, these technologies are not introduced from the outside, but are formed in the discourse community by the gradual increase of corresponding discourse experience and its dissemination through the standardisation of discourse practices (Plotnikova, 2011, p. 26). The use of technologically defined discourse scenarios ‘works’ to achieve specific goals, particularly in terms of business communication, a real economic profit.

In the focus of corporate communication let us also discuss technologically defined discourse practice of a recruitment interview. The empirical data used in the article are ‘Employment Inquires’ of California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (California, USA)¹, ‘Interview structure’ of the Tripartite Alliance for Fair Employment Practices (Singapore)², as well as Russian versions of these documents, such as ‘Interview Structure’ of the recruitment agency ‘EQ – Staff’³.

A recruitment interview takes place within the scope of institutional business communication which automatically ‘includes’ a number of limitations related to the content, duration and venue, the ratio of communication initiatives and speakers’ contributions to the conversation. There arises a need to develop technologies as ways of optimizing discourse interaction in the strictly determined framework. In this regard, one of the directors of a large Russian recruitment agency, a career coach, says, “*There always appear new technologies, tools and techniques that are designed to improve the level of recruitment. ... Recruitment, if you do not know yet, is sale. If you disagree with me, I am really sorry for your business. ... A recruiter must be able to explain convincingly why your company is the best choice for the candidate and why he/she should accept these employment conditions and opportunities for career development.*” This quote can be commented on in terms of N. Fairclough’s research (Fairclough, 1996). Distinguishing new discourse technologies, the English linguist refers to colonisation of institutional communication by marketing and advertising techniques. Within this technology communication between professionals and non-professionals (customers) is redesigned. The general cognitive model of these roles based on the notion of competence (having competence – being subordinate to competence) is replaced by the market model (producer – consumer). Discourse functions shift from informing and enumerating responsibilities to persuading and enumerating benefits (Plotnikova, 2011, p. 37) which in fact is found in the example above. The corpus of empirical data shows that the second global discourse technology distinguished by N. Fairclough as conversationalisation of institutional communication finds its niche in the presented discourse practice. In particular, it is reflected in the recruiters’ (interviewers’)

behaviour acclaimed by the employer, recommended techniques of empathy, flexibility and two-way communication, “*For example, I try to use a positive approach from the very beginning of communication. When I am contacted by applicants or they come for an interview, I am always in a good mood, I talk to them in a friendly manner, I want to know how things are going, I thank them for coming and spend a few minutes to create a relaxed atmosphere. This practice pays off, candidates talk a lot and freely.*”

Returning to the technological basis of discourse employment practices it should be emphasised that it is presented interactively by two sides: the recruiter as a representative of the employer and the applicant. What is relevant is that both sides prepare for a job interview. Since technologisation of communication is one of the most important aspects of its institutionalisation, it is clear that the technological scenario aimed at the discourse construction of the desired result is the employer-interviewer’s prerogative. The latter gets armed with a prepared discourse, most appropriate for his/her social role with regard to minimising their communication efforts. In this case, as noted by S. Plotnikova, understanding of the essence of the technological process, the cognitive model of what is happening, is not an indispensable duty of its participants;

this is a task for discourse technologists (Plotnikova, 2011, p. 39). Specialists – discourse technologists provide ready-to-use technological materials, such as Interview structure in the example below, which includes a conversation script, guidelines, etc.

Let us dwell on some elements selected during the analysis of the corpus. The fragment of the Interview structure at the stage of Interaction with candidates looks as follows, “*The interviewer should be prepared and well trained on the use of effective interviewing techniques for*

candidate selection. The candidate is given a fair opportunity to be assessed on his / her merits and goes off with a good impression of the company, regardless whether he / she gets the job.” The pattern of standardised moves in the discourse practice is presented in a sequence of actions:

- *Welcome at the reception desk.*
- *Establish rapport (Use of ice-breaker, e.g. did the interviewee have difficulty finding his / her way here)? Conduct the interview by asking prepared questions.*
- *Close the interview with a note of thanks to the candidate.*

Typically, executives do not advertise that they train their employees to use strictly determined discourse involving stability and predictability of communication by adjusting the conversation to an existing prototype. Thus, the vital component of the technological scenario of the interview is training of recruiters and guidance on conducting it:

Training of interviewers

- *How to put job applicants at ease.*
- *Awareness of errors and pitfalls of an interview (e.g. stereotyping).*
- *Interview and selection procedures.*
- *Development of selection criteria.*
- *List of interview questions.*
- *Questioning techniques.*
- *Awareness to ensure that all candidates for the same job should be asked the same set of questions.*
- *Listening skills.*

