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**THE SPECIFICS OF DISCOURSE IN CHAT COMMUNICATION:
A RESOURCE FOR IMPROVEMENT**

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Abstract

The paper studies the integrative issue associated with new services for communication. The relevance of the paper is determined by the need to identify a resource for efficient communication. The subject of the research is the specifics of neighbors' communication in the popular WhatsApp messenger. The authentic material (scripts of texts) of intra-group communication in two linguistic cultures – Russia and Switzerland – is significant in the paper. Comparative-contrastive and discursive methods of analysis allow identifying general and particular features of communication in chats. General features are due to the institutional type of discourse, and particular ones are to the personal type. They are determined by the nature of communication, defined in the format of “conventional” (Switzerland) vs “non-conventional” (Russia) communication. Depending on the interaction nature between neighbors in linguistic cultures, the composition and differentiation of speech genres given by the topic is revealed. The common genres for the two linguistic cultures are announcement, congratulations, call for joint work. Unconventional intercourse, characteristic of the Russian chat communication format, conditions the presence of supplementary speech genres (invitation, request), as well as genre diversity (for instance, an announcement as an advertisement of one's product). Maintaining a balance between the opposition components, in which conventionality is assigned a priority status, is a resource for optimizing intra-group communication, in which interaction between subjects from various social groups is performed. Thus, intra-group communication is simultaneously the essence of inter-group communication.

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1. Introduction

The interdisciplinarity of humanitarian comprehension as an actual phenomenon in modern science performs the function of reviving and developing the traditions of human studies. It is value-oriented, and forms the space of ecological communication in order to identify mechanisms for regulating dialogical interaction. The topic under study is in the problem area of human existence in new conditions – a digitalized form of life (Barnes, 2003; Crystal, 2001; Lemke 2003). They have acquired greater significance in various aspects with an increase in the speed of human life – philosophical, sociocultural, and psycholinguistic. The invention of various forms and types of communication at all times seemed to be the fundamental force of social evolution. In contemporary science, the issue of contradictions of civilizational growth, and the achievements of high technologies leading to the humanism crisis become relevant (Akaev & Ismailova, 2021).

The new challenges of society, set by the communicative necessity (reducing time costs, overcoming spatial barriers), are aimed at creating efficient and comfortable forms of communication. Chats as group forms of communication are formats of organizing people united by general interests, jointly solving problems of a professional, educational, creative, domestic, and other nature. All this leads to the emergence of new group chats, surprising with their diversity and unusualness.

Current communication technologies contribute to the differentiation of social media formats (chats, blogs) (Mubarak, 2016; Tameryan et al., 2019) of human communication, expanding the communicative space in which both positive and negative attitudes take place, leading to the corresponding consequences – communicative facilitation/counteraction. Communication difficulties are explained through the problem of meaning, exacerbated by the negative effect of accelerated communication (Shahovskij, 2020).

2. Problem Statement

Actually, the relevance of studies, set back in the last century, aimed at comprehending the discursive space, is increasing. From a linguistic point of view, the concept of “discursive space” (Plotnikova, 2011) is one of the main concepts that indicate the formation of human relations with the environment in various spheres of life, including everyday life in a network format. One of such spaces to be described is the communication of neighbors in chat rooms. If, after the advent of the new century, someone happened to live in different places, not knowing who lived in neighboring apartments for years, not to mention what happened beyond the landing, then with the advent of mobile messengers, we have to know the neighbors, even in absentia. The given issue is actively discussed on the Internet with a pragmatic goal, for instance: “why do you need to register in a general home chat?” The degree of scientific development of the issue reveals the presence of research on the topic of neighborhood in the field of sociology and psychology (Ryaguzova, 2017). Meanwhile, the lack of linguistic papers on the given area allows us to speak about the relevance and novelty of the work undertaken.

3. Research Questions

The research question in the paper is the house-wide chat “Neighbors” in Whatsapp as a specific group communication format, which is represented by verbal (dialogical cues), non-verbal (media files), sometimes paraverbal (smilies) means.

Empirical material – about 400 pages of text (with media files), representing the communication of people united by a common feature – living in small comfortable houses in southern Russia and in central German-speaking Switzerland. The study of the problem in two linguistic cultures allows identifying a resource for improving group chat communication. The material is presented in compliance with ethical standards – the anonymity of communication participants is preserved (there is no indication of personal data – names, phone numbers).

