

УДК 81'42

Taboo Breaking as a Current Tendency of Discursive Interpretation of Taboo Speech Meanings

Yana V. Popova*

Siberian Federal University

82 A Svobodny, Krasnoyarsk, 660041 Russia ¹

Received 04.12.2012, received in revised form 11.12.2012, accepted 24.12.2012

The article offers an extract from the research of communicative-pragmatic means used for discursive interpretation of taboo speech meanings in intercultural mass media mediated discourse. The work focuses on a presentation of modern approaches to understanding of taboo breaking phenomenon and the analysis of discursive practices of intercultural mass media mediated discourse participants in terms of taboo speech meanings explication. The materials in German are analysed as examples of two most important tendencies: taboo creating and taboo breaking phenomena. The ways how the phenomena appear in discourse exactly are the methods of speech meanings explication. However the discursive practices intermingle with each other in intercultural discourse so that it is very difficult to detect and separate one method from another. And only the context, communicative goals and intentions of discourse participants can help here.

Keywords: taboo creating, taboo breaking, discursive practices, taboo speech meanings, intercultural mass media mediated discourse, taboo speech meanings explication.

Introduction

Many scientists pay much attention to the phenomenon of taboo creating, studying taboos from various points of view either basing on the original interpretation of taboo, or inclining to the modern explanation: V. Kashkin, E. Melikova, O. Ruter, I. Sadykova, Zh. Varbot, I. Kon, N. Mechkovskaja, S. Ullmann, S. Luchtenberg, H. Schroeder and others.

Despite some inconsistency in defining of the term “taboo”, discrepancies in classification and characteristics of methods, themes, spheres of taboo creating, researchers lay special emphasis on this phenomenon for communicative linguistics.

The ways of taboos transmission in communication particularly with the help of euphemisms are of great interest. A lot of research on euphemization has been done by such significant scientists as G. Paul, Zh. Vandries, Sh. Brjuno, Sh. Balli, E. Benvenist, L. Blumfeld, S. Vidlak, I. Gal'perin, B. Larin, H. Nirop, Zh. Varbot, V. Zhelvis, A. Kacev, B. Kuper, L. Krysin, E. Shejgal, G. Kuzhim, V. Zobotkina, V. Moskvina, E. Senichkina etc. Euphemisms are defined “not only as lexical units used instead of forbidden taboo nominations and permitted by speech behavior norms but also as rhetorical quality of speech that makes any communicative situation comfortable

* Corresponding author E-mail address: yanapopov@yandex.ru

¹ © Siberian Federal University. All rights reserved

or helps to avoid possible communicative conflicts” (Vildanova, 2007, p. 22).

The other perspective sphere for the researchers is the process opposite to taboo creating – taboo breaking. However, the idea of taboo breaking is often limited to the description of the process of dysphemization, understood as “deliberate making speech rude” (Kovshova, 2007 p. 118). At the same time the approaches towards the definitions of dysphemism, its differentiation with other language and communicative means such as basilects, vulgarisms, colloquial and strong language, phraseological units etc. are controversial.

M. Kovshova writes, that “the act of making speech rude is accompanied by the speech acts of abuse, quarrel etc. That is the main difference between dysphemism and euphemism” (Kovshova, 2007 p. 118).

V. Moskvina differentiates between dysphemisms, “tabuisms” and invectives. Herewith, the scientist understands dysphemisms as “direct expressions that deliberately or undeliberately contradict the situational relevance.” “Tabuisms” are defined as “taboo nominations” and invectives are explained as “offences” (Moskvina, 2010, p. 23, 24). All these phenomena the researcher opposes to the euphemisms, i. e. “words or phrases used instead of other words or phrases undesirable or inconvenient in a certain situation” (Moskvina, 2010, p. 22).

E. Senichkina distinguishes “basilect euphemisms” and vulgarisms: “There are no euphemisms among vulgarisms. The vulgarisms are negatively colored words and word combinations. Low style euphemisms make the denotation heavily contaminated and as a result they become dysphemisms” (Senichkina, 2006 p. 7-9).

Theoretical framework

In this work dysphemisation is understood as taboo speech meanings explication with the

help of ruder negatively connotated nominations in relation to the taboo denotation. Herewith, deliberate or indeliberate making language rude, negative communication, offence, abuse, expression of aggression, making speech deliberately or undeliberately crude are understood as functions which dysphemisms perform in discourse.

