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Mitigation in the Scientific Discourse

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of mitigation strategies and tactics in scientific discourse on the material of English, German and Russian languages. Objectivity, accuracy, consistency and clarity of presentation are traditionally distinguished as the main style-forming factors of scientific discursive practice focused on scientific knowledge. At the same time, the anthropocentrism of modern linguistic science naturally led to the inclusion in the focus of research interest of the subjective components of the scientific discourse, in which the personality of the addressee of the scientific text is reflected and to which the category of mitigation can be properly attributed. The strategy of assertive mitigation is realized in the scientific text through ritualized tactics of deictic depersonalization and modalization. These tactics reflect the interaction of two tendencies - the subjective (the author's desire to show the scientific significance of his personal contribution to scientific research, or, on the contrary, to preserve the "face" by softening the categoricity of the presentation) and objective (the desire to present only facts and strong evidence). The paper proves that the assertive mitigation strategy realized in the analyzed languages by ritualized tactics of depersonalization and modalization plays an important role in scientific discourse and serves, in the final analysis, to preserve the "face" of the addressee of the scientific text.

Keywords: Discourse, Mitigation, Deixis, Hedging, Strategy and tactics.

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1. Introduction

Linguistic science is now characterized by the active development of cognitive and discursive paradigm, which is based on "the definition of language as a cognitive process performed in communication activities and provides special cognitive structures and mechanisms in the human brain" (Kubryakova, 2004: 406). According to L.V. Tsurikova, as applied to the analysis of discourse, this paradigm is defined as the cognitive-pragmatic, involves, on the one hand, the consideration of the discourse in terms of speech acts and speech events, as well as the analysis of the actual linguistic properties of the latter and the relevant extralinguistic (sociopragmatic) factors, and on the other hand, - a description of the structures of representation of various types of knowledge that determine the speech strategies of communicants and the choice of specific language forms in the process of discursive activity (Tsurikova, 2006: 6).

2. Methods

The category of communicative mitigation defined in western linguistics by the term "mitigation", which was introduced into pragmatics by Fraser in 1980 in the context of language techniques aimed at minimizing the possible unwanted effects in communication (Fraser, 1980: 341) refers to such structures that determine the communicative behavior of the speaker in various types of discourse. C. Caffi defines mitigation as an umbrella category, which includes a wide range of strategies by which the speaker softens the interactional parameters of his speech to reduce potential communicative risks (Caffi, 2007: 41-42). M. Langner interprets this phenomenon as a speech strategy that limits the violation of the "territory" of the interlocutor, i.e. as a special case of negative politeness (Langner, 1994: 22). However, there is still no unity of opinion in the treatment of this phenomenon, which is also manifested in terminological diversity - softening is defined as *Abschwächung*, hedging, understatement, etc.

3. Discussion

In this paper, softening is understood as a communicative category, the main content of which are illocutionary softening strategies, implementing in the communication certain communicative prescriptions aimed at minimizing communicative risks in the interaction (Takhtarova, 2008: 57). Mitigative prescriptions, determining the speaker's speech choice in potentially conflict situations, can be defined as follows: anti-conflict, non-categorical, non-positive, glorified and emotional restraint. Strategies of illocutionary softening, depending on the type of speech action, can be realized in communication as a strategy of directive, assertive, evaluative, etc. mitigation.

Although Fraser, analyzing the main signs of mitigation, notes the fact that the latter is not politeness - "it is not the same as politeness," we consider politeness as the central communicative category that is cross-cutting and integrates a number of more particular categories, including communicative mitigation.

It is known that, along with conventional or ritualized politeness, which includes speech etiquette, a special role in communication is played by individual politeness. As K. Vorderwülbecke points out, it is necessary to distinguish between conventional, contextually free politeness, the essence of which is the implementation of social norms and conventions, and individual politeness, capable, depending on the context, to go beyond these norms, expressing respect for the interlocutor (Vorderwülbecke, 2002: 32). Proceeding from the fact that mitigative strategies and tactics are included in the paradigm of politeness strategies, it can be concluded that a concrete implementation of mitigation can be both clichéd, stereotyped, and individually personalistic, allowing the speaker to demonstrate his linguo-creative competence.

Thus, in particular, institutional interpersonal communication, due to a rather high degree of formalization of the discursive behavior of the interactants, is characterized by ritualized mitigation strategies and tactics, while in colloquial interpersonal discourse the speaker is given greater freedom in choosing strategies that represent his intentions, which, in the final result, determines the linguo-creative, individually-marked style of communicative behavior of speakers.

