Original Article

Heterogeneity of Professional Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a broad overview of characteristics and causes of heterogeneity of contemporary discursive practices of professional communication. The authors highlight major changes in professional discourse exemplify them in the paper with register and/or code switching practices in aviation, law, education and business communication are highlighted. Discourse heterogeneity is viewed in the paper presented in two different aspects: as a language aspect it is referred to as hybradization and a semiotic phenomenon referred to as creolization. Hybradization implies the ability of a discourse to make use of heterogeneous language means: elements of different styles, codes, genres and registers. Discourse creolization is a result of merging different semiotic codes in one discourse, e.g. verbal, iconic, kinesthetic etc.The discursive heterogeneity is defined by the authors as mixing (incorporating) diverse genres, forms and/or meanings/senses in one communicative event. In view of the growing interest in investigating the nature of professional discourse heterogeneity pre-conditioned by a number of linguistic, physical, social and cognitive variables, this article explores its key causes in three areas: 1) language forms in a particular register or code, 2) personal or institutional intentions of a professional, and 3) professional competitiveness of an individual. The applications of the study presented are diverse and include the following: tendencies of language development, cross- and intercultural professional communication, translation studies, etc.

Key words: Institutional discourse, Professional language, Competitiveness, Style/code switching, Register, Context, Communicative act

INTRODUCTION

Describing the current "democratic changes in the Russian society of the last decade", scholars point out that these changes greatly influenced the "synthetic" processes in a number of institutional discourses. Linguistic studies aimed at describing modern discursive practices and creating a typology of means and/or communication strategies applied in a discourse typically conclude one (or a combination) of the following: 1) there are no purely homogeneous discourses [1], 2) modern discourses demonstrate hybridization of strategies and resources [2], borrowing to a great extend from vernacular [3], 3) style, register and code switching in a modern communicative event is a norm.

Unfortunately, among numerous available papers describing discourse heterogeneity (or hybridization,

inter- or polydiscursivity), little research can be found on institutional discourse heterogeneity. Recent overviews of the research conducted in the area state that causes of institutional discourse heterogeneity have rarely been the main subject of research: in fact, only few studies are available at the moment.[4]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Following the modern view on the type of a discourse determined by its functional parameters and objectives, R. Wodak argues that none of the modern institutional discourses can be exemplified by a single homogeneous type of discourse, it is a continuum of interdependent but conflicting discourses in a single setting [5, p. 12]. The language is considered by the authors as a socio-historic phenomenon reflecting social events and the structure of the society [6].Researchers believe that modern discourses typically comprise different features and a modern discourse appears as an interdiscourse, i.e. as an integrated construct of different discursive forms and practices[7]. Changes and deviations are inevitable consequences of the social life in communities [8].

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While studying the phenomenon S.Danilova suggests a pragmatic classification of discursive heterogeneity distinguishing between obligatory and intentional heterogeneity. The first is defined by the researcher as selective inclusion of thematically similar blocks of texts into one discourse and exemplified with the military discourse as a merge of medical, financial, legal, pedagogical, scientific, sports discourses. The second type – intentional heterogeneity – caused by the intention of the author's of the text to attract communicative partners' attention may be the result of incorporating into a text the forms and concepts which are extraneous or alien for this particular text [9]. Unfortunately, in our opinion, the classification lacks a unifying parameter and misses at least two issues: 1) incorporation of different forms into a text may be caused not by intentions but scarcity of competitiveness of the text author; 2) discourse merges resulting in "obligatory heterogeneity" are always intentional.

We are more inclined to accept the approach to interdiscursivity "as the outcome of producers' choice making, dynamic negotiation and linguistic adaptation" developed by Jianguo, WU[10].

In institutions with a high degree of formality and regularity (law, military forces, examination practices, etc.) standardization of professional communication is strictly regulated and monitored. The control is provided based on the documents reflecting the current system of established standards. For example, studying occupational communication in the English court, T.V.Dubrovskaya [11] indicates the importance of its ritual practices. Exemplifying conventionalism of the English legal system, T.V.Dubrovskaya draws attention to the scope of a special directory "Titles and Forms of Address: a Guide to their Correct Use" which all participants of a trial are required to follow. The first edition, published in 1964, had 164 pages [12], after 22 reprints its modern version has 240 pages [13]. Conventionalism of professional communication and codification of a professional language are aimed at providing its forms (separate units, collocations, phrases) with a signal function. To be used as signals, the language forms are to be earlier recorded in written professional texts, memorized and reproduced in oral speech "standardized, i.e. unchanged" [14]. Without reproducibility, professional "communication would lack its typical automatism and cause excessive intellectual tension to interlocutors" [15]. These ideas are similar to the ideas of T. Givon [16] that linguistic meanings (senses) tend to be implemented in iconic forms, as recognition of the referent in the form saves effort in encoding and decoding of the corresponding sign.

A communicative act as the basic unit and a functionally integral element of professional communication presents a duality of situation and discourse which, in their turn, fall into con-situation, context, presupposition, speech, thus reflecting intra- and extra-linguistic aspects of the discourse.

RESULTS

The present study *data* collected by the authors during the period of 2014 -2015 are 378 mono-, dia- and polylogues of Russian professionals speaking on professional topics. The criterion used for selecting a text were any extrinsic elements in the text including register- or code-switching. Apart from the authors' of the article audio recordings, the data collected contains Youtube video recordings of two focus groups, the first comprising professionals only (intra-occupational communication) and the second customers and professionals (inter-professional, professional-lay communication) from aviation, legal, educational and business sectors.

The Analytical Framework applied in the study is based on the theory of speech acts of J. R. Searle (1980) developed by V. V. Krasnyh (1999). Content analysis was used to determine the change of communication topic[18].

