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PROFESSIONAL EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSE IN RUSSIA: A SOCIO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The paper deals with a socio-pragmatic approach to professional educational discourse aimed at a description of the communicative behavior of teachers and students in its various genres. The scheme of this discourse includes its basic components – the objective, participants, chronotope, values, strategies, and genres. The topic of the discourse, as well as its tonality, is also relevant for its description. Our understanding of educational discourse is based on a multidimensional model of discourse analysis. It includes five directions of analysis. Structurally, discourse is analyzed as a sequence of utterances in a certain communicative situation. Topically, discourse is explained as a combination of themes which may be interpreted as connected with bringing up people, usually young ones, and instructing them so as to help them be socialized as members of a community. Socially, it is important to focus upon participants of any type of discourse. They may be analyzed from many points of view, including personality-oriented and status-oriented communication. Pragmatically, any discourse may be explained according to its tonality, formal or casual, serious or jocular, phatic or informative, ideologically charged or neutral, sincere or manipulative, etc. Instrumentally, we distinguish between oral and written type of speech, contact and distant conversations, protocol fixed and normal discourse. The main trends of educational discourse studies in modern Russia are represented in pedagogical interaction in secondary schools, academic communicative behavior in universities, learners' communicative activity, and educational instrumentalities.

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Keywords: Educational discourse, pragmatics, values, communicative strategies, genres.



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1. Introduction

The term “discourse” is often used in various disciplines which deal with communication in general and its situational varieties in particular. We define this notion as verbal and non-verbal interaction both in oral and written forms between people in culturally fixed concrete circumstances. In this respect we follow the pragmatic trend in Linguistics according to which the emphasis is made not on structural description of language units, but on their usage and situational application (Hymes, 1986; Slembrouck, 2002; van Dijk, 1995).

2. Problem Statement

A professional discourse is understood in this paper as communication between specially trained people who deal with a task requiring a comparatively long theoretical and practical institutional training in socially relevant fields of activity. Education belongs to this sphere. Educational Linguistics has been given a proper attention to both in the West and in Russia and it is regarded as a branch of Applied Linguistics (Brumfit, 1997; Heath, 2000; Hornberger, 2001; Spolsky, 2010; Stubbs, 1986). A socio-pragmatic approach to educational discourse still remains a disputable field of communication theory.

3. Research Questions

The aim of our study is to work out a theoretical scheme of professional educational discourse from a socio-pragmatic point of view and apply it to professionally relevant elements of discourse.

4. Purpose of the Study

The rationale of our approach is the following: professional educational discourse may be explained and described according to the scheme which includes its objectives, participants, special values and norms of behavior, communication strategies and speech genres.

5. Research Methods

The material of the study comprises scripts of basic educational academic discourse genres, i.e. verbal conversation of university teachers with their students in lectures, seminars, consultations and oral examinations. The total length of the texts analyzed is about 50 hours. The participants were professors and students of Pushkin State Russian Language Institute in Moscow, the material was collected in the period from 2018 until 2020. The methodology of the study includes the following procedures of analysis: description of the place and time of verbal interaction, scripts of speech, comments on professionally relevant elements of discourse, comments on meta-discourse markers, comments on gestures and mimics, and comments of self-presentation signs. Professionally relevant elements of discourse consist of topic specification, exact terminology, institutional self-presentation, and institutional evaluation.

6. Findings

A theoretical framework of educational discourse

Our understanding of educational discourse is based on a multidimensional model of discourse analysis. It includes five directions of analysis.

Structurally, discourse is analyzed as a sequence of utterances in a certain communicative situation. These utterances are interconnected and may be explained within a standard grammatical theory as a text with a certain contextual and situational addition, which may be paraverbal or non-verbal, such as gazes, mimic, gestures, silence, etc. Another structural approach to discourse is based on a speech act theory and focuses upon intentions of participants and combinatory varieties of dialogue reactions.

Topically, discourse is explained as a combination of themes which may be interpreted as connected with bringing up people, usually young ones, and instructing them so as to help them be socialized as members of a community. In this respect, educational discourse may be realized by anyone who chooses such topics. Educational topics are often discussed in media and political discourse and they are very important for psychologists and philosophers. And certainly, such problems often emerge in everyday communication at home.

