WUT 2020
10th International Conference "Word, Utterance, Text: Cognitive, Pragmatic and Cultural Aspects"

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BLOG COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Virtual communication space possesses various features, such as subjectivity of information, interactivity, hypertextuality, global nature, creativity, anonymity and fragmented structure as well as involvement of the reader into a dialogue, a combination of different types of discourse, similar speech patterns of communication, free choice of language and specific computer ethics. The present article reveals that a blog post is a unique genre of virtual communication that can used in many formats. It is characterized by peculiar structure, linguo-stylistic means, and ways of constructing personal identity. Blog posts cover a wide range of topical issues and events that occur in modern fashion, sports, music, art and entertainment and are widely discussed by bloggers. Researchers distinguish both gender similarities and differences in English-speaking blogosphere. Gender differences in virtual communication depend on the communication settings, type of discourse and the time parameter. At this stage of the study, the analysis reveals that in female blogs the self-expression strategy is actualized by various tactics, which are in their turn, realized by the lexical and syntactical means, such as evaluative epithets with the positive connotation, the abundant use of intensifiers, lexical approximators, metaphors, comparisons, elliptical sentences, modal verbs, and emphatic constructions. In male blogs the self-description as well as the self-expression strategies are realized by jargon words and terms, slang and taboo words, logical comparisons and simile, idiomatic expressions and contracted word forms as well as interjections.

Keywords: Virtual communication, genre, blog, online commentary, gender, communication strategy.

1. Introduction

The paper focuses on the study of gender peculiarities of blog online communication. In the era of rapid development of computer technologies and alternative news sources issues related to various aspects of electronic communication arouse interest of psychologists, sociologists and linguists. The computer changes not only the type but also the very process of communication and our understanding of it. There is a well-stated opinion that virtual discourse was originally a male domain, since the first computers were created in the United States for the needs of the armed forces. Programmers and computer specialists, the majority of whom were men, created a special language with slang words, phraseological units and abbreviations to codify the messages and make their conversation incomprehensible for nonprofessionals and common users. Today both men and women participate equally in computer communication, which allows us to outline gender differences of virtual communication in English-speaking blogosphere. Virtual discourse has been studied in various aspects by such linguists as Dementiev (2015), Mityagina and Sidorova (2016), Galichkina (2009), Akhrenova (2016). Although gender-related peculiarities of online communication have been specified, the research into gender differences of blogosphere has not been carried out yet.

2. Problem Statement

The emergence of a new type of communication triggers the formation of a specific communication space, which defines the way we communicate on the Internet, the number and personal characteristics of users and their choice of means of expression, time and space concepts in interaction. We highlight the following features of the virtual communication space: subjectivity of information, interactivity, hypertextuality, global nature, creativity, anonymity and fragmented structure. When getting into a new type of interaction the text acquires new features. So a text message is characterized by a number of interconnected parameters: involvement of the reader into a dialogue, hypertextuality, a combination of different types of discourse, similar speech patterns of the circle of communication, free choice of the language and specific computer ethics.

There are various genres of Internet communication. It is necessary to note that there are several classifications of the Internet genres, depending on the time of communication, involvement of Internet users, relevance to written or oral interaction, the use of multimedia. The main Internet genres are: email, forum, blog, chat, ICQ, IRC, homepage, social network, games and entertainment projects. We rely on a number of interrelated parameters and distinguish the following criteria as topic, communication purpose, sphere of communication, the image of the author/reader, online/offline form, relevance to a written or oral text, dialogue / polylogue composition, linguistic features. We distinguish after Goroshko and Polyakova (2015), Shchurina (2016), Akhrenova (2016) between original web genres (chat, ICQ and discussion groups) and genres borrowed from other areas of communication (abstract, e-letter, blog).

3. Research Questions

This study is premised on the following research questions:
- What is meant by virtual communication?

- ▪ What are gender-specific features of blog communication?