The explication of taboo speech meanings is considered as any communicative means of expression of some content of some phenomenon. Herewith, the phenomenon is interpreted as a private (personal), national or international (intercultural) taboo.

In its turn, the explication of taboo speech meanings can be realized not only by means of dysphemisms but also by means of direct nominations in relation to the taboo denotation. It should be mentioned that there can appear some difficulty while differentiating between dysphemisms and direct nominations. It can be explained by dependence of these phenomena on time, social and other factors. It happens when a taboo speech meaning loses its taboo meaning due to the social change, perception of something or some other reasons. Moreover, a direct nomination or an euphemism can become dysphemisms. “Scurrile von heute signalisieren die neuen Grenzen von morgen.” (Bizarre things today are the signals of opportunities tomorrow) (Sander, 2006, p. 91). For example, the nomination “prostitute” used earlier only as an euphemism has lost its veiling function. However, it can be hardly referred to the dysphemism (cf. “bitch”). So “prostitution”, “prostitute” nominations are more likely to be direct in relation to the taboo denotation. But the reference of a nomination to dysphemism or to direct nomination is context-restricted. For example, the usage of “prostitution” nomination in reference to a politician in political debates (as a transfer of meaning from

one subject to another “on the principal of their real or associative adjacency” by the common characteristics: vendibility, unscrupulousness etc.) can appear as a dysphemism, direct offence.

Thereby, the explication of taboo speech meanings by means of direct nominations is one more way of taboo breaking.

Statement of the problem

To reveal taboo speech meanings and their discursive interpretation it is not enough to know only taboo themes, as taboo speech meanings basically do not exist out of a definite context and discursive practices: “...Realisierung in der Kommunikation notwendigen sprachlichen Verhaltensweisen sollen gelernt werden...” (Realization of necessary language behavior ways shall be learned) (Trad, 2001, p. 47).

We understand discursive practices as units of communicative language activity depended on some factors (cultural, social, psychological, individual) used to take and interpret the reality by a definite person in a definite communicative situation.

As we know many taboo themes, areas and nominations have a relative character: in monoculture situation they can be both a taboo and not a taboo, but becoming an object of intercultural communication their meaning can change. A theme, phenomenon, nomination, phrase understood neutrally by representatives of one culture, in intercultural communication can accept a taboo speech meanings that can be found in communicants’ discursive practices.

Discursive practices, in their turn, have much greater research potential, when they intermingle with each other in intercultural discourse. The intercultural discourse is understood as a speech communicative activity directed to alien characteristics of any subject in any aspect.

Methods

As practical material we use intercultural mass media mediated discourse, namely, German TV broadcast recordings about various events in other countries, representatives of different cultures, intercultural projects etc. For example, a German documentary film about the Chukchi and Chukotka from “Zapping international” series on “Arte” channel, broadcast series devoted to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, “Hart aber Fair” talk show, documentary film “Liebesgrüße nach Moskau”, cultural news real “Schlingensiefel Container: Ausländer raus!”, world news, intercultural TV project of RTL II channel “Das Experiment: 30 Tage Moslem” etc.

It should be mentioned that any mass media mediated discourse is subjected to a definite kind of processing. It means that beyond its characteristics it gains new ones typical for mass media discourse.

However, political correctness – avoidance of direct assessment and direct nomination of unpleasant notions and phenomena which are understood by many researchers as basic characteristics of mass media discourse – today are questionable (Pryadinikova, 2007, p. 78).

L. Krysin says that “there are two main different tendencies: making speech crude, on the one hand, and euphemization, on the other hand (Krysin, 2004, p. 262]. The process of making speech rude is connected with an earlier forbidden public discussion of private life and increase of aggression level in speech of modern people.

Speech aggression is a usual phenomenon not only in the colloquial speech of modern people but also in public communication (Kovshova, 2007, p. 260). It seems that its participants prefer more and more “hard words” and rough expressions breaking language (cultural usual), personal thesaurus and even intercultural context-restricted taboos. This fact is explained by various researchers differently:

as a tendency of mass media discourse to make a sensation, to manipulate people and also as various genres specificity etc. However, any mass media mediated discourse gets this specificity when intimate and private things become public.

“Viele Menschen sagen, wenn man wissen wolle, was Werte seien und was in einer Gesellschaft tabu sei, müsse man nur die Medien, speziell das Fernsehen beobachten. Das Fernsehen sei der größte Zerstörer von Worten und breche mindestens einmal in der Woche ein Tabu... Eine weit verbreitete Auffassung lautet: Werte muss man fördern, Tabus muss man brechen...“ (Many people are sure that to understand what is valuable today and what is taboo, one can just switch on a TV. The TV is the main taboo breaker; minimum one taboo is broken minimum once a week when it is on the screen. There is a widespread opinion: values must be kept but taboos must be broken) (Sander, 2006, p.110).