Socially, it is important to focus upon participants of any type of discourse. They may be analyzed from many points of view, including personality-oriented and status-oriented communication. The first discourse type is realized between people who know each other quite well and perceive their interlocutors as members of one's own family in a broader sense of the word; they share common memories and attitudes, they do not have to explain things which go without saying for them. The second discourse type is quite different, people take their conversation partners as representatives of certain groups, usually institutional groups, such as politicians and voters, officers and clients, doctors and patients, professors and students. This type of discourse is organized within strict rules of topical development, though certain deviations from typical scenarios may take place. Legal discourse in this respect is very strict and educational discourse is rather free. Any type of status discourse may be analyzed within a frame of its components, including participants, objectives, typical time and space, values, communicative strategies, and genres.

Pragmatically, any discourse may be explained according to its tonality, formal or casual, serious or jocular, phatic or informative, ideologically charged or neutral, sincere or manipulative, etc. The tone of a discourse depends on relations between its participants, their age, gender, occupation, situational background, and cultural norms. It is unique for any given conversation but at the same time has certain stable properties which may be described and fall under certain types. Educational discourse in this respect is characterized by a wide margin of variety, it includes various formats of verbal and non-verbal behavior, has certain class and ethnic specificity and it has drastically changed from old times until nowadays.

Instrumentally, we distinguish between oral and written type of speech, contact and distant conversations, protocol fixed and normal discourse. Such an approach to discourse focuses on the circumstances of communication which determine to a certain extent both modes and topics of interaction.

Studies in educational discourse in Russian Linguistics (including both secondary school and university education) are interconnected with projects dealing with political, media, legal, scientific, business, and medical institutional types of communication. Institutional discourse is professional because it is realized by specially trained people who function as members of an organization established to satisfy

the existential needs of society, such as possession and transmission of power, religion, law, mass media, scientific research, medical aid, and education.

Educational discourse is subdivided into four main subtypes: secondary school communicative interaction (usually named pedagogical discourse) (Antonova, 2007; Gabidullina, 2009; Oleshkov, 2012), university discourse (academic communication) (Dimova, 2004; Gordiyevskiy, 2006; Khutyzy, 2015; Zubkova, 2009), learners' discourse (the emphasis is made on communicative activity of students) (Balabanova, 2018; Ezhova, 2007; Komina, 2009; Shcherbinina, 2010), and educational instrumentalities description and evaluation (textbooks and electronic educational means) (Kurovskaya, 2017; Rozina, 2005). Certain genres and peculiarities of educational discourse have been closely studied (Karatanova, 2003; Koroteyeva, 1999). It should be mentioned that educational discourse borders with hybrid conversational entities, such as Didactics theory discussion, which belongs to the sphere of science (in Russia the term "science" includes both natural sciences and the humanities), and enlightenment for any interested audience, i.e. lectures and interviews with experts on TV about politics, law, arts, health, and education.

Pedagogical interaction is defined as mutual activity of educational process participants aimed at a pedagogical objective, grounded in fixed norms and values, resulting in transformation of attitudes and world view dispositions and developing cognitive potential of students (Ezhova, 2007). A very detailed scheme of school discourse is presented by Oleshkov (2012). He sets forth 19 parameters of its description subdivided into invariant and variational dimensions of a didactic situation. A semiotic approach to educational discourse is developed by Gabidullina (2009) who understands it as a process of educational texts production and interpretation in a communicative situation immersed into a sphere of organized teaching and learning. Three text types make the core of this discourse, these are textbook, teacher's meta-text and students' texts. Teacher's discourse is the central organizing element of this educational situation.

It is important to define a positional difference in any type of discourse, because objectives of a speaker may not coincide with the aims of an addressee. Komina (2009) makes it clear that in situations of a professional educational discourse, teachers use their utterances so as to guide and control the students whereas students express in their speech the knowledge they have acquired and skills they have mastered. The author differentiates two main types of educational verbal formations: generative and demonstrative discourse, the former is produced and perceived in the process of oral and written interaction and the latter is prepared in advance so as to show the students samples of language usage coined as definitions or argumentation patterns.