Neighbors’ chat is a kind of the atmosphere indicator of interpersonal relations among the house residents: it allows establishing confederates, social circle, solving domestic problems, gaining real help and support, and discussing various topics. It should be borne in mind that neighbors are a group community differing in a number of criteria – social, age, and psychological. In this regard, various cognitive experience and lifestyle of community members set certain conditions in communication in connection with the individual perception of communicative situations that determine the appropriate genre diversity.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the paper is to model the format of the linguistic and cultural specifics of chats in the Russian and Swiss versions, which is presented in various genres; characterize the genre diversity of chats; establish the dependence of the genre on the topic under discussion; identify a resource for improving the discourse in the chat.

5. Research Methods

The main methods of analysis are discursive, comparative-contrastive. The applied methods are based on the methodology of interdisciplinary research: classical and non-classical concepts of communication theory; functional, anthropocentric, linguacultural approaches; discourse analysis, considering the integrative concepts of linguistics (“discourse”, “discursive practices”, “communicative practices”, “social practices”). Discourse is interpreted in terms of the language of culture (Karasik, 2013). The concept of “practice” characterizes the dynamism of the processes taking place in various spheres of human activity. Communicative practices (Vasilkova, 2008) point to the integrativity of discursive and social practices. Discursive practice is interpreted as a topos, where the problem of “multilayered multiplicity of objects” is solved (Fuko, 2004). In comprehending discursive and any social practice, the main emphasis is on the concepts of “activity” and “social experience” in the “here” and “now” mode (Issers, 2011). Thus, any situation finds or does not find its specific solution in the emotional communication process (Shahovskij, 2020). The synergetic approach (Prigozhin & Stengers, 2021), or

non-classical concept of autopoiesis, is of particular interest in the system of cognitive-communicative analysis (Maturana & Varela, 2019).

6. Findings

Chat discourse is characterized in various categories – participants of communication; purpose, topic of communication; genres of speech; speech formulas. The main goal of the discourse in the chat is the implementation of the information-organizational (regulatory) function. Achieving the goal is relevant in the interaction of communication subjects, in which a special place is given to the chat moderator (chairman of the HOA/Homeowners Association in Russia and the head of the house in Switzerland). His or her task is to broadcast up-to-date information to everyone, to remind the residents of the precise fulfillment of various duties (observance of order and cleanliness in the house and on the territory adjacent to it, timely payment of bills, etc.).

General and specific features of chats in the actualization of speech genres have been revealed when studying the subject in two declared lingua cultures – Russian and Swiss (German-speaking). Regulation of relations in the institutional sphere is based on the principles of a linear and non-linear model of communication.

General and specific characteristics are present in the “*announcement*” genre in two linguistic cultures.

The genre of “*announcement*” of an institutional nature (linear form – an instruction pamphlet from the chairman of the HOA on the 15th day of each month) in Russia has the form: “*From 15 to 18, submission of water meter readings.*” In rare cases, the text of the announcement is partially changed when the moderator forgets about the timely notification, for example, it occurs on the 16th: “*Until the 18th, submission of water meter readings.*” The genre of the informational nature announcement in the Russian chat has a template character, while there are no speech formulas of politeness.

In the Russian chat, an announcement from a moderator in the institutional sphere can also acquire a non-linear character, due to an emotional reaction, a wide commentary on the state of affairs with an expression of dissatisfaction. Therefore, an announcement of an informing and organizing nature, which comments on the need for action (the topic of checking water meters), becomes the basis for controversy in the Russian chat, causes a change in the topic leading to the discourse ideologization: “*Everyone needs to do (about checking meters)!!! Because we did at the same time, 4 years ago!!! If not done, water will be charged according to the standard, and this is not profitable (expensive!!!)*”. The answer of one of the residents of communist views: “*Of course, it's expensive, because the standard for one person was developed under the Soviet regime, now you will be left without pants if you spend so much. Who wants to talk about the charms of socialism, write in a personal. You can't here.*” The resident of the house – A* always defends his position in the group chat, without hiding his political views.

Such communication is not typical for the Swiss chat. It observes the formal implementation of the communication rules (polite cliché of the moderator, which does not require a response from the residents: silence as a sign of consent). For instance: “*Guten Tag, Nachbarn. Wie geht es euch allen? Heute kommen ein paar Mitarbeiter von der Gemeinde, um die Befestigung in jeder Wohnung zu kontrollieren. Wenn sie keine Masken an haben, haltet ihr bitte Abstand. Mit freundlichem Gruss.....*”

(Translation: “Good afternoon neighbors. How are you all doing? Today, several workers from the municipality will come to check the fastening in each apartment. If they are not wearing masks, please keep your distance. With a friendly greeting...”). In this case, there is an active use of template (polite) speech formulas.