The purpose of this article is to consider mitigative strategies and tactics within the framework of scientific discourse. Appeal to this type of institutional communication is not accidental. The active development of international contacts, including scientific ones, has caused the researchers' increasing attention to various aspects of scientific discourse both in domestic and in foreign linguistics (Dönninghaus 2003, Auer, Baßler 2007, Breilkopf 2005, Schröder 1997, etc.).

As noted V.I. Karasik (2004), a characteristic feature of the scientific discourse is the fundamental equality of all participants in communication in the sense that none of the researchers has a monopoly on the truth, and the infinity of knowledge makes every scientist critically treat both the stranger and his research. The values of scientific discourse are concentrated in its key concepts (truth, knowledge, research) and are reduced to recognizing the cognizability of the world, to the need to multiply knowledge and to prove their objectivity, to respect for facts, to impartiality in the search for truth, to a high estimation of accuracy in wording and clarity thinking. Scientific discourse, according to N.K. Ryabtseva, is the most revealing area of conscious reflection, cognitive and communicative simultaneously. In the cognitive plan, the scientific discourse is an explicit or implicit reasoning, and in the communicative one, an explicit or implicit combination of dialogical and monologic mode of communication (Ryabtseva, 2005: 456).

From the foregoing positions, the interest of linguists in those parameters of scientific discourse, in which the personality of the subject of scientific knowledge and presentation is reflected, and to which the strategy and tactics of mitigation can rightly be attributed, seems quite natural. For scientific discursive practice, a special importance is played by the strategy of assertive mitigation, which represents the prescription of non-categoricity. Using the strategy of assertive mitigation, the speaker seeks to absolve himself of responsibility for the presented new knowledge, to present the latter as an objective truth and, thereby, to protect himself from possible criticism of his opponents.

4. Results

Despite the fact that the abovementioned motives seem to contradict the basic characteristics of the scientific discourse aimed at the transfer of objective, proven, verified knowledge, concrete tactics that implement the assertive mitigation strategy are actively used in scientific communication, being predominantly stereotyped, clichéd in various linguocultures, and the reference to these tactics is often automatic.

Thus, in particular, one of the tactics that reduces the responsibility of the speaker for the stated content is tactic of deictic defocalization or depersonalization, which takes the subject out of the action focus.

According to Yu.A. Komarova, the ways of representing the subject in scientific speech are summarized in three categories - certainty, uncertainty and generality. Moreover, one of the characteristic tendencies of English scientific speech is, according to the author, the use of pronouns in the first person singular (I, me, my, myself) (Komarova, 2008: 90).

The tactic of depersonalization of the subject of scientific exposition is actively used in English, German and Russian-language scientific discourse. At the same time, it should be noted that the paradigm of

linguistic means serving the implementation of this mitigation tactic in the analyzed languages is very extensive and diverse, compare:

- **Es lässt sich sagen**, dass bei widersprüchlichen Zeichen in der Regel das nonverbale Zeichen näher an der wirklichen Befindlichkeit des Sprechers liegt.

- **It can be said that** vibration is everywhere, and a lot of serious vibration is having a bad effect on our life, such as factory noise caused by mechanical vibration and bridge collapsed due to resonance.

- **Ausgehend** von Straßenverkehrs-Hinweisen... Insbesondere **ist dabei zu klären**, welche Funktion dem Spiel mit verschiedenen Bedeutungsebenen in dieser Hinsicht zukommt.

- **Based on** the information available in the product reports, the management team determines the necessary investment and marketability of each new product.

- **Betont wird**, dass Maximen weder als absolute regeln fungieren, noch in der Anwendung jeweils die gleiche Gewichtung besitzen.

- **It should be emphasised that** the controller fragility issue has been earlier studied in the literature under the terminology controller sensitivity.

Man darf, was die wortgeschichtliche Seite angeht, tatsächlich vermuten, dass ...

- **As a matter of** terminology, such children are known by so many names other than mentally disabled such as "mentally retarded", "feeble-minded", "mentally handicapped", "mentally deficient", "mentally subnormal" or "mentally sub-average".

Erwähnenswert ist, dass gerade diese neue Funktion auf p-mails zurückwirkt.

- **It is worth nothing that**, in Bruininks and Malle's study, "participants referred to hope as keeping a person focused on one's goals".

Inclusive forms — *imagine, consider* using the personal pronoun *wir, we*, as well as I-forms, which are practically not used in Russian, are used in the use of personal forms of mental performatives, in German and English-language scientific discourse, compare:

- **I would like to** use a concrete example to show that children can take pleasure in philosophizing: "Can flowers be happy?"

- Die klassischen Analysen behandeln fast ausschließlich semikonventionelle indirekte Sprechakte, die **ich** hier konventionalisiert **nenne**. Darunter **verstehe ich** die kulturell relativ stark festgelegte Verwendung.