Our model of educational discourse is socio-pragmatic and includes the following components: the institutional objective of this communication type (socialization of students), basic participants (teachers and students), a chronotope of discourse (its timing and spatial parameters according to M.M. Bakhtin), values and norms, communicative strategies and tactics (structured aims), and genres (situational subtypes of verbal behavior) (Karasik, 2002).

Axiological parameters of educational discourse may be formulated as a set of norms shared by the members of this institutional organization, for example:

Studying is a virtue, and hence people should study. Consequences: teachers and sources of knowledge should be respected, as well as the very process of knowledge acquisition. Studying is realized

through overcoming difficulties, it requires perseverance. Consequences: willing and diligent students should be encouraged, negligent learners should be criticized, teachers must support and help their students.

Strategies of educational discourse are determined by communicative intentions of its participants and they implement the main objective of socialization for new members of any community – to involve people into a group which shares the same values, information, opinions, norms, and rules of behavior. We can single out explanatory, evaluative, control and organizing communicative strategies of educational discourse.

Genres of educational discourse may be determined and described either within a general deductive model built upon certain typological features, such as objectives, participant types, typical scenarios, ritualization degree, etc., or on the basis of real forms of such interaction which may be regarded as prototypical, e.g. a lesson, a lecture, a seminar, a discussion, teacher and parent conversation, etc. Genres are subdivided into certain subtypes, e.g. a common lesson, a lesson-excursion, a lesson-press-conference, etc.

A linguistically relevant analysis of educational discourse includes its fragments fixed in utterances of its participants.

A description of professional educational discourse

The following excerpt from lectures in various aspects of Linguistics illustrates an explanatory communicative strategy of Educational discourse (lectures were given in Russian, fragments of recording are translated into the English language by the authors. V. K., I. L.).

Dear students, my name is NN, I will be your lecturer in Lexicology. The objective of our course of lectures in Lexicology of the Russian language is to make a systematic picture of this level of the language and describe its properties. As we remember, any language consists of several interconnected systems of linguistic signs, including sounds, morphemes, words, and morphological and syntactical patterns. These systems are often presented as layers of the language. Lexicology as a branch of Linguistics deals with words (lexis is 'word' in Greek). But not only words belong to the sphere of Lexicology. We should also take into consideration their meaningful parts – morphemes represented in word roots and affixes, on the one hand, and certain type of word combination, which are called set-phrases, on the other hand.

We can see that a lecturer introduces herself, explains to the students the objective of the course, brings back to them some basic information from the introductory course of General Linguistics and defines the object of the theory to be acquired. The text includes special terminology (lexicology, sounds, words, morphemes, syntactic patterns, roots, affixes, set-phrases). New terms are explained, and the etymology of the basic term is given. The pace of speech is moderate, the passage is 80 seconds long, the articulation and pronunciation of sentences is very distinct. It is especially important for the Pushkin State Institute of the Russian Language because many students here are foreigners.

After that the lecturer tells her students some important organizational information:

We shall meet twice a week, a lecture on Monday and a seminar on Friday. You can acquire the plan of our lectures and assignments for seminars from our institute site. You will find the recommended manual there, too. Now I ask the monitors of the groups, please send me via e-mail the lists of students present in our lecture. This is my e-mail (written on the blackboard).

The organizational information contains the routine program of classes, specifies additional sources of the course and expresses the request to the monitors to send the lists of students to the lecturer.

Seminars are classes organized for discussion of important topics in a course of lectures. Here is a fragment of discussion:

V.K.: Our seminar today is devoted to values in different types of institutional discourse. I asked you to send me your opinions concerning the values of Internet network discourse. I would like to mention that many students have sent to me very original and thoroughly formulated arguments. Regrettably, there are some students, however, who failed to send me their assignments. Naming no names, please, take it into account. I hope you will do it further on. Well, first, are there any questions?

M.Z.: I have a question.

V.K.: Well?

M.Z.: Should we quote the names or nicknames taken from the network text we take? Or is it better to use abbreviations?