- ▪ What lexical, and syntactic features in the speech of bloggers can be identified?

- ▪ What tactics do bloggers employ to reveal differences in speech behaviour?

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. The object of the research is gender peculiarities in English-speaking blog online communication. The subject of the study is graphical, lexical, morphological, and syntactic characteristics of gender differences in the English-speaking blogosphere.

4.2. Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to identify linguistic features of gender identity in the English-speaking blogosphere.

5. Research Methods

In accordance with the questions and the purpose of the research, the following set of methods was used: the analysis of the publications concerning the studied problem, contextual, descriptive, cultural and comparative analyses, descriptive-analytical, and content analysis methods, lexico-stylistic, interpretative and the elements of statistical method.

6. Findings

Modern linguistics have paid great attention to gender differences in speech. Some interesting research has been carried out by Goroshko and Pavlova (2015), Egorova (2016), Mityagina and Sidorova (2016), Gukos'yanc (2016) featuring online communication. Egorova (2016) states that the results of the polls generally show that women are more oriented towards humanities and communication where the desire of creative self-realization, recreation and communication prevails. Men choose a clearly pragmatic attitude in the use of Internet technologies. Women are more likely to communicate online to make up for the lack of creative, highly intellectual communication in everyday life. Goroshko and Pavlova (2015) comes to the conclusion that gender differences in electronic communication depend on the communication settings, type of discourse and the time parameter (synchronous/ asynchronous).

The genre of blog can be defined as an asynchronous personal internet discourse featuring a collection of short regularly added entries that contain images or media that are significant for the author of the blog at the moment or relevant to a particular topic, event or recollection. Initially blog was an online diary in which the author covered events that occurred to him over the past few days, so it was a kind of a personal diary in the electronic format. We agree with Kirillov (2017) that currently the genre of blog goes beyond the personal information to become a kind of global news network. The user from any point of the globe can join a group of people, put in some news not to share his point of view to a global audience but to cover a similar event that occurred to him. These features determine the "media" character of blog posts, which is understood as a universal feature of a text "to be a compressed message about relevant and important events and facts from the lives of real people" (Horol'skij, 2015, p. 46). The main characteristics of media text are: relevance of the news, unexpected incidents, the involvement of the

author into the event, allusion to popular concepts and relevant topics at the time, expressive means, large target audience, feedback.

A blog post is some published information that usually entertains or educates. Bloggers often seek the attention of a target audience. That audience is seeking answers to the questions they're asking or they're simply looking for information that is entertaining to them. Good blog posts often fulfill one of the two functions while the best are often both educational and entertaining. Blog posts can come in many formats. They can be like a log record where the author writes down his thoughts on a topic, almost like storytelling. Posts can also come in a list format or they can be written in segments with an introduction, body and conclusion. Usually a blog post answers a question the audience is asking, in this case it is recommended to provide the best answer possible. That often involves researching the topic, collecting information to include in the post (survey results, test results, etc.), citing that information and providing context to what the information means for the reader and how they can use it.

The Internet commentary in our work is considered as a separately taken message placed immediately after the text of the article written by a follower as a feedback. We state after Klushina, Smirnova, Kasperova, Ivanova, and Barysheva (2018), Abdullina (2016) that it usually combines elements of informative, evaluative, imperative and ritual types of genre. An Internet comment consists of less than 50 words and includes a link to the previous follower's comment or the blogger's post. The main part of the comment can be written in the form of an analytical commentary providing reader`s thoughts over the post or questions to the blogger or the analysis of his message from the linguistic point of view. A commentary can be an emotional response to the post or a piece presenting a collective literary work. The blogger is not the sole author of the work, the follower is an active participant of communication who adds, rewrites, criticizes and argues with the blogger in the discussion. Lobodenko and Bashtanar (2016) claim that mass reader in Internet communication becomes a collective author.

