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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

INTERFERING DISCOURSES IN ACADEMIC DIALOGUE EVOLUTION

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the evolution of academic discourse in the dialogical perspective, starting from letters to the editor (LE) of leading academics into Voprosy Yazykoznaniya in the 1960s, through Research Letters (RL) to Academic Blogs (AB). The authors suggested a research algorithm that can be used in analyzing different academic discourse genres. The functional **method** was applied in the comparative analysis of the genres in question: such functions as contact-building / supporting, direct / indirect addressing the recipient; informational, didactic / educational, oriented on self-presentation were distinguished. As the **result** of the study the relevant properties of the said genres were defined, such as the intentions of the addressee who may be expecting an answer or not; may be counting on immediate answer, or not counting at all, or disseminating the information on spec; besides, the number of recipients is taken into account – it may be a person / group of persons representing an official body (editorial board / editor-in-chief) or the professional pool; focus on some specific topic / a variety of topics; engaging in regular / one-time communication, and some other parameters. The research has revealed discursive as well as structural and linguistic characteristics of LE, RL and AB discourse. The authors analyze the genres from cultural (as of contemporary publication-process-related realia) point of view, as well as in terms of their influence on institutionalized communication.

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1. Introduction

Academic discourse has been in the focus of linguistic research for several decades, a variety of its specific features have been extensively researched into, cf. (Baffy, 2018; Benelhadj, 2019; Gerasimova, 2018; Hyland, 2001; 2010; Suleimanova & Lukoshus, 2018; Suleimanova, 2018; Wang, 2019; Vodyanitskaya, 2018).

In natural communication – either written or oral – there are no pure types of discourse, it is always a mix of interfering discourses, which contribute to the resulting type. It is the set of features that form this or that discourse genre. It means that discourse genres are cross-related through some features they are sharing, and sometimes they can have only one or two features in common, which, still, may serve as a common denominator, kind of *tertium comparationis* that justifies the comparison. We chose such seemingly different subgenres which, as the research shows, have much in common and are evolutionally interrelated across time.

2. Problem Statement

One of the key specific “mechanisms” which were triggering the evolution of academic discourse genres and the academic communication on the whole was the interference of discourse genres when they interacted and mixed, to form new sub-genres (Chernyavskaya, 2003; Shevchenko, 2008). In other words, evolution of discourse genres (Borbotko, 2014; Ivanova et al., 2014) and their interference result in new varieties, e.g. Research Letters, Academic Blogs and others. The paper focuses on the specifics of dialogical perspective in the evolution of academic discourse, starting from letters to the editor (LE) of leading academics into Voprosy Yazykoznaniya in the 1960s, through Research Letters (RL) to Academic Blogs (AB). The authors elaborated a research algorithm that can be used in analyzing different academic discourse genres.

3. Research Questions

The research into specifics of the dialogue in the above genres revealed fundamental differences within this cluster, dialogue-wise, i.e. the addressee may be expecting response in one case – as in the Research Letter, or not expecting it immediately, like in a blog (though hoping to get it, in the long run, waiting patiently). This connection with the recipient distinguishes the discourse types – and needs to be looked into. The kind of dialogue practiced in three subgenres requires functional analysis taking into account the intentions of the speaker, his expectations as regards potential feedback of the recipient, and other parameters.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research we focus on in the paper involved Letters to the Editor (LE) from leading academics into Voprosy Yazykoznaniya in the 1960s, Research Letters (RL) and Academic Blogs (AB) with **the purpose** to explore into their specifics with regard to the evolution of academic dialogue and cross interference of discourses.

One of the key features of the academic discourse is that, by definition, it is always a dialogue with the academic community as a scientist is inevitably counting on the response and even critique from the peers (Suleimanova, 2016); cf. dialogue in fiction which is oriented on a different communication format with the reader.

5. Research Methods

The two-step research is based, first, on functional analysis, relying on a variety of criteria which determine the function of the genre (Magnet & Carnet, 2006; Melliti, 2019; Rutkowski & Ehrenfest, 2012); second, it is followed by the analysis of the relevant characteristics of the variety.

