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ЯЗЫК КАК ОТРАЖЕНИЕ СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНЫХ НОРМ И МОДЕЛЕЙ ПОВЕДЕНИЯ

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Аннотация

В статье делается попытка рассмотреть язык как культурно-специфический и социально обусловленный феномен. Люди идентифицируют себя и других не только с помощью языка, но и посредством моделей поведения, типичных для данного сообщества. Социальные конвенции и культурные нормы традиционно принятого поведения являются продуктом сообществ, образованных носителями языка. Язык, использованный людьми, отражает их идентичность в социальном и культурном плане. Вместе с тем, язык формирует культуру и менталитет личности. Этот процесс – не одностороннее влияние; это – взаимодействие.

Ключевые слова: взаимодействие языка и культуры, социо-культурный опыт, нематериальные и материальные ценности, социальное положение.

Introduction

A nation's language is a reflection of its culture, psyche and modes of thought and behavior. Language is culture-bound and socially conditioned; it expresses cultural reality. People who share values, attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, behavioral patterns, etc. identify themselves as members of a social group and acquire common ways of viewing the world. When people express ideas, beliefs, facts, events, opinions they refer to common experience and shared knowledge accumulated over centuries. They do it through language, which reflects speakers' attitudes and beliefs, their points of view which are also shared by others. The language that people use refers to common cultural and social experience. Speakers of a language identify themselves and others through the use of this particular language, i.e. their language reflects their identity socially and culturally; on the other hand, language can be said to shape one's culture and mentality – this is interaction rather than one way influence. Cultural differences are reflected in language in profound ways, and scientific research provides solid evidence that our mother tongue can affect how we think and how we perceive the world.

Main part

People identify themselves and others not only through language but behavioural patterns, typical of a given community. Social conventions and cultural norms of traditionally accepted behaviour are the product of communities of language users, “culture can leave deeper marks exactly where we do not recognize it as such, where its conventions have been imprinted indelibly on impressionable young minds...” [Deutscher, 2011, 7]. Their attitudes, values, and beliefs are strengthened and backed up through social and cultural institutions like the



government, the religion, the educational institutions, the workplace, the legal system, etc. Not only are these backed up through social and cultural institutions but they are also reflected in the way members of a given social community use language. Not only the lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological types of linguistic organization differentiate these speakers from others in terms of their language use but also what they say and how they say it make them different from other language communities and groups within those communities.

It turns out that the most significant connections between language, culture and thought may be found where they are least expected, in those places where common sense would suggest that all cultures and all languages should be exactly the same.

For example, according to Kate Fox, a well-known English anthropologist, British introductions and greetings tend to be uncomfortable, clumsy and inelegant as opposed to the American firm and friendly handshake.

“Hands are half extended and then withdrawn or turned into a sort of vague wave, there may be awkward, hesitant moves towards a cheek-kiss or some other form of physical contact such as arm-touch – as no contact at all feels a bit unfriendly – but these are also often aborted half-way.

“This is excruciatingly English: over-formality is embarrassing, but so is an inappropriate degree of informality” [Fox, 2014, 38]. The same observation had been made by George Mikes many years before in “How to be an Alien”: “The aim of introduction is to conceal a person’s identity. It is very important that you should not pronounce anybody’s name in a way that the other party may be able to catch it...

If he stretches out his hand in order to shake yours, you must not accept it. Smile vaguely, and as soon as he gives up the hope of shaking you by the hand, you stretch out your own hand and try to catch his in vain. This game is repeated until the greater part of the afternoon or evening has elapsed” [Mikes, 1966, 17].

On the other hand, “The ‘brash American’ approach Kate Fox continues, ‘Hi, I’m Bill from Iowa’, particularly if accompanied by an outstretched hand and beaming smile, makes the English wince and cringe. The American tourists and visitors I spoke to during my research had been both baffled and hurt by this reaction. ‘I just don’t get it’, said one woman. ‘You say your name and they sort of wrinkle their noses, like you’ve told them something a bit too personal and embarrassing’. ‘That’s right’, her husband added. ‘And then they give you this tight little smile and say ‘Hello’ – kind of pointedly not giving their name, to let you know you’ve made this big social booboo. What the hell is so private about a person’s name, for God’s sake?’” [Fox, 2014, 39].

These appear to be different manifestations through the two most institutionalized varieties of English: British understatement versus American overstatement.

Another culture-bound situation would not be unwelcome in this connection. Americans have been socialized into responding ‘Thank you’ to any compliment, as if they were acknowledging a friendly gift: ‘I like your sweater! – ‘Oh, thank you! I like it too’.

