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ABOUT THE FEATURES OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE (BASED ON THE EXAMPLES OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES)

Abstract: This article discusses various aspects of the development and functioning of a language mediated by the environment of the Internet, also known in modern linguistics as an Internet discourse. The article analyzes the role of the Internet and its services, in particular, social networks, media, online journalism and entertainment services of the Internet in the formation of this discourse. Various aspects of this language are considered, including stylistic features and special vocabulary. In addition, the influence of the Internet discourse on modern English as a whole is analyzed. The article pays attention to a comparative analysis of the features of the Internet discourse in the Russian and English languages, in particular, borrowings in the Russian-language Internet discourse, examples of direct borrowing, calque, unmotivated neologisms, the use of slang, etc. are analyzed. The article summarizes the most noticeable patterns of the specific process of the Internet-mediated communication, and their impact on the language used in this process, including morphological and stylistic features.

Key words: Discourse, Discursive analysis, Internet discourse, Media Discourse, Slang, Stylistics, Calque, Neologism, Neologization.

Language: English

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Introduction

It is known that linguistics as a branch of scientific knowledge has always been and will be connected with the study of either a certain aspect of language use within community, or the use of its particular layer, therefore, once again demonstrating the fact that linguistics relates to social science. It is also confirmed by the fact that the language itself is a dynamic, rapidly developing phenomenon that constantly goes through changes. The majority of these transformations depend on how certain members of society use language means. The questions of their linguistic peculiarities belong to various branches of language study, including stylistics, semiotics,

discourse analysis etc. The main aspect which remains is the fact that the language and its means evolve depending on the level of their popularity within society. A number of words that were used to depict certain phenomena have already lost their function because of being replaced with newer, modern ones; while some became completely obsolete in the process of civilization, because of disappearance of phenomena and actual concepts they related to from the everyday lives of people.

The main part

Internet technologies and their users create a new discursive environment which, becoming quickly

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popular, transfers to other spheres of life at a fast rate. The reason is the fact that the Internet occupies a stable place in our daily routine as much as television does. Currently, the same social networks have become a “part” of people’s “public image”. There is no surprise that such tendency is visible, first of all, among younger generation audience. Social networks, fulfilling the functions of communication and information exchange, make a considerable contribution in popularization of certain vocabulary that was initially circulating in “virtual” environment that started to gradually step out of these boundaries into other areas of language use. In modern linguistics, there is no sustained term that could generalize all phenomena that appear in the process of communication in internet-mediated environment, or characterize such a language or discourse with one term [1, 148].

Despite this, the language processes themselves are quite obvious and are constantly receiving enrichments, both in English and Russian languages. There are various examples of social network vocabulary that underwent such a process:

“Follow” – a word that probably occupies a place of the most used in the context of social networks. There are several ways with which the word can be translated into Russian language, including “подписаться” (“podpisatsya”); there is also a highly trendy calque “фоловить” (“folovit”). Both words maintain the meaning, which is “subscribe to a certain user or a page”. The latter word, however, has a distinctive “slang” tone.

Another highly popular example is a word “post”, which can be either a verb or a noun. In Russian Internet language, such informal translations like “постить” (“postit”), “запостить” (“zapostit”) are most widespread.

“Block” (“restrict the user on social network or forum”). Currently, Russian Internet discourse frequently exploits informal words with “incorrect” word formation like “блокануть” (“blokanut”), “блокнуть” (“bloknut”).

Reverse action verbs in the context of social networks, and information technology in general, undergo an interesting process. A prefix “un” is the most used prefix used for this purpose: “Unfollow”, “Undo”; while other prefixes with the same meaning, including “dis” (“discharge”) or “de” (“devalue”), do not appear to be used. In Russian, however, loan translations of reversed action verbs do not exist, e.g. “анфоловить” (“anfolovit”).

As can be seen from these few examples, the word that denotes a function or phenomenon of a social network, undergoes through several processes if translated or going into widespread use. Phrases can have both formal translation and informal, less strict means of distribution, most often, in the form of a calque or unmotivated neologization. Informal variants of words are more preferable and, therefore,

occur more often in communication, and this fact provokes a counterquestion about the reasons for this preference. First, the age category of most active internet users, particularly, social networks, is youth, that is more prone to use slang and jargon in everyday language. Second, calque words that “directly” came from English are highly convenient in terms of their direct associativity and easiness in being recognized, which itself serves as the reason for their quicker distribution. It is important to note that, despite initially “restricted” character of using these phrases, modern tendencies show that their use is expanded, and meanings are understood by a wider audience that does not necessarily relate to the area of social network users; i.e. this lexis “firmly” occupies its place in an everyday reality.