So taboos visualization and their social functioning, presentation of a usual material as a hot sensation or an extra urgent topic, event, breaking norms, moral rules, making things absurd, creation of comicality, mockeries, wipers, – these are mass media discourse possibilities realized by means of dysphemization which is one of the current tendencies of discursive interpretation of taboo speech meanings. The mediated intercultural discourse is subjected to such a tendency. But due to its own peculiarities such as intention to avoid a communicative conflict, to succeed, perceiving discourse participants as equal communicative partners, preserving their cultural self-sufficiency – intercultural discourse has rather high intensity of euphemization. So two different tendencies: taboo creating and taboo breaking coexist within one discourse.

In this work we have tried to find out if taboo breaking is a current tendency of discursive

interpretation of taboo speech meanings in mass media mediated intercultural discourse and how this process is brought into life.

Some extracts of our analysis are given in the table below.

Conclusions

Having analyzed the material we came to the following conclusions:

- To understand the process of taboo creating only as euphemization and taboo breaking as dysphemization is not quite correct, because there are many ways to interpret taboo speech meanings in discourse. Along with euphemization of mass media mediated intercultural discourse taboo breaking techniques are up-to-date. As a rule, they are brought into life by means of 1) dysphemization; 2) direct nominations of taboo speech meanings; 3) “making a sensation” strategy (it is originally used in mass media discourse. It can be referred to dysphemization, if we examine this in its wider sense: not only as making speech rude but also as using more negative nominations in reference to the taboo denotation); 4) communicative strategy “sich belehren lassen” (let somebody explain something to you);

- Taboo breaking is always connected with taboo speech meanings explication, transmission, while other discursive interpretation ways are aimed at their saving, masking, concealing (euphemization, communicative intended silence, hints, exemplification, jokes etc.). However, the reference of any phenomena to the definite discursive interpretation method of taboo speech meanings is always context-restricted;

- The choice of taboo speech meanings interpretation technique and the usage of definite nominations directly depend on intentions of discourse participants, their social status, age, belonging to a particular culture, communicative situation and some other factors;

- In intercultural communication in the modern multicultural society the intention to make communicative aims of communicative partners more transparent, to influence the recipient, to succeed increases greatly. This causes the necessity to use simple constructions, direct nominations and often dysphemisms. It can be one of the reasons why taboo breaking tendency is extremely essential in mass media mediated intercultural discourse today.

Table 1. Examples

Source	Example	Translation	Discursive interpretation and notes
1	2	3	4
„Zapping international“ «arte» channel The documentary plot «Das Fernsehen der Tschukschen» 30 min.10 sec.	1. Die Miss Tschukotka ist keine Tschuktschin, sondern eine lächelnde Maske... Wenn du diese Maske herunterreisst, dann siehst du die Grimasse des Teufels!	- Miss Chukotka doesn't have any relation to the Chukchi. It's just a mask with a faked smile... But if you tear this mask away you will see the devil's grimace!	The German journalists' documentary film about Chukotka and the Chukchi. The plotline is built on the basis of contrast expressions and opposite opinions of the Russians and the Chukchi concerning the same things. The plots are accompanied by film authors' comments. The Chukchi blame the Russians for imposing Russian culture, discrimination and even racism. The Russians blame the Chukchi for drunkenness, life criminalization, ignorance, and unwillingness to work, to study. This expression says about "Miss Chukotka" beauty parade where Russian girls with European features always win. It sends shock wave through the native population. A middle-aged man, a Chukcha gives sharp comments, uses colorful metaphors "faked smile which conceals the soul but behind this smile there is only hypocrisy and anger". The conceptual world division into "we" and "enemies" categories is obvious. All the negative associations concerning wicked power, hypocrisy hidden behind the faked smile, cowardice and inner emptiness are connected with enemies. Negative compressed comparison as a metaphor serves dysphemization.
The same	2. Bevor der Abramowitsch kam, steckte nicht nur das Fernsehen in Krise, sondern ganz Tschukotka. Die Leute sind einfach verhungert, viele Krankheiten führen zu Opfern, die Kinder haben sich gegenseitig todgeschlagen, um zu überleben	-Before Abramovich came to power, not only TV had been in crisis but also the whole Chukotka. People died from hunger, diseases. Children beat each other to death to survive.	"A myth about an honourable well-doer" is a method typical for mass media discourse (Danilova, 2009, p. 119). Making the expression more emotional with a help of direct nominations of taboo speech meanings connected with taboo themes: hunger, death, murder, crisis etc. Herewith direct nominations manipulate people's consciousness. The usage of Past Perfect and Passive intensifies emotional influence and shows the attitude to the real state of things. Homogeneous predicates forcing the negative atmosphere before Abramovich` coming with a help of gradation method.
Schloss Bellevue: Feiern zum Mauerfall Series of broadcast devoted to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall n-tv 20 Jahre Mauerfall 01:51:50	3. Seine Gesundheit machte einen sehr ... sehr angeschlagenen Eindruck. Er ist schwer krank.	- He looked worn-out (word-for-word: his health seemed broken down). He is very ill.	This expression belongs to Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany. Thus she explains the absence of H. Kohl at the anniversary. The negatively colored epithet with negative sense and direct nomination "very ill" are used in the direct sequence. Ascending gradation method, development of the word combinations into synonymic row. The gradation in this case serves to intensify text expressiveness to get emotions and reaction from the audience.

