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University Discourse in Computer-mediated Communication: Philosophical, Sociological and Cultural Grounds for Linguistic Description

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Abstract

Being the center and the result of cognitive strains made by many people – scholars, theologians, philosophers, representatives of art, and aimed at maintenance of high-level searching for truth, good and beauty, for the truth of objective reality in the society – the University plays an outstanding part in life of countries and peoples, stipulating stable discussion of the problem of idea or mission of the University. The paper provides a brief review of fundamental classical and post-modern philosophical conceptions of mission of the University which are relevant for linguistic investigation of the University discourse. The University discourse is seen as a complex and polyphonic phenomenon existing on the point of intersection of different kinds of discourse and incorporating them through basic concepts, demanding, therefore, for lingua-cognitive description. The objectives facing the modern University include integration into the global educational process implementing mostly by means of computer-mediated communication. Hence, the object of prospective research is determined – the computer-mediated University discourse, which hasn't been studied in details yet. A set of features of computer-mediated communication is singled out from all the conceptions modern linguistics has at its disposal at present. The investigation of computer-mediated University discourse can be topical and necessary both for contemporary linguistic knowledge and for humanities in general.

1. Introduction

The University, established in Europe at the beginning of the second millennium has always been the heart of cultural traditions, scientific thought and education, exerting an enormous effect on development of economy and politics, providing the State with fundamental knowledge, advanced scientific ideas, forming social views. It also has always been in the focus of unceasing discussions and numerous scientific investigations.

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One of burning issues, which is of constant interest for philosophers, sociologists and pedagogues and considered as a guideline for linguistic description of the University discourse, is the problem of mission or idea of the University, because according to Heidegger's opinion every science is philosophy, and it gets its power of existence from philosophy (Heidegger, 1995). For linguistics with its concentration mainly on the processes, peculiarities and laws of communication within the University, philosophical understanding of the idea of the University is one of big importance because any process of communication at the University is determined by a special aim, which is specified both by the mission of the particular University and by the University as a sociocultural institution. The concept "Idea of the University" introduced as far back as by W. von Humboldt has been often used by scholars due to its integrity, precision and volume and we consider it as a synonym to the concept "mission of the University". We suppose that nearly all representatives of contemporary philosophy have ever touched upon the issue of mission of the University.

The mission of the University is seen as a strategic aim, reflecting the purpose of its being and it has to form collective consciousness of the organization, enlist the efforts of the staff to achieve corporative goals, in other words, mission of the organization embodies philosophy and purpose of the organization, determining the values, beliefs and principles forced the activities of the University staff. In accordance with the position of some scientists the mission accounts for the essence and purpose of an educational institution, sets the goals and means of their achievement, orientates behavior of the staff and associates them, forms corporative culture and image of the University and influences on the social attitudes to it (Akinf'eva, 2000).

2. Mission of the University from the standpoint of Humanities

The essence of the University mission is considered differently both by the Universities seeking to be centers of science, education and culture, and by scholars, dealing with the study of the University phenomenon. After studying a number of perspectives to determine the mission of the University two main approaches are evident: a traditional one viewing the University according to the direct meaning of the word "University" and a managerial one (Meshkov, 2012). Scholars following the first approach give the mission of the University the same status as to the functions of higher education and make redundant the discussion about the significance of educational institution in the society. The managerial approach sees the University as a bearer of advanced ideas necessary to form a positive image of a particular educational institution in the society (Meshkov, 2012).

It should be noted that some scholars' research concerning the University mission is proceeded from the meaning of the word "universitas" (totality), considering it as a basic concept, which determines the significance of the University as a social institution and connecting it with the University mission (Pogosjan, 2011). The analysis of currently published works focusing on the University mission has resulted in the conclusion, that a lot of arguments and counterarguments in scholars' discussions are based on or referred to Humboldt's ideas (Krejsler, 2011), (Krejsler, 2006). The idea of the University by W. von Humboldt is based on the fact of trinity of the University: the unity of pedagogues and students, equal in their aspiration for knowledge, which is not constant and is to be disseminated, the unity of research and training, combining the processes of knowledge transfer and renewal of the process creating the knowledge, the unity of knowledge of all sciences. Therefore, the model of University by Humboldt includes training, research and cultural and educational functions (Davydov, 2004).

In his attempts to determine a dominant idea in the University mission, Ortega y Gasset gives primary importance to communion of the man with cultural values, providing him with life-relevant ideas and to the transfer of a particular amount of special knowledge required by the chosen profession at the University. He doesn't consider science as a basic function of the University although the University is inseparable from science, and professional training is not identified with scientific work, because training is to transmit special systematic knowledge (Ortega I Gasset, 2003).