- In **meiner** sprachwissenschaftlichen Arbeit **bin ich** in drei Zusammenhängen auf sprachlich Stereotypes und auf Stereotype gestoßen.

- In **my** research **I'm** thus **focusing on** the development of novel techniques for the visual perception of humans and their activities, in order to facilitate perceptive multimodal interfaces, humanoid robots and smart environments.

According to N.K. Ryabtseva, mental performatives *it should be emphasized, it should be noted, while agreeing, it is useful to remember*, etc., which are one of the most "pure" metatext components of the scientific discourse, are an example of the embodiment of the subjectivity of cognition, reasoning and presentation, as well as the inseparable connection of cognitive and communicative in the scientific text (Ryabtseva, 2005: 459).

H. Schroeder, analyzing the functioning of hedging in scientific discourse, includes modal operators, passive, in the paradigm of mitigation tools along with the above impersonal and indefinite personal

constructions. The use of these forms, which reduce the categoricity of the presentation and thus increase the degree of probabilistic evaluation, violates, according to the author, the basic style-forming principles of the scientific text, namely, accuracy, clarity, unambiguity and brevity of presentation. However, the active use of hedging indicates that, «daß Wissenschaftskommunikation - in einem weitaus stärkeren Maße als bisher in der Fachsprachenforschung angenommen - ähnlichen Mechanismen wie die Alltagskommunikation gehorcht, dies aber durch den besonderen Fachkode mehr oder weniger erfolgreich verschleiert» (Schröder, электр.рес.). The paper also provides the following functions of hedging in scientific communication:

- reduction of the responsibility of the speaker / writer for the truth of the reported;
- modification of the effectiveness or importance of the reported;
- an indication of the attitude of the speaker / writer to the proposition or the disguise of his position;
- protecting the speaker / writer from possible criticism and reducing the risk of rejection of the recipient's message.

S. Dönninghaus is in solidarity with this point of view. She notes that the use of depersonalization tactics, by which the author of a scientific text reduces the measure of personal responsibility for what he has said and avoids possible criticism and negative consequences (sanctions) from the addressee, indicates a principled inadequacy of scientific communication (Dönninghaus, 2003: 245-246).

The tactic of using modal operators that reduce the categorical assertive illocution is also quite cliched and occurs in both Russian and German languages, compare:

***Vielleicht** erscheint die geäußerte Kritik z.T. ungerechtfertigt und die Überlegungen und Vorschläge im letzten Teil **etwas** zu aufwendig...*

*Im ersten Beispiel etwa ist die Formulierung ... für die meisten Leser **wohl** doppeldeutig.*

*Пополнение функционального класса квалификаторов современного английского языка сопровождается **некоторой** вульгаризацией.*

*Важно подчеркнуть, что использование подобных «противоположных» языковых средств является **вполне** адекватным.*

*Для языковой картины мира, **по-видимому**, не характерно оправдание лжи-обмана.*

*But on the other hand, the manturing of the discipline has been accompanied by a **certain** decline in interest, through this has varied from one country to the next.*

*The first step to take in analysis of an "elementary doctrine of the components of experience", as Kant put it, is an **apparently** simple one.*

In the opinion of N.K. Ryabtseva, these means of mitigation, defined by the author as modalizers and categorical reduction operators, reflect in the scientific discourse the desire to avoid subjectivity, to emphasize the relativity of cognition and the possibility of an alternative point of view (Ryabtseva, 2005: 481).

5. Conclusions

Thus, the assertive mitigation strategy aimed at reducing the categoricity of the reported, protecting the communicative and scientific image of the speaker / writer, is represented in scientific discourse by the tactics of depersonalization and tactics of using modal operators. These tactics, being sufficiently cliched in scientific discursive practice, reflect the subjective components of scientific discourse, first of all, the

attitude of the speaker to the reported and to the potential addressee. It is important to emphasize that mitigative strategies and tactics are marked by ethnocultural specifics. For example, in Russian scientific discourse, as noted above, the "I" form of mental performatives is not used, while in English and German linguocultures this form is used along with impersonal forms and inclusive "We". In addition, it can be assumed that in each ethnosociety there can exist their own, ideoethnic tactics, realizing mitigative prescriptions in the scientific discourse. Differences in the scientific discursive style, caused, inter alia, by differences in mitigation strategies and tactics, can cause misunderstandings in situations of intercultural communication, reducing the effectiveness of international scientific contacts. In this connection, the study of the ethno-cultural specifics of mitigation strategies and tactics in the scientific discourse on the basis of various linguistic cultures is not only theoretical, but also practical value.

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