The main purpose of the online commentary is to guide the attention of the readers to new relevant facts and events that capture the general public's attention at the moment. Comments are aimed at the assessment and discussion of information, expression of personal attitude, and receiving information in return. We agree with Tanabaeva (2017) on the idea that comments are characterized by such features as being emotional, subjective, evaluative, compressed, simplified in structure, employing expressive punctuation and neglect of spelling norms as a strategy.

For the Western world lifestyle bloggers have long become journalists, fashion critics, an integral part of fashion shows, one of the key elements of promoting brands on the market. Fashion designers are willing to pay large fees for positive feedback on their collection or brand. A lifestyle blog is a collection of entries related to fashion, style, clothes, travelling, spending free time. It is intended to cover the lifestyle of a blogger whose purpose is to advertise, manipulate "subscribers (followers) to buy cosmetics, accessories, clothes of certain brands at certain stores and shopping centers, as well as go on vacation to recommended places, read works by certain authors, attend particular exhibitions.

The main type of content on the blog is posts on modern fashion, new trends in music, sports, art and entertainment, in which bloggers write about the latest developments, post photos from fashion shows at fashion weeks, and talk about what you need to wear in the current season, what to eat, where to find a suitable fitness center or yoga studio. Also they present their own pictures (the so-called looks) where

they describe in detail what brand of clothes and where to buy, its price, providing recommendation and arguments why the things are best combined in this way.

All the blogs have the same structure. At the top of the page there is a header with the menu or navigation bar. The main content area highlights latest blog posts. In the sidebar you can find the following topics: a profile, post calendar, archive, friends, search, guestbook, comments, links and favorite content. The footer presents relevant links on the contact page, a disclaimer or private policy. The structure allows switching easily to different modes to view photos, comments, to find out to know where the photos were taken, see the shops where you can buy a particular product.

There are two main ways of constructing personal identity in cyberspace: self-description and self-expression. When the blogger chooses self-description he makes an ample use of highly referential self-centered utterances. The main strategies of self-description of a blogger are the autobiography of a user, list of interests and posts which describe life events of the user. The authors of such diaries want to tell the audience about themselves, their interests and hobbies and to find users of the same interests, to share opinions and impressions about the various events of their life. Self-expression is characterized by an emphasis on mental representations of typical situations when the blogger uses pieces of poetry, photos, unique design of personal pages and so on.

We have carried out the thorough research on linguistic peculiarities of famous lifestyle bloggers' instagram accounts who have more than one million followers having analysed more than 10 instagram entries. According to the results of the research, we may firmly state that there are certain differences between male and female bloggers to employ various linguistic means and strategies.

Lifestyle blog has a personal touch, which explains the prevalence of self-expression strategy in bloggers' utterances and posts. Many lifestyle bloggers embrace their experience or career origins when they are finding their "niche" to write in, like make-up, fashion, cooking, travel, photography, health, fitness, décor, being a stay at home mom.

In female blogs the self-expression strategy is realised by such tactics as the tactics of creating a colourful utterance, the tactics of mitigating the aggressive tone of the utterance, the tactics of maintaining a friendly contact, the tactics of shortening the distance. The afore-mentioned tactics are realized by lexical and syntactical means. Female bloggers frequently use many evaluative epithets with the positive connotation (tremendous comfort, deathly allergic, amazing connection, fabulous job, countless sacrifices, lovely fabrics, etc) to express their emotions and attitudes. Epithets with the negative connotation are less common (nasty haters, disgusting situation, poor show, etc).

The abundant use of intensifiers is one the characteristic features of American and British female bloggers and is more typical of female gender ("much too young", "awfully pretty", "too dressed up", "perfectly happy", "totally lost", etc). Female bloggers employ a large number of lexical units in their posts.

According to the results of the research, female gender widely employ lexical approximators which can be considered markers of femininity in certain way ("sort of right", "kind of mysterious", "sort of distant"). One of the reasons related to approximate nomination is uncertainty in some situations.