1	2	3	4
Hart aber Fair, The 1 channel 01:44:12	4. Verschlagene Manager des Bösen	- Artful (cunning, sly) managers of evil	German talk-show with absolutely different participants (according to social status, jobs etc. They should be directly related to the problem being discussed in the show. Here experts, scientists, public people and a moderator are always present. The show is not of an entertainment character but aimed at constructing the discussion between the supporters and opponents. In this part "Scientology" sect is under discussion. A representative of evangelistic church having leading position in Germany uses this metaphor. A sharply negative assessment expressed by the metaphor and pejorative epithet shows taboo speech meanings and represents a dysphemization method. Herewith, this metaphor can be examined as "speech indicator of the social status" of the communicant (Karasik, 1991, p.37)
The same	5. Ich kriege immer Emotionen, wenn ich den Typ sehe!	- I always lose my temper when I see this guy!	One of the representatives of the show speaks about the sect leader in such a manner. Earlier the speaker was a member of the sect and became its dupe. Then he left the sect and now he is trying to reveal the sect leader. The expert uses an interesting tactics. Giving estimation to the actions of the sect leader the speaker doesn't look at him but turns to the moderator and experts showing a distance. Social status detraction, cultural self-sufficiently derogation by means of addressee change. However, he talks to the moderator as to an equal participant of the discourse with an equal social status mentioning another discourse participant in third person to detract him and to demonstrate that he is not worth direct address. The definite article is used as a demonstrative pronoun to show belonging to a definite category. "This guy" colloquial nomination demonstrates aggression to a discourse participant. The euphemistic expression with the second part of the phrase doesn't veil taboo meanings.
Nachrichten weltweit World news	6. Kinderschlagerei und Missbrauchen. Ein polnischer Bischoff soll die Kinder geschlagen haben	- Beating and rape of children. A priest from Poland is accused of beating children	An allogism is used to reach a stylistic effect. It is a tactics of "making a sensation" strategy put into practice with some methods: Spectacularity strengthening The usage of sexual implication Presenting something as a disaster Criminalization Presenting something as a deviancy (Sander, 2006, p. 24) The making a sensation strategy can be examined as dysphemization if we understand dysphemization not only as making speech rude but also as a usage of more negative, unacceptable nominations in relation to the taboo denotation. In this example direct nominations of taboo speech meanings in the announcement are used to attract attention of the audience. In the parallel construction apart from the repetition, there is also a modal verb in its subjective meaning "supposedly" pointed to an eventual informant. So taboo speech meanings expressed with a help of a direct nomination, verb "to beat", on the one hand, and modality of the supposition, on the other hand, used to veil the confidence, to show doubts about the truth of the information and to disclaim responsibility for taboo breaking and direct accusation.
Das Experiment 30 Tage Moslem „ For 30 days to be Moslem“ TVexperiment RTL II 01:59:44	7. Ich fühle mich mit dem Kopftuch nicht wohl, nicht... nicht... nicht attraktiv genug	- With this kerchief I feel unfree, not... not... not attractive enough	The program is an international TV project. It consists of experiments series where real people participate as representatives of different cultures. In the experiment "to be Moslem for 30 days" a young girl, German student, takes part. She should live in a Muslim family. Moreover, the girl has to follow all the rules and traditions of this