Defining communicative competence as the ability not only to understand, but also produce statements that, first of all, must comply with the semantic context, and only then with prescriptive grammar, Campbell and Wales (1970) were in fact the first to confirm the significance of con-situation, i.e. extra-linguistic context of communication in their article "The Study of Language Acquisition" [19]. Con-situation changes result in either 'extraneous', hybrid elements inclusions into the utterance or code switching. Among the most frequent con-situation changes observed in the recorded professional texts were the following: role change of communicants as a result of intrusion of a superior/inferior (supervisor, leader, head/, junior, subordinate etc.), location change (exit from or entrance into an elevator, getting into a car etc.), variation of conditions (a system/tool/gadget malfunctioning, sudden break of a machine etc.), shortening or lengthening an anticipated period of time of some event (production, expectations etc). All of them resulted in the discourse acquiring heterogeneous elements. The studied communicative events demonstrate four different types of inclusions presented in Table 1: (1) professional discourse forms in a general discourse, (2) general discourse forms in a professional discourse, (3) elements of professional discourse 1 in professional discourse 2, (4) nonverbal code elements in a professional discourse.

Table 1: Types of code switching caused by con-situation change

Types of switching	General language→professional language	Professional language→general language	Professional language 1→professional language 2	Professional language→nonverbal behavior
Con-situation change	Intrusion of a superior/inferior Shortening or lengthening an anticipated period of time of some event Variation of conditions	Location change Shortening or lengthening an anticipated period of time of some event Variation of conditions	Intrusion of a superior/inferior Location change Shortening or lengthening an anticipated period of time of some event	Intrusion of a superior/inferior Location change Variation of conditions
Number of occurrences	324 (86%)	346 (92%)	217 (575)	17 (4%)

DISCUSSION

The text analysis shows that communicatively successful dialogue implies shared knowledge about the communicative situation and appropriate language proficiency. These are the pre-conditions of successful reception (perceiving) and performing code and/or register switching in one of the directions: "general language → professional language", "professional language → general language", "professional language 1 → professional language 2", "professional language → nonverbal behavior". The absence of communicative failures depends on the ability of both communicative partners to "navigate the complex internal space, which can be called a system of relations. The skill to set up proper relationships, prioritize different elements depending on the situation, and perform the code switching is nothing else but understanding"[20, p.170]. When the code is changed or unexpected heterogeneous elements are incorporated into the utterance nothing but knowing the "system of relations", i.e. possessing "social presupposition" [21, p. 104] may solve potential communicative problems.

Inclusions of vernacular elements into a Russian formal register communication are typically short and switching for a lower register are brief if a professional cares for 'maintaining the I' and keeping a higher social status. Professionals aiming at creating intimate and natural relations tend to longer inclusions of spoken elements in their professional discourse [21]. Both – long and short informal inclusions in a formal discourse are not only results of 'choice making', but markers of the so-called "democratization" of professional discourse, demonstration of a tendency towards or seeking some equality in discursive practice through eliminating power asymmetries. It is usually a situation in which a professional acts as a facilitator with the interaction being more of a dialogue than a monologue since making choices on language forms, communicative partners select the strategies useful in achieving communicative goals The data collected and analyzed attest to the fact that successful construction and maintaining a professional identity implies the ability

of a professional to generate highly interdiscursive texts and participate in interdiscursive practices.

These borrowings into one discourse from other discourses are universal: business discourse has spread beyond commercial institutions and colonized not only medical, legal or pedagogical but also military discourse. Multi-media and IT discursive elements penetrate into all types of professional discourse thus marking the so-called 'technologization' of the modern professional discourse.

It is a paradoxical situation when, on the one hand, rules of the institutional communication and conservatism of the society are aimed at preserving standardized forms and discursive practices. But, on the other hand, "clean status and personal discursive tactics" [17] tend to "diversify" means and forms even in a stable extra-linguistic context. Does a professional discourse acquire its non-homogeneous character due to the "social multifunctionality" of its producer(s) as the modern world with its commodification/marketization and technologization requires the ability to implement more than one role in society and generate different types of texts?

Obviously, the answer (s) to the question must be sought in the communication process itself. Linguistically relevant could be studies of the components of communicative acts (or parameters of discursive practices) as a part of a bigger research of an institutional discourse. Particularly interesting in this aspect are quasi- spontaneous and spontaneous (unprepared) utterances. The first type are those which are prepared, but not written utterances (for example, an exchange of routine phrases of a pilot and a radio controller, answers of a desk man, or a railway station operator on duty about a regular timetable, or a roll call.

CONCLUSIONS

A professional discourse produced spontaneously is never an impersonal mono-discourse buta configuration of various elements of different discourses (or discursive practices) within, a professional or social communicative

event. Inter-discursivity is applied to both formal and informal institutional communicative practices and implies violation of language and social conventions of the institution(s), making linguistic choices to meet pragmatic challenges, adaptation to linguistic, cognitive, social and pragmatic variables.

Discursive heterogeneity increases in non-standard situations, which are not spelled out with the standardized professional "phraseology". The main findings on the reasons for incorporating elements of other types of discourse (primarily, vernacular) are the following: (1) the lack of description of all possible situations and norms in the discourses of high ceremonialism, (2) explication of one's own "I", (3) language and/or effort economy reasons. Unskillful use of professional phraseology resulting in generating 'clumsy traces in texts' does not mirror lack of language means but immaturity of an individual as a text author.

The results and significance of the research presented are of theoretical and practical purposes as it provides insights into the development of the language in general and recommendations on how to effectively conduct intra-professional, inter-professional or professional-lay communication in different institutions. The studies are also beneficial to any person trying to become an active, competent participant in a professional community, i.e. in institutional socialization.

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