The English pattern of behaviour in this situation tends to be quite different. Going back to “Watching the English” by Kate Fox: “The pattern is as follows. The opening line may be either a straight compliment, such as ‘Oh, I like your new haircut!’ or a combination of a compliment and a self-critical remark: ‘Your hair looks great; I wish I had gorgeous hair like you – mine’s so boring and mousy. The counter-compliment rule requires that the response to either version contains a self-deprecating denial, and a ‘counter-compliment’, as in ‘Oh, no! My hair’s terrible. It gets so frizzy – I wish I could have it short like you, but I just don’t have the bone structure; you’ve got such good cheekbones!’...” [Fox, 2014: 54].

When she asked English women why they could not just accept a compliment, and how they would feel about someone who just accepted a compliment, without qualification, and didn’t offer one in return, the typical response was that this would be regarded as impolite,



unfriendly and arrogant – 'almost as bad as boasting'. One woman replied, 'Well, you'd know she wasn't English!' [Fox, 2014: 54].

Is this as simple as “understatement” versus “overstatement”? Some might argue this may be English hypocrisy versus American outspokenness and openness. But this is stereotyping of course: stereotypes, as we are all well aware can be very dangerous.

Interestingly, the Russians tend to follow the English pattern of behaviour rather – they downplay the compliment, minimize its value and sort of feel embarrassed and try vehemently to justify themselves:

– I like your shoes. They're nice!

– Oh, they're really old. And they cost so little. Yours are much more stylish!

Such a view of cultural norms and social patterns of behaviour focuses on the ways of thinking, behaving and valuing that members of the same language community share.

What accounts for all these variations in social patterns and cultural norms? And, most importantly, what accounts for these variations being expressed in language in many different ways?

Different factors must be at work, such as history and geography (climate, topography, landscape), and not only that: frequency of language usage affected by trends and tendencies, most widely spread at a particular period of time; social bonding signalling social standing; the influence of ethnic groups: the American culture, for example, is a mixture of different foreign cultures which have been fused with Anglo-Saxon base.

From a historical perspective social patterns and cultural norms are identified over time, registered in language and passed down from one generation to another. Moreover, the social communities in each generation represent themselves through cultural heritage and material values – assets both tangible and intangible – such as schools, museums, libraries, corporations, the media, technological achievements, works of art, pop culture, etc.

Intangible assets could be related to purely culture bound notions, such as *understatement*, *overstatement*, *modesty*, *fairplay*, *privacy*, *hypocrisy*, *reserve*, *politeness*, *eccentricity*, *compromise*, *class-consciousness*, *stiff upper lip*, *anti-intellectualism*, *exceptionalism*, etc. – concepts not visible to the naked eye.

In other words, this representation of social communities expresses cultural and social variations through language. These variations, further on, are bound to produce varying terminologies in different institutions like education, governmental system, banking, etc. To illustrate, *assistant professor*, *associate professor*, *president* in the USA, *lecturer*, *senior lecturer or reader*, *vice chancellor* in the UK; in the US a candidate *runs* for office, in the UK a candidate *stands* for office, an American candidate *is nominated*, while an English candidate *is named* by his party, *a mutual fund*, *common stock*, *a checking account*, *a savings account* in the US, *a unit trust*, *ordinary shares*, *a current account*, *a deposit account* in the UK. It is possible to consider differences in the terminologies of other spheres of life, such as religion, law, medicine, sports, etc. in different “Englishes”. The discussion, in fact, could be endless.

Language is such a complex, sensitive and flexible reflection of human behaviour and mentality that people use it instinctively to meet their local communicative needs. No standard language (and this is especially true of English – the *lingua franca* of today) is ever completely immune to variability; no variety of language ever stands still, or is used by different regional communities and social groups within those in exactly the same way.

Related to this is probably the most interesting, and certainly the least understood, factor of all, social bonding. William Labov studied the accents of New York City and found that they were extremely complicated and diverse. In particular, he studied the sound of *r* in words like *more*, *store* and *car*. In the 1930s such *r*'s were never voiced by native New Yorkers, but over the years they have come increasingly to be spoken – if not always. Whether or not people voiced the *r* in a given instance was thought to be largely random. But Labov found that there



was actually much more of a pattern to it: people were using *r* as a way of signalling their social standing. The higher one's social standing, the more often the *r*'s were flickered, so to speak. More than that, Labov found that people used or disregarded the *r* as social circumstances demanded. He found that sales assistants in department stores tended to use many more *r*'s when addressed by middle-class people than when speaking with lower-class customers. Actually, there was very little randomness involved.

Interestingly, a similar observation illustrating the utmost importance of social standing in the English society is made in "Watching the English". "Along with the lists of ingredients and calorie-counts, almost every item of English food comes with an invisible class label... Socially, you are what you eat – and when, where, and in what manner you eat it, and what you call it, and how you talk about it" [Fox, 2014, 305]. The popular novelist Jilly Cooper quotes a shopkeeper who told her, "When a woman asks for back I call her 'madam'; when she asks for streaky I call her 'dear'". "Nowadays, in addition to these two different cuts of bacon, one would have to take into account the class semiotics of extra-lean and organic bacon, *lardons*, *prosciutto*, *speck* and serrano ham (all favoured by the 'madam' class rather than the 'dear', but more specifically by the educated-upper-middle branch of the 'madam' class), as well as 'bacon bits', pork scratchings, and bacon-flavoured crisps (all decidedly 'dear'-class foods, rarely eaten by 'madams')". [Fox, 2014, 54].