1	2	3	4
			<p>culture. TV viewers can see her life. In addition to this, each day all the participants of the experiment should tell about their feelings and ideas in front of the video camera so that no other experiment participant can hear this. The pausation when the girl tries to find an appropriate epithet shows that there is a taboo speech meaning. The girl tries to interpret and to adapt this not to offend other discourse participants, not to detract their cultural self-sufficiency. The first epithet expressing physical uncomfortable condition is quite direct: the kerchief is too tight. But the second nomination is more neutral to the taboo denotation and is used as an euphemism. Direct negation is shaded with a help of the word “genug” (enough). “Not enough attractive” expression is used instead of “unbeautiful, unsexy, unattractive”. Meiosis, incompleteness of an action or a quality is an euphemization method.</p>
The same	8. Und wie ist es bei euch?... Schüttelt man bei euch die Hand?	And you? Do you also shake hands with each other?	<p>One more expression of the German girl. She is afraid to do something wrong and to break Muslim traditions. So she shows her willingness to take and to understand other traditions and rules and breaks taboo speech meanings in an interesting way. She shows the fear of an eventual communicative conflict because of different rules and traditions in discourse quite directly. This is one of the communicative strategies called “sich belehren lassen” (let somebody explain something to you) used in intercultural communication to succeed (Trad, 2001, p. 161). In this case the strategy of direct interrogative form of address is used to lose cultural otherness. This method can be examined as one more tactics of taboo creating, saving.</p>

References

- Vildanova G.A. “Problem of euphemistical nomination”, *Structural-semantic, kognitive, pragmatic and drugie aspekti of researches of different level units. Modern Problems of linguodidactics*, 3, (2007), 21-27, in Russian
- Danilova A.A., *Manipulation with words in mass media* (Moscow: «Dobrosvet», 2009), in Russian
- Karasik V.I., *Social status language* (Moscow: Institut og linguistics of USSR Science Academy, Pedagogical Institute Volgograd, 1991), in Russian
- Kovshova M.L. *Semantics and pragmatics of euphemisms. Shorter thematic dictionary of modern Russian terms* (Moscow: Gnoziz, 2007), in Russian
- Krysin L.P. “Euphemisms in modern Russian speech” *Russian words*, 2 (2004), 262-286, in Russian
- Moskvin V.P. *Euphemisms in the lexical system moder Russian language* (Moscow: LENAND, Edition 4, 2010), in Russian
- Prjadil’nikova N.V. *Euphemisms in Russian MSM at the beginning of XXI century: complex characteristics: PhD* (Samara, 2007), in Russian
- Sander Uwe, Ganguin Sonja. *Sensation, absurdity and taboos in mass media* (VS Publishing house for social sciences, Wiesbaden, E.1., 2006), in German
- Senichkina E.P. *Euphemisms in Russian: Special course: course book* (Moscow: Higher school, 2006), in Russian

Trad Ahmed Rafik. *Taboo topics in intercultural communication: a work for cultural linguistics didactics in studying German as a foreign language*. (Peter Lang. European Publishing house of sciences, 2001), in German

Детабуирование как актуальная тенденция дискурсивной обработки табуированных речесмыслов

Я.В. Попова

*Сибирский федеральный университет
Россия 660041, Красноярск, пр. Свободный 82а*

Проблематика данной статьи отражает один из фрагментов исследования коммуникативно-прагматических средств, служащих для дискурсивной обработки табуированных речесмыслов в межкультурном дискурсе, опосредованном масс-медиаально. Цель статьи – систематизация исследовательских подходов к феномену детабуирования, а также анализ дискурсивных практик участников межкультурного масс-медиаально опосредованного дискурса с точки зрения трансляции табуированных речесмыслов. На материале немецкоязычного межкультурного дискурса разграничиваются две ведущие тенденции: табуирование и детабуирование. Способы реализации этих тенденций в дискурсе и представляют собой способы дискурсивной обработки табуированных речесмыслов. Однако дискурсивные практики, переплетаясь между собой в межкультурном дискурсе, осложняют выявление и распознавание этих способов. И только благодаря анализу контекста, интенций участников дискурса, коммуникативных целей такие задачи могут быть реализованы.

Ключевые слова: табуирование, детабуирование, дискурсивные практики, табуированные речесмыслы, межкультурный масс-медиаально опосредованный дискурс, экспликация табуированных речесмыслов.