V.K.: Thank you, it is actually a question of investigation ethics. Generally it is recommended not to use real names of the network members in our research, because it is private information.

N.L.: But network is a public territory, isn't it?

V.K.: Yes, Natasha (the names are changed), it is. You know, it is a general recommendation. We understand, of course that we deal with a public sphere which means that people should be responsible for the things they post. It's the first thing, and who will give us the argument for a second one? Yes, Anastasia, please.

A.D.: We know that in the internet discourse many people use nicknames which means that everything they say is very conventional (smiling).

V.K.: That is true. So, I think it is safe in any case to use abbreviations. Agreed?

The format of academic discussion demands that an instructor stimulates students to express their opinions on the topic and do it in an appropriate style. The instructor starts the seminar with a remark concerning the home assignment. Students who have sent their answers must see that their work is noted and evaluated. Those who failed to do the homework should understand that it was not unnoticed. The instructor does not name truants, because it could be an offence to them. In many classes, however, this mode of instructor's communicative behavior is distorted, and open reprimands often take place. After that the instructor asks the students if there are any questions concerning the assignment. The students are encouraged to ask questions and express their arguments in a free mode. It is necessary to note that for some foreign students who joined the Pushkin Institute, such a way of exchanging their views seems inappropriate, they wait for direct invitation to speak. The instructor could have given a short categorical answer to the question from the student, but instead she tries to answer it in such a way that involves students to give their arguments. This excerpt of a seminar shows important features of an academic discussion in modern Russia: an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom, where students may initiate the discussion, the dialogue includes various points of view and is directed at formulating a joint position. A professional point in a discussion is the fact that the instructor explains the principles of an academic discussion mentioning that the question concerns ethics. Students are often named by their first names,

instructors are addressed with their first name and patronymic. Foreign students often apply the address “professor”.

The genre of a consultation has some common points with a seminar, but is performed in a less official manner:

I.L.: Well, Olga, what's the news about our diploma paper?

O.P.: I am writing it. I have some questions to you.

I.L.: What questions?

O.P.: How many textual examples should I collect for my paper?

I.L.: You know, it depends on the topic. Their number should be convincing. Your topic is communicative strategies in social advertising, isn't it?

O.P.: Yes.

I.L.: And how many examples have you collected?

O.P.: 147.

I.L.: Well, I think that will be enough for a diploma paper. You know, we should not insert every textual fragment in your paper as an illustration of the types we have found.

O.P.: Sorry?

I.L.: We have several communicative strategies, and each of them is assigned to definite topics, right? Each topic must be illustrated by a textual example. And each illustration is to be commented upon. Certainly, it would be better if your examples about clean streets would be somewhat equal in number to examples about behavior on the road.

O.P.: Now I see, thank you. My next question is about the supplement. Should I include there all the photos?

I.L.: No, you can give the most convincing and interesting photos of social advertising. What is really important, you should tell the reader the distribution of different types of texts in per cent or in direct numbers. Usually it is done in a form of a table.

O.P.: Yes, I will do it. Thank you.

A consultation is a speech genre of educational discourse aimed at clarification of some difficult or dubious points in the content and organization of a course or any event or document necessary for the course. We can see that a student puts questions to her research advisor not about the content matters, but about the form of writing the paper. Thus, the dialogue is concentrated around the norms and rules of written educational discourse in its academic variety. We should pay attention to interconnected communicative strategies of the interaction quoted. The lecturer shows that she is eager to control the situation and to explain how the things should be done. The student is interested only in technical matters of writing her paper, whereas the advisor explains why this or that way of presentation is recommended. Actually, the advisor helps the student understand the requirements of the department to students' papers, and thus develop the skill of academic writing in general.

7. Conclusion

A socio-pragmatic approach to professional educational discourse makes it possible to determine and describe the communicative behavior of teachers and students in its various genres. The scheme of this discourse includes its basic components – the objective, participants, chronotope, values, strategies and genres. The topic of the discourse as well as its tonality is also relevant for its description. The main trends of educational discourse studies in modern Russia are represented in pedagogical interaction in secondary schools, academic communicative behavior in universities, learners' communicative activity and educational instrumentalities.

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