Mitigative Strategies of Self-Evaluation in German Linguoculture

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Abstract: The article deals with studying the strategy of mitigating the evaluation intention in potentially conflictogenic situations which traditionally include request, refusal and evaluation situations. Speech behavior of German-speaking communicants in self-evaluation situations is analyzed. Mitigative strategies correlating with the politeness maxima can be both conventional and individual representing communicants’ linguocreative opportunities. Mitigative style of communications behavior is characterized by its focus on the recipient’s expectation. The evaluative mitigation strategies under analysis are determined by linguocultural specificity of discourse practices of a specific ethnic society.

Keywords: Mitigation · Politeness category · Evaluation · Image · Communicative strategy · Linguoculture

INTRODUCTION

The most characteristic feature of the contemporary linguistic researches is integrative approach to studying linguistic phenomena stipulated by involving the homolouquens linguistic personality into the center of the research interest in the whole variety of its performance in the communication. The problem of optimizing the speech communication, conditions of the communicative contact efficiency, the influence of communicants’ social characteristics on the interaction conditions become the object of the focused attention in social psycholinguistics, ethnical psycholinguistics, communication science [1-3]. In its turn, it naturally caused active development of the strategic direction in the linguistic science. At the present time it is generally acknowledged that the strategic character of communication defines the speaker’s opportunity to make the speech choice of the most appropriate language means for the implementation of his communicative intentions in each specific communication situation. The ability to adequately choose the language material to verbalize ones intentions taking into account the communication situation and the personality of the communicative partner is one of the basic components of the speaker’s communicative competence that is formed in the process of the personality’s socialization.

Each speech action of communicants, each decision in favor of any communicative strategy is always a result of the interaction of conventional and individual factors.

Main Part: It is known that, as a rule, any communicative contact starts according to a specific scenario, scripts allowing interactants to choose definite models of the speech behavior and relevant communicative roles. Conventional component of the speech contact plays an important role in implementing both explicit and implicit intentions of communicants. Basic conventions regulating verbal interaction include the Politeness principle based on the rule of “saving face” of both the speaker and his communication partner [4]. In spite of the universal character of the basic postulates of the polite communication, norms and rules of the speech behavior are always characterized by a definite ethnic and cultural specificity. The knowledge of national and cultural peculiarities of the communicatively correct and situational appropriate behavior is an integral component of the international communicative competence.

The politeness principle has a defining role in those situations when the recipient’s speech action is potentially “conflictogenic”, i.e. it constitutes a danger for the communicative image of the speaker himself or the recipient. Above all, such situations include refusal as a response to the recipient’s request, speaker’s requests...
and verbalization of the speaker’s positive and negative evaluation to himself as well as criticism of the recipient or objects related to him. The care about “saving face” both of the speaker and the recipient makes the speaker use mitigative strategies based on mitigating the illocutionary force of the statement in the situations above.

We understand mitigation (mitigare (Latin) means to mitigate, weaken) as a communicative category basically including the strategies of illocutionary extenuation that optimize the speech contact. In the Western linguistics mitigation is regarded as a synonym of extenuation (Abschwächung, hedges) in the wide meaning of the word [5-8] and is defined both as the extenuation process and this process result.

As K.F. Sedov correctly states, the orientation to cooperative communication is one of necessary components of effective communication based on the correspondence of speech norms to ethic norms [9]. Due to this, it is unmistakable that politeness, respect to interlocutor, positive emotional atmosphere of the communication refer to relevant dominants of the speech behavior in any linguistic culture. Consequently, the results of the speech choice are often determined mainly not by the message subject but by his recipient.

In the process of communication, domination of any type of orientation to the speaker himself or his interlocutor defines various communicative styles-egocentric, conflict or cooperative, recipient-oriented. The determinant for the mitigative style of the communications behavior is orientation to the interlocutor. Taking into account the recipient’s communicative expectations while choosing the speech means implementing the speaker’s intentions, ability of the communicative empathy to play an important role in the speaker’s achieving his goals in the communication and finally, it determines the efficiency of the speech behavior in the situations of cooperative, harmonic communication.

Mitigative strategies play a special role in potentially conflictogenic situations including both positive and negative self-evaluation situations. Positive self-evaluation is known to be the violence of the modesty maxima indicating the speaker to diminish his merits and reject the praise in his address [10]. According to the fair statement of M.V. Koltunova, to praise oneself or constantly agree with the praises in one’s address mean to emphasize one’s superiority that inevitably spreads the disagreements zone and is conflictogenic, i.e. a socially unacceptable tactics [11]. However, negative self-evaluation also contains danger for the recipient’s “face” as it violates the sympathy maxima. According to it, the speaker must aspire to minimize the antipathy between himself and the interlocutor. Thus, potential conflictogenity of the specified situations also makes the recipient use mitigative strategies that weaken the illocutionary force of the statement while verbalizing the evaluation illocution.

In order to mitigate the evaluation illocution, the speaker has a specific set of mitigative means from which he chooses those most adequate for the specific situation and specific recipient. In choosing any type of verbalizing the mitigative strategy, not only conventional norms and directions of any ethnic society appear but also linguocreative potential of the speaker himself while using those opportunities which are offered by the language system. The reality of the speech communication is much wider and more comprehensive than any conventions and ready-to-use formulas of the speech behavior. Of course, the speaker’s language choice is made in accordance with specific models that allow the recipient to correctly understand not only explicit but also implicit intentions of the speaker. Herewith, the speaker is rather free in his speech choice within these models.

Thus, in particular the mitigative strategy of mitigating negative/positive self-evaluation in the German linguistic culture can be implemented through the use of various language means verbalizing the mitigated evaluation:

- Meiotic operators, litotes constructions, for example:
  - Sie können reiten? »Ein bisschen, sagte sie, nicht besonders gut« [12].
  - Nein, technisch bin ich wirklich nicht sehr begabt...[13].

- Modal words in combination with litotes constructions while verbalizing negative:
  - Vielleicht bin ich in dieser Sache nicht ganz der richtige Ratgeber. [13]; and positive self-evaluation:
  - Dabei sollte sie sich freuen, dass ich ihm nicht auch noch auf der Tasche liege-weil ich ganz zufällig eine ziemlich erfolgreiche Geschäftsfrau bin [14].

- So called hedges or Heckenausdrücke/Hedges:
  - Ich weiß nicht, Cora. Ich bin irgendwie kein Taktiktyp [13].
Echo-question used actively while representing both positive and negative self-evaluation:
- *Nicht schlecht, oder?*-fragte ich selbstbewusst [14].
- Ich bin schließlich auch nur ein Mensch, *nicht?* [12].

**Resume:** Thus, the speaker’s use of mitigative strategies while verbalizing evaluation intentions allows to avoid interational risks in the communication, herewith maintaining general sympathetic tonality of the speech contact. The recipient’s speech choice in each specific situation related to the representation of the positive or negative self-evaluation is defined by both stereotyped, ritually conventional norms and postulates of politeness and the speaker’s individual characteristics that reflect the linguocreative competence of the homo loquens.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, we can surely speak about the doubtless urgency and perceptiveness of studying the strategic aspect of communication that displays both universal and national specific features of the communications behavior. This direction of linguistic researches has also got applied the meaning that can be hardly overestimated as it is a basis for forming international communicative competence of the speaker through didactic communication.

**REFERENCES**

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