For M. Heidegger, in contrary, the main goal of the University consists in carrying out scientific research (Heidegger, 1995). According to M. Heidegger's position, students and pedagogues are to be involved into science, which is to correlate with faculties existing within the University in a definite way.

Jaspers, following Humboldt's ideas, emphasized the significance of scientific research at the University. But the University mission wasn't reduced by Jaspers only to familiarization of students with scientific research, among the essential goals of the University there was training, education and research. Moreover, these three goals are seen as an inseparable unity in the University idea – "the top and essential principle of the University is the tie between research and training … the best researcher is the only best teacher … it is he who can show the process of cognition in spite of demonstrating the dead results of sciences" [9]. Research and training contribute to the development of intellectual culture, therefore, the University mission consists in research, education (knowledge transfer) and culture. The University is to implement the unity of intellectual, social and educational functions (Mished, 1991). The society always has a demand for a social institution, which is able "to ensure the unity of such factors as succession in culture, successful orientation of the man in current life and his willingness to bring the future nearer – to come into tomorrow. It is possible due to the unity of three social systems: education, culture and science at the University" (Ogorodnikova, 1997).

However, contemporary Humanities know another understanding of the significance of the University in modern society, formulated by philosophers – post-modernists. Lyotard thinks that the substantiation of the University significance developed by German classical philosophy has lost its legitimating power nowadays, the reasons of de-legitimating social and historical importance of science and the University are as follows: "growth and success of capitalism, on one hand, and embarrassing development of engineering, on the other hand" (Lyotard, 1998). Ridings also assumes, that the University has been getting the form of a market-oriented corporation providing educational services with the corresponding seeing it by the society: "The fact that students consider themselves as consumers isn't a delusion anymore, the modern University is transforming from the ideological instrument of the State into an officially organized and relatively autonomous consumer-oriented corporation" (Ridings, 2010). Transformation of education into an educational service is not a simple change of a name; it concerns the matter of the University activity. "…The Universities and institutions of higher education conform the requirement to form competences, not ideals – Lyotard writes, - the knowledge transfer provides the system with players, able to play the part on their posts in a right way, the latter are required by institutions" (Lyotard, 1998). In other words, the post-modernists realize that degradation of the University is caused by the subordination of science and education to the laws of market relations, but they interpret marketization of science and education as a completely imminent process, which can't be withstood. The post-modernists don't bring forward any constructive program of the University development, and offer to live "on its ruins", supposing that the only thing we can do is "to find a place on these ruins" (Ridings, 2010).

We believe that the controversy devoted to "highlighting" the mainstream goal in the University mission has its philosophical point. Moreover, the ideas of the University dominating in one or another culture are found in the models of education, among which the scholars traditionally speak about the German model of the research University and the British model of the intellectual University. The Russian University follows Humboldt's idea of trinity and sets the educational, scientific and training goals.

Hermann Heimpel, who continued Ortega y Gasset's reasoning considered the University as a complex structure, the University for him was not only an institution of higher education, but a company with its management, office workers, workers, members of production department, drivers and nurses, that is the whole world, closed but incorporated into the society (Heimpel, 2003).

Therefore, the University can be viewed as a particular kind of practical activity involving the interaction of lots of people, playing their social parts within the institution of higher education. The sphere of practical interests and influence of the modern University is undoubtedly extensive but the main point is that the University impacts on the whole life of contemporary people, giving to them reliable instruments of self-development, professional mobility and flexibility.

3. An attempt to determine the University discourse from the standpoint of linguistics

One of the problems, conditioned by the complexity of the University phenomenon, is the problem of the University discourse. As we have already mentioned, the discussions about the University predestination, its mission, about the polyphonic nature and multi-aspects of University reality is relevant for linguistic description of the

University discourse, because they can help to solve the problem of the essence of the University discourse and its further description.

As the University discourse is one of a complex nature it is impossible to reduce this kind of discourse to the discourse of science or to the pedagogical discourse; the pedagogical discourse is developing not only at the University, but also at school. The University discourse is aimed at knowledge transfer followed by joint searching for the truth, the discourse of science is aimed mainly at solution of complex scientific problems.