But it would be unwise to think that in such a class-conscious culture there should be no guidelines (on a scientific basis) on what to say and what not to say in order to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding in terms of class bonding and social standing. There are seven words ("the seven deadly sins" as labelled by Kate Fox) that the English uppers and upper-middles regard as class indicators:

pardon (an upper-middle will say 'Sorry?'; an upper-class and a working-class person will both just say 'What?')

toilet (the correct upper-middle/upper term is 'loo' or 'lavatory')

serviette (upper-middle and upper-class will say 'napkin')

dinner (it is a working-class indicator if used to refer to the midday meal; it should be called 'lunch')

settee (if it is a 'sofa' it is upper-middle or above)

lounge (only middle-middles and below say 'lounge'; otherwise it is 'sitting room')

sweet (when misapplied the word is a "deadly sin": the sweet course at the end of a meal is called the 'pudding' – never the 'sweet', or 'afters', or 'dessert', which are unacceptable words).

People from other cultures might think this is a joke but these observations are based on cultural and sociolinguistic research carried out by a well-known English anthropologist.

Learning a foreign language implies learning more about the target language culture and there will always be some facts and information which prove the truth of the observations, related to the class system in England. An extract from an article published in 'The Daily Mail' in April 2007 can serve as evidence to support "the deadly sins" rule. The article describes Kate Middleton's (Prince William's girlfriend) parents to the Royal Family: "How would you feel if your son introduced you to his girlfriend's parents, and the mother said "pleased to meet you" rather than "how d'you do'?" Or asked if she could use the toilet than the lavatory or the loo?" [Wilson, 2007]

According to the reports of some slightly-too-gleeful royal friends on Sunday, these were some of the gaffes made by the unfortunate Carole Middleton, mother of Kate. Among those who surround the Royal family, there was, apparently, great unease at Kate's background. Her parents run a mail order children's party business and her mother used to be an air hostess.

It all added up to a shocking lack of class, we are told. One commentator snobbishly announced that Kate's upbringing was "solidly middle class but lacking in the sort of breeding..."



so necessary to becoming a king's consort". The Queen, reportedly, "couldn't believe it" when Carole said "pleased to meet you".

In this country, there are dozens of such class indicators. If you say "notepaper" rather than "writing paper"; if you say "spectacles" rather than "glasses"; if you say "serviette" for "napkin", you are almost certainly a member of the middle classes, rather than upper.

The truth is, that there is a class system in England. It isn't enough for some people to be rich – they want to look down on hard-working people such as the Middletons. Hence, the unpleasant mockery of Kate Middleton by William's braying friends who would call his girlfriend "Doors To Manual", a slighting reference to her mother's former employment as an air hostess.

The metropolitan and upper classes have been, and always will be, snobbish, cliquish and exclusive. You fight to get in among them, if that is your ambition, and even when you think you have arrived, everyone "knows" your true social origins."

All cultures of course have a social hierarchy and methods of signalling social status. There are many other class indicators – such as one's taste in clothes, furniture, cars, books, decoration, ways of entertainment, etc... – but language (one's speech) is the most unmistakable and most obvious. Indeed, it is usually language – much more so than clothing, furnishing, or other externals – which is the chief signal of our social identity. Britain is usually said to be linguistically much more class-conscious than other countries where English is used as a first language.

Conclusion

With all the grammatical intricacies, different accents and deviations from standard vocabulary, with all the unlimited manifestations of cultural and social variations, the regional varieties of English, one might think, could be endangered by becoming like separate languages. It is pointless to ask how many dialects of English there are: there are indefinitely many, depending on how detailed scientists wish to be in their studies, but according to R. Quirk "we need to see a common core or nucleus that we call 'English' being realized in the different actual varieties of the language that we hear or read" [Quirk et al., 1989, 13].

The fact that the 'common core' dominates all the varieties means, that however remote a variety may be, it has running through it a set of grammatical and other characteristics that are present in all others. It is presumably this fact that justifies the application of the name "English" to all the varieties.

Language varieties are not just matters of localities and regions (there are also occupational, ethnic, class and sub-class varieties); it appears that these are not matters of size and population dispersal either. A striking similarity between Australia and North America is the general uniformity of speech compared with Britain. The varieties are of course more obviously numerous in the long-settled Britain than in the more recently settled North America or in the still more recently settled Australia and New Zealand.

Variation is far more a matter of cultural identity. Culture encompasses all aspects of our behavior that have evolved as social conventions and are transmitted through learning from generation to generation.

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