We distinguish such functions as contact-building / supporting, direct / indirect addressing (e.g., in LE the author is directly addressing the recipient); informational, didactic / educational, oriented on self-presentation, etc.

The second step focused on analyzing other parameters, such as the intentions of the addressee – he may be expecting an answer or not; may be counting on immediate answer (as in LE), or not counting at all, or placing the information on spec; then the number of recipients is taken into account – it may be addressed to a person / group of persons representing an official body (editorial board / editor-in-chief) or the professional pool; focus on some specific topic / a variety of topics; engaging in regular / one-time communication, and some other parameters.

6. Findings

The analysis of the three academic discourse genres revealed that each of them is a mix of interfering communication forms and strategies.

6.1. Academic Discourse Genres as a Combination of Interfering Communication Formats

6.1.1. Letters to the Editor

This variety actually started in *Voprosy Yazykoznaniya* (ВЯ) in the 60s in a rubric *What Scientists are Working On* (*Nad chem rabotajut uchenye*); section *Scientific Life* featured research letters from scientists from different countries. They described their research interests, invited researchers who shared their paradigmatic stand and methodology to join the research and academic dialogue – either explicitly or implicitly. We shall refer to them as Letters to the Editor, or LE versus actual Research letters RL.

6.2. LE Composition

LEs often start with the description of researcher's academic interests or the academic affiliation – *kak tyurkolog ya... kak uchenyj-lingvist ya... as a linguist / turkologist*; then proceed to stating the burning research issue which calls for coordinated efforts of the scientists, it takes the form of an invitation to academic dialogue – e.g. a German scientist (see below) claims that Turkish and Soviet turkologists's ideas were not taken into account, as she was expecting to find the account of their more impressive achievements and publications (*pri etom raboty tyurkologov iz Turcii i sovetskih kolleg v sootvetstvii s planom ne*

uchityvalis, poskolku ya ozhidala ot tyurkologov obeih stran soobschenij ob ih nesravnno bolee bogatyh seriyah publikacij.)

Then the researcher can compare research methods and offer promising vistas in their research fields: *we can expect most representative results in studying prosodic phenomena (Osobenno znachitel'nyh rezul'tatov mozhno ozhidat' v oblasti prosodicheskikh fenomenov).*

In many cases the author introduces an implicit *Another* agent using the predicates denoting potential action *can* (lit. *one can*); the implication is that the speaker leaves open the question who will take part in the event; both the speaker and any potential counter-agent can contribute to the action (Suleimanova, 2018). The speaker actually involves some potential *Another* agent in her own discourse space, as if the speaker invites him to join and cooperate; she does not shut him off – on the contrary, she associates himself with *Another* (Suleimanova, 2018, p. 194).

The next element the LE author focuses on is a promise to develop the theory, and informs of the academic contacts with colleagues *The chapters on syntax and grammatical categories are being worked on by M. Ivich, while I work on chapters on phonemes and morphematic means. (I keep an eye on the research into Mycenaean inscriptions, together with my friend M. Legen. Nad glavami o sintaksise i o znachenii grammaticheskikh kategoriy rabotaet M. Ivich, v to vremya kak ya obrabatyvayu glavy o zvukah i morfemacheskikh sredstvah; Ya prodolzhayu vmeste so svoim drugom M. Lezhenom vnimatel'no sledit' za uspehami izucheniya mikenskih nadpisey).* The author compares research potential in the field of Turkic languages – higher in the USSR as the territory inhabited by native-speakers of Turkic languages. What follows is different research procedures in Germany and the Soviet Union. She believes that their synergetic combination could yield good results.

In other words, the LE composition compiles general complimentary comment on the journal policy and its contribution to the contacts of linguists, refers to the author's own research interest and academic contacts, then states the problem, i.e. contrary to the author's expectations, some serious works were neglected and she suggests joining efforts and proposes a detailed research plan. The letter follows the pattern **greeting-compliment-research interest-problem-research plan**.

Besides, the LEs may contain evaluations – e.g., the author evaluates the journal's contribution in emotional and rational terms *Menya raduet – I am glad, that the editorial board is working towards stronger links of linguists