Modern female bloggers tend to express their viewpoint on any issue or news. In some posts slang and taboo words can be conveyed which indicates women's independence and active position in the society ("jerk", "What's the hell with….", "totally out of whack").

In order to make posts more colourful and provoke the feedback of followers bloggers use lexical stylistic devices. The most frequently used of them are trite and genuine metaphors ("My heart has melted", "wipe my smirk off the face") and logical comparisons and simile ("sing like a diva", "act like a nightmare", "behave like a bizarre creature").

On the syntactic level it is necessary to note that the dominant constructions employed by female bloggers are elliptical sentences ("Care to think?", "Still alone?"), modal verbs ("You might be thinking", "I must confess"), emphatic constructions ("I do believe", "She did speak on it", "We put on a pretty marvelous show, didn't we?").

Male bloggers tend to stick to a more neutral tone in their posts and stories. We have analysed instagram accounts of men specializing in design, cooking, sports, and psychology. It is interesting to note that male bloggers employ jargon and terms a lot to speak about this or that sphere of life and their profession mainly (flavour, have a bite, boil, freshly grilled, do jumps, hamstrings, snatch, deadlift, liquid coolant). Self-description is vividly viewed in male blogs as well as self-expression. Most posts are job or hobby-related and less emotional in comparison with the female blogs. Male bloggers are more reserved and self-contained. As well as female bloggers male bloggers use a variety of lexical units which are similar to that of women's vocabulary and speech behavior (slang and taboo words (dammit, ass-hat, can cop a feel), epithets (handsome men, pretty women, marvelous mood, magic moments), metaphors (Love is the best medicine), logical comparisons and simile (like a monster, like a real man), idioms (horse around, shoot the breeze)).

One of the characteristic features of masculinity that can be traced in male blogs are contracted forms (ya, kinda) and interjections (Oh, gee, uh, oh, no).

Instagram is a huge resource platform which has a great impact on the linguistic potential and speech behaviour of the bloggers. Self-expression and self-description are the main strategies both male and female bloggers resort to. However, self-expression is more prevalent in female blogs. A famous blogger's post can be abundant in various linguistic means on all linguistic levels and the choice of which does differ in terms of masculinity and femininity.

7. Conclusion

At this stage of the study we have come to the conclusion that there exist the following features of the virtual communication space: subjectivity of information, interactivity, hypertextuality, global nature, creativity, anonymity and fragmented structure.

A blog post is an integral part of virtual discourse. It is a unique genre that can come in many formats and is characterized by the specific features, such as structure, language peculiarities, ways of constructing personal identity, and its educational and entertaining functions. The main content of the blog posts is commonly connected with modern fashion, sports, new trends in music, art and entertainment, in which bloggers write about the latest developments, post photos from fashion shows,

and recommend what to wear in the current season, what and where to eat, where to find a suitable fitness center or yoga studio.

It can be stated that men and women participate equally in virtual communication, thus it has become possible for researchers to distinguish both gender similarities and differences in English-speaking blogosphere. Gender differences in virtual communication depend on the communication settings, type of discourse and the time parameter.

In female blogs the self-expression strategy is actualized by various tactics: the tactics of creating a colourful utterance, the tactics of mitigating the aggressive tone of the utterance, maintaining a friendly contact, and the tactics of shortening the distance. The afore-said tactics are realized by the lexical means, such as evaluative epithets with the positive connotation, the abundant use of intensifiers, lexical approximators, slang and taboo words, the usage of metaphors, logical comparisons and simile. On the syntactical level the tactics are realized by elliptical sentences, modal verbs, and emphatic constructions.

In male blogs the self-description as well as the self-expression strategies are vividly viewed and realized by such lexical means as jargon words and terms, slang and taboo words, logical comparisons and simile, idiomatic expressions and contracted forms as well as interjections.

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