The personal discourse unfolding in the chat, in the Russian linguistic culture, unlike the Swiss counterpart, tends to establish non-conventional rules. Some examples from chats:

“Announcement” genre of a personal type contains information of an advertising and marketing nature about the offered goods (products), mainly for the holidays: “Dear neighbors, there is such a set of 2 gingerbreads “Ded Moroz + a cow (symbol of 2021. – for example)”, the height of the gingerbread is 11 cm. Each gingerbread is in an individual bag, everything is packed in a box with a satin ribbon. The price is 400 rubles, when buying from 10 pieces – 370 rubles per each. It is possible to buy gingerbread by the piece. Each gingerbread is packed in a bag with a satin ribbon – 200 rubles a piece.” (This text is accompanied by a media file – a photo of the described goods). There are no such announcements in the Swiss version of chat correspondence between neighbors.

The actualization of the “announcement” genre as an “unexpected offer”/“invitation” of a cultural and leisure nature is also characteristic of the Russian chat: A*: “There are 2 tickets for football, anybody wants? Krasnodar-Ufa at 18:00” (a minute later added: “For free”). B*: “I want. flat 3.” A: “I’ll come in the evening.”

Another genre is “unusual request” and the answer to it – is expressed in a brief exchange of remarks (you should pay attention to the early time of the day): 06:41. A*: “Good morning! Who is not sleeping? Who can I call on the intercom?” B*: “Call flat 17.” This genre is absent in German-speaking communication between neighbors living on the territory of the Swiss Confederation.

The non-linear nature of communication based on the principles of fluctuation, complicity and ownership is of particular interest in the Russian chat. Thus, the actualization of the “complaint” genre is due to the topic “communal force majeure.” The tactic of quoting replicas of the institutional discourse subject, that is, a representative of the IPSC (Independent power supply company) is applied in communication with residents when solving the issue of a temporary lack of electricity on the part of the moderator. Such tactics involve the principle of complicity (thinking of force majeure as a common problem), which can bring balance to the environment. The response remark serves as a means of justification, representing the quotation by the moderator of the responsible person remarks from IPSC: “... “Yes, it’s power supply company! You are sick of calling! Yes, broken wires! Yes, we knew the weather in advance! First, the brigade will repair in A *, then in B *, then at your place! Yes, one team! Yes, it was possible to allocate several brigades in advance, because they knew that there would be such f***! We don't f*know, why not singled out! No questions for me! I don't know to whom! Yes, no bosses!” It is power supply company's answer.” The quoting tactic represents the real state of affairs – the turmoil in the IPSC service, which is expressed in a specific style of replication. The manifestation of disorder in the economy and emotional tension in the institutional sphere serve as an element of indignation (“fluctuation”) that can bring balance to the system of disgruntled neighbors' relations. Some toponyms are encoded in quoting several statements (translating direct speech into indirect speech) of the responsible organization representative, as well as devalued vocabulary, without which this type of

discourse cannot be imagined, since the analyzed topic in the chat is expressed in the corresponding speech genres (“complaint”, “reproach” and “invective”).

The institutional sphere of communication in the genre of “complaint” in the German-speaking part of Switzerland also remains within the framework of conventionality. Discontent does not result in a public attack, but is overcome by stylistic means, balanced by a rhetorical question: “*Jetzt haben die Wohnungen schon 3 Jahre und viel Umtriebe mit der Heizung im Herbst. Muss da nicht von VANOLI’s Seite eine saubere Lösung her mit dem Heizungsbauer?*” (Translation: “*We have been living in these apartments for 3 years now and there is a lot of instability regarding the heating in the fall. Shouldn't there be a reasonable decision on the part of the VANOLI building firm?*”). However, invectives in a latent form are present in the address of individuals who violate the general order: “*Nach Pfirsichen fliegen nun auch Melonenschalen aus dem einen Fenster auf den Rasen bei uns unten... Wenn da ein Schimpanse lebt, dann ok... Falls nicht, bitte in Zukunft auch den Kompost nutzen...*”; “*Leute, ehrlich kann mal passieren aber nich zur Gewohnheit werden... Trotzdem schönen Sonntag allne*” (Translation: “*After peaches, now the melon husks are flying down to our lawn from one window... If there is a chimpanzee living there, then fine... If not, please use this as compost in the future...*”; “*Guys, to be honest, anything can happen once, but when it already becomes a habit... Nevertheless, sunny Sunday to everyone...*”). The format of conventional communication in the presence of an implicit tone of discontent (indignation) is not without a concession, an explicit tone of irony, accompanied by a final polite form of good wishes.