Tips on conducting interviews

- *Be punctual for the interview.*
- *Establish rapport.*
- *Use a prepared list of questions.*
- *Ensure that all questions asked are related to the job requirements and selection criteria.*

Recruitment as a type of communication vividly demonstrates, among other things,

interaction / conflict of global and national components of the implemented practice because employment interviews in the modern world are the accepted norm which at the same time has its national characteristics in every country. Specific textual data of the discussed practice used in the analysis and communicative reality allow us to correlate international regulatory documents, which we consider here as explications of global technologies, with their unique implementation in a particular cultural context. A sufficiently productive example in this respect is presented by employment inquiries in the U.S. culture and communication space. We interpret this text as a technologically created discourse product for implementation of recruitment discourse practice. The text data present a standardised list of inquiries that are legally acceptable or unacceptable in the interview with an applicant (Table).

Obviously, one of the main interviewer's discourse intentions is that questions should not discriminate against candidates, which is illustrated by the aforementioned guidelines. In addition, since “technology may include a taboo on certain speech acts» (Kopylova, 2011, p. 79), this list almost taboos inquiries about private sphere, such as age, religious beliefs and ethnic origin, disability, marital status, etc.

Comparison of employment practices in the Russian linguacultural context and in Europe and the U.S. suggests that in general, this type of discourse in Russia is developing under the influence of western (in the broad sense of the word) models. This finding suggests the unification process of communication in Russia which is acquiring a more global technological nature. At the same time research in the field of corporate business discourse, whose authors are both Russian and foreign scholars (E. Vereshchagin, R. Rathmayr, L. Kulikova), shows a clear national and cultural markedness

Table

ACCEPTABLE	SUBJECT	UNACCEPTABLE
Name	NAME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maiden name
Place of residence	RESIDENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions regarding owning or renting.
Languages applicant reads, speaks or writes if use of language other than English is relevant to the job for which applicant is applying	NATIONAL ORIGIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions as to nationality, lineage, ancestry, national origin, descent or parentage of applicant, applicant's spouse, parent or relative.
	RELIGION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions regarding applicant's religion. • Religious days observed.
Name and address of parent or guardian if applicant is a minor.	SEX, MARITAL STATUS, FAMILY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions to indicate applicant's sex, marital status, number/ages of children or dependents. • Questions regarding pregnancy, child birth, or birth control. • Name/address of relative, spouse or children of adult applicant.
	RACE, COLOR, SEXUAL ORIENTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions to applicant's race, color, or sexual orientation. • Questions regarding applicant's complexion, color of eyes, hair or sexual orientation.
Statement that a photograph may be required after employment.	PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION, PHOTOGRAPHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions as to applicant's height/weight. • Requiring applicant to affix a photograph to application or submit one at his/her option. • Require a photograph after interview but before employment.

of discourse practices in this field. In the Russian-language institutional interaction taboo on personal inquiries is still rarely observed, distinction between the applicant's private and employment-related space is not often taken into account. In accordance with the Russian communication style the constant discourse challenge to the interviewee, despite the studied technologies, is speech acts of self-praise and outstanding self-presentation of his/her competence and success.

Thus, the technological features of the employment discourse practice reflect, as its deconstruction shows, global as well as cultural and conventional characteristics of this social sphere. Both components in the Russian linguaculture seem to be found in a dynamic equilibrium.

Conclusion

Based on these examples, I would like to show that technologies, including discourse ones, form a new technological reality that changes communicative behaviour and patterns of human interaction. The correlation of global technological characteristics of discourse and its cultural determinacy depends, firstly, on the field of communication (to what extent the latter is the result and the embodiment of globalisation and internationalisation of production and social life), and secondly, reflects models of at least three processes of interpenetration of discourse technological character and national specificity: domination, absorption or dynamic equilibrium between the two components of institutional communication.

¹ <http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/res/docs/publications/dfeh>

² <http://www.fairemployment.sg/assets/Files/documents/ResourcesFair-Recruitment&Selection Handbook.pdf>

³ <http://eqpersonal.ru/index.php>

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Технологизация дискурсивных практик: глобальность versus-культурная специфичность

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В статье рассматриваются относительно новые для дискурсивных исследований понятия «технологизация дискурса» и «дискурсивные практики» в их соотношении с межкультурным контекстом коммуникации. Делается попытка на основе изучения и анализа эмпирического материала русского, немецкого и английского языков соотнести глобальные и национально детерминированные дискурсивные практики как практики современной технологичной коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: глобализация дискурса, технология, дискурсивные практики, технологизация дискурсивных практик.