We think, that the statement of some scholars about the conglomerate nature of the University discourse is quite rightful (Kirillova, 2010). The conglomerate character is conditioned by interaction and interpenetration of pedagogical, scientific, administrative, ceremonial, sport and professional discourses – depending upon the specialization of the institution of higher education – within the University discourse (Astafurova, 2013). The complexity of the phenomenon of the University life is unquestionable and bases on the interaction of lots of things, "influencing the dynamics, density and mixed character of the University communicative environment" (Maksimov, 2010). However, the leading positions are given by the same scholars to the pedagogical and scientific discourses because they are oriented at development and self-development of a personality at the University considered as the center of education and science (Astafurova, 2013). This point of view summarizes all presented in contemporary linguistics discussions dealing with the concept "the University discourse" and the problem of its reducing or not-reducing to the pedagogical or scientific discourses only. The kind of communication named "academic discourse" (we consider it as the University scientific and pedagogical discourse) can be viewed as a constituent part of the University discourse. The academic discourse is defined by the scholars as "regularly organized speech interaction, possessing extra-linguistic and linguistic features, and using a definite system of professionally-oriented signs with taking into consideration status-and-position characteristics of main participants of communication (scholars/lecturers and students in the sphere of the University education" (Kulikova, 2009).

Such complex understanding of the University discourse determines the vectors of its linguistic description, mentioned in works by Astafurova and Olyanich: verbal-semantic, lingua-cognitive and motivation levels. The verbal-semantic research focuses on grammar and paradigmatic and semantic and associative relations between words, the lingua-cognitive investigation includes concepts, having hierarchical and coordinative relations. The motivation level studies intentions, "actualizing in definite communicative situations with the shared parts, common for corresponding spheres of communication; forms of precedential texts of culture are stereotypical units of this level" (Astafurova, 2013).

The contemporary Russian linguistics has addressed to the problem of the University discourse for several times, having studied particular aspects of this complex phenomenon (Dimova, 2004), (Burmakina, 2014). However, a comprehensive linguistic description including the analysis both of the communicative interaction between the main participants of the University discourse "lecturer – student" and discourse practices taking place on the periphery of this discourse hasn't been known yet. We think that the polyphonic and complex University discourse is to be studied from the view of lingua-cognitology, finding basic concepts, which form the lingua-cognitive space of this discourse. A comparative study of basic concepts forming the discourse of different educational traditions (German, British, French and Russian Universities) is also possible and can be useful for fundamental description of the University discourse.

4. The Internet and its features relevant for linguistic investigation of University discourse

At present educational processes are impossible without the global information and communication medium of the Internet. Its facilities used in the educational processes can help to solve lots of challenges facing cotemporary education, among theses problems there is the necessity to "become global and integrate with the global University, find one's niche in the local education, develop a model of partnership with the society, restructure into the real corporation of masters and students, create a concept of reflexive educational technology in contemporary production and transfer of knowledge" (Sogomonov, 2002).

The Internet as a global communication medium is investigated by the representatives of different sciences, including philologers (Galichkina, 2012), who have determined main features of the computer-mediated

communication. The constitutive principles of computer-mediated communication are viewed by E.N. Galichkina in her doctor thesis. The scholar suggests the following parameters: 1) bimodality, which is understood as a possibility of two communication modes – actual and virtual ones; 2) metalinearity consisting in the hypertext; 3) creolization – a possibility to put nonverbal (multimedia or iconic signs) into the sequence of verbal signs (Galichkina, 2012).

Besides the constitutive features the additional parameters caused by the influence of contemporary civilization are suggested by the scholar. These parameters are as follows: 1) Americanization – penetration of norms of communicative behavior typical for American culture as the main source of globalization culture; 2) juvenilism – orientation at norms of play behavior as a dominating example of modern mass culture 3) virtualization – reverse influence of communication in the Internet on actual communication in its different genres; 4) self-presentation – attracting one's attention to the company image to promote the content seen as a good or a product; 5) feteshization – appraisal transformation of the worldview caused by seeing the world as the computer, by the transfer of peculiarities of the instrument onto people using the instrument (Galichkina, 2012).

5. Conclusions

In the light of presented features of computer-mediated communication (we consider them the most total, reflecting both the current level of developed technologies and the corresponding linguistic works dealing with the Internet communication), we suppose it is urgent and necessary to analyze the computer-mediated University discourse viewed linguistically. This research will help to reveal presence/absence of changes in the conventional University discourse caused by the channel of communication and their verbalization. We consider the investigation of the computer-mediated University discourse as the promising one, because it can supplement the investigations of some other institutional discourses in computer-mediated communication.

Acknowledgements

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