The “warning” genre in the Russian chat, for example, develops the theme of ecology and human health. We are talking about a discussion of the threat of applying 5G technology. Correspondence in the Russian chat turns into a dispute between neighbors (AP* is an active proponent and OP* – opponent, M* – moderator). AP*: “Attention, all the neighbors, near the house where the tire shop is, a high pole is brought, there is a threat of installing a 5G tower. I ask the chairman and everyone to take action and get written confirmation from IPSC that this will not be transferred to cellular operators or other services.” OP*: “In Russia, the use is planned only in 2022.” M*: “Let's see what this pole is.” OP*: “Sleep tight.” AP*: “Do we need it? Even in 22? We have children, grandchildren... You will dump everything in safe places, and we will be irradiated here.” OP*: “I'll tell you a secret, but your phone is also a source of radiation” (ironic). AP*: “You, OP*, should know how 4G and 5G affect the body. Two big differences.” OP*: “I don't see the point in arguing. Read the information carefully, you can buy a cream from radiation.” M*: “We can't resist this machine, and you AP* know. But we can send a letter from the residents to relevant organizations.” AP*: “Of course, there is no point in arguing, because everyone knows your involvement with the current regime.” This is where the whole discussion ends. There are no such direct disputes in the Swiss version of the communication format under consideration. The initial information of a warning nature turns into the genre of “argument”, into an altercation with an ideological component.

The “congratulation” genre is at the intersection of institutional and personal types of discourse. This genre is reduced to congratulations on Christmas and New Year in central Switzerland: “*Wir wollten Euch allen schöne Weihnachten wünschen und senden herzliche Grüsse aus dem Dschungel von Costa*

Rica” (Translation: “We wish you a Merry Christmas and send warm greetings from the jungles of Costa Rica”).

Congratulations on the holidays (New Year, Easter), accompanied by media files, become something more in Russian linguistic culture (for example, in the case of the Great Victory holiday). A sense of unity, a desire to share personal information with neighbors is manifested in them. Congratulations on Victory Day are especially touching. An example of family involvement in the Great Event in a short story from 09/05/2021. M*: *“Happy Victory Day! And my Grandmother. Great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother LA*, grandmother is 93 years old (1), she still cooks herself, although she sees poorly and develops her memory every day. They have been married for 63 years with my grandfather. Both are WWII veterans. Grandpa passed away 4 years ago. But their relationship, relationship to life to people. We learn from them. Shared (2). Because there are few of them left and, thanks God, Grandmother is one of them.”* (the text ends with the “begging hands” pictogram). Sometimes confused syntax (1) and telegraphic style (2) indicate a high degree of the addresser emotionality. In this position, spiritual values affecting the historical, social, and cultural aspects of social development are significant for Russian linguistic culture.

7. Conclusion

The discursive and comparative-contrastive analysis of chats made it possible to determine the discursive model specifics – the features of typical representation (institutional/personal), as well as the initial linguacultural opposition, namely, conventionality (Switzerland)/non-conventionality (Russia). The Russian communicative format is characterized not only by diversity of genres, but also by the differentiation of the genre (personal announcement of an advertising nature; unusual request; unexpected offer). It is also characterized by reproaches, invectivity along with sincerity. In a Russian chat, the moderator finds himself at the center of interpersonal relations between neighbors, which involve him in the process of regulating interaction with the external environment through informal tools. Reproaches, calls for conscience and order are no exception in the communicative format of German-speaking Switzerland, but they are playfully ironic in nature, reduced to a conventional principle. There is no explicit invectivity, in contrast to the Russian chat.

Ecological communication is required in all spheres of human existence, especially in everyday life. A balanced format of communication (conventional/non-conventional), in which conventionality is in a priority status, can be considered a resource for improving the discourse in the chat communication of neighbors. The Russian discursive space, which is characterized by emotionality, is more in need of regulating communicative interaction through the tools of formal communication, both in the institutional and in personal sphere. The chat moderator role is essential. When electing him, it is necessary to consider both his ability to solve economic and social problems, and communicative and speech competencies. However, rules’ knowledge is not enough for a Russian chat moderator for efficient communication: when the conventional approach does not work, it becomes indispensable to include informal tools that operate on the basis of a synergistic principle that creates order out of chaos.

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