A particular, somewhat problematic characteristic of Internet language and its means is its tendency to frequent and drastic changes in the use of a certain lexicon, which results in quick rise and fall in popularity of specific words. It refers, first of all, to new words, words the semantics of which was “modified” by a computer or internet context, neologisms from the area of Internet-discourse etc. As the development of an Internet sphere is very often associated with the use of social networks and media or blogs, most of Internet-mediated words are born in this particular part of it, and recently, we are witnessing leaps from one tendency to another in terms of language use which cannot leave the general shape of a modern language unaffected. For example, such a phrase like “selfie”, being almost infectiously popular at the dawn of its birth in social media and networks, is becoming more and more obsolete nowadays, which, however, is not associated with the loss of its relevance, just because a selfie has been and is an integral part of our lives as long as we have front cameras on our smartphones. Despite this, it is obvious that the phrase itself is heard less and less often, compared to other, newer words that denote currently trending social network functions like “livestream” or “story”. Still, even these words will likely to have the same short lifespan of popularity, because the evolvement of internet as the source of entertainment, and its reinvention will stop with an extremely negligible chance.

Despite the fact that internet-environment discourse is obviously observed, it does not have an outlined term, instead having various phrases that differently include and evaluate its phenomena, for example, “Internet discourse”, “computer discourse”, “virtual discourse” etc. The essence remains the same in all these terms, which is communication that is made possible only in the presence of computer technology, including internet [2, 118].

Communication in Internet environment has many tendencies that never remain in static state, always acquiring new forms and using various

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language techniques as the sphere develops. Basic tendencies of Internet communication are:

1. Common use of slang, especially in Russian Internet discourse, based on the transformation of English words with the use of loan translation (“забанить” (“zabanit”), “блочноуть” (“bloknut”), “фоловить” (“folovit”) etc.)

2. The lexicon’s dependence on environment and functions of a particular Internet service. For example, torrent-trackers actively use terms like “seed” and “leech” that are typical only for the services of such nature.

3. Frequent change of vocabulary trends that depends on the popularity of particular means of entertainment in social networks. For example, such words like “selfie” and “spam” are already becoming less and less visible.

4. Use of contractions in the form of abbreviations that may or may not have a symbolic meaning to save time in the process of communication: “IMHO”, “LOL”, “ASAP” etc.

5. Excessive fragmentation of communication, regardless of the type of message. Let it be a direct message or a comment to the post or a photo, communication on the Internet always strives for maximum briefness, leading to frequent violation of grammar norms, word abbreviation, ellipsis etc.

6. The multimedia nature of communication. New technologies laid the foundation of a new level of communication regardless of the graphic representation of a discourse. Instead of writing words, other ways to communicate can be used, including emoji, images, gif animations, memes etc., that are used even without the accompaniment of words as such, if the message is clear to the addressee without them.

7. Independence of the communication process from extra-linguistic conditions. Internet users can communicate regardless of extra-linguistic factors like distance, current location and time. They may not even know or meet each other in real life.

8. The hybrid characteristics of communication. The process of a dialogue on the Internet does not have an instant character like real-life conversation, i.e. it is similar to correspondence by mail, on the other hand, if comparing the volumes of individual messages, it has properties of real-life communication.

9. The scale of communication. Because of the fact that extra-linguistic factors do not directly create boundaries in Internet communication, users can communicate with as many people as they want and from any part of the world. Moreover, using hashtags as a specific language tool of social networks, a user can share his message and specific interests with an arbitrarily wide audience.

10. The diversity of communication genres, which include: dialogues (conferences and chats),

monologues (blogs, news media), non-public (e-mail) [3, 216].

In many ways, the Internet discourse, its features and style form a new image of a language, the influence of which has trespassed the “virtual” boundaries [4, 69].

Considering constantly evolving characteristics of society, new concepts are always born and enrich the language, which is especially visible in modern times. What makes a difference compared to the past is the presence of the Internet that offers new, innovative ways of information share and distribution including social networks and media, together with more traditional ways like television and radio. It is crucial to pay attention to the fact that the Internet as a technology in general does not present itself as an innovation, because there is no secret that its features and advantages in instant information exchange including e-mail or database development had been intensively used worldwide since the beginning of a new century, and the roots of the emergence of the Internet itself date back to the 1980s. The innovative aspect inside the Internet is the diversity of modern approaches to its derivatives, including software, various platforms like web-sites, services, mobile and desktop applications etc. This is the reason why the main factor of innovation on the Internet depends on the developers of such services and people involved in the content creation for these systems. Examples include various Web platforms of distance education, file sharing, information services and services of entertainment. All these spheres have their own contributions to the image of a modern language, introduce new language concepts and related words, often completely new ones, it has to be said.

Therefore, social networks in the current “digital” reality do not have just one, but several functions, and those that have an important effect on certain language processes related to discourse and stylistics, are not directly affiliated with the primary aim of social networks, which is to socialize and keep in touch between individual users. Internet services serve as a particular platform for different fields of activity and can be filled with diverse information content. This implies the same diversity in the language used in accordance with these fields [5, 11].

It is important to take into account the role of Internet journalism in the formation of a new Web discourse. In the period of a modern language, especially if we talk about the English language, journalism in general has played a vital role. It is known and recognized that throughout the history, the branch of journalism was fundamental in popularization of new terms and words related to various innovative spheres, including science, art, mass culture and sports. It is also important to admit that the journalism made it possible to properly understand various scientific phenomena that were previously unknown or difficult to be comprehended

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in the eyes of general public, by adapting scientific terminology in the form of impressive, accessible and easily memorable phrases. Examples of such work include terms like “Big Bang” and “Black Hole”, that are known and understood by any modern school student, whereas at the beginning, these astronomic discoveries were complicated and alien to an everyday reader. Journalists made it possible for these discoveries to be popularized and introduced into an everyday language.

In general, the process of discourse that takes place in the field of information exchange, is aided by the functionality of social networks. Nowadays, an individual learns the majority of information and latest news about the world through social networks, in which almost every respectable information agency or entertainment service had already opened a dedicated page. Social websites offer a possibility of practically instant information transfer at a faster pace and higher volumes compared to traditional mass media. It is important to notice that such abundance of information channels on the Web, particularly, in social media, stimulates a wide choice of language styles, with the help of which, various discourse types are formed. All of these discourse types are aimed to deliver information in the most effective way, let it be a public journalistic discourse, entertainment discourse etc [6, 2]. We are currently witnessing an enormous variety of online publications of different directions, including sport, hobbies, art, science, culture, travel and many others. The presence of social networks in such a context occupies an obvious place and role and influences the language characteristics of not only users, but of Internet-journalists themselves. Just like in traditional journalism, language and its stylistic devices play a significant role on the Web, just because news bulletins on social networks are accompanied by brief but effective headlines to attract the audience and keep readers' interest. An interesting peculiarity of the language of an Internet journalism, especially the one used in entertainment, is a possibility to “blur” the boundaries between formal and informal layers of vocabulary, use slang and vernacular, and apply different styles within one text [7, 752].

In the guise of social networks, one can also trace another extremely important circumstance, which is their multimedia character. Our communication online is not limited by a graphical representation of words anymore, it can now include other ways to convey a message, express ourselves and share information with the help of media like videos and photos. Therefore, the borders between spoken and written discourse, formal and informal language get erased, and the ways to express our emotions and opinion are broadened [8, 141].

Also, the tendency to save the language means takes an obvious place – it is sometimes easier to send a photo or video instead of a possibly longer verbal

explanation, and the high number of existing abbreviations in online messaging like LOL, IMHO, ASAP once again confirms the aforementioned words. Such characteristics of Internet-based communications were made possible after its switch to Web 2.0 technologies that turned static web use into an interactive process which resulted in changing the way we use it [9, 206].

The Internet and its possibilities are a great source of language change, often with the formation of authentic slang layer. It is significantly visible in the case of Russian Internet discourse replete with borrowings from English, mainly due to the fact that initially the field of information technology in Western countries was developed and popularized earlier [10, 113].

Nevertheless, the language of the Internet and its influence on overall language characteristics is not always positive. A high number of slang phrases and words in the Internet discourse inevitably leads to a stylistic shift of the language towards an informal style; many terms and words that depict the same concepts in a neutral way are being lost and forgotten, and even may become completely obsolete in favor of a more popular slang equivalents. It is especially visible in contemporary Russian computer discourse, in which slang words often prevail over neutral terms of the same meanings. For instance, a term “flash drive” is used in the Russian language in two variants, the first one, “флеш-накопитель” (“flesh-nakopitel”) belongs to an official, stylistically neutral translation, the variant which is almost never used in an everyday spoken language, except for official instructions; with speakers preferring to use a slang word “флешка” (“fleshka”).

It is important to admit that the process of stylistic shift of an Internet-based discourse is more obvious in other languages compared to English, while in the English language Internet (and computer) discourse, this problem does not have such a tangible character, probably because of the fact that many new terms initially belonged to a neutral layer of vocabulary, including the phrase “flash drive”.

Conclusion

The further development of the Internet-mediated language depends on the volume of development of its related field, which, most likely, will only gain momentum regarding its innovation. In addition, the language of the Internet also depends on what the nature of the use of the Internet will be in the future - whether it will be even more entertaining, or will take on a more academic tone. Also, in many respects, all its trends depend on the new generation and how and in what form they will use language tools in an environment that is already inherent to them from birth, which affects the future of the Internet discourse in general. Whatever the processes in this area are, they will undoubtedly be of great interest to

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linguists and researchers of other related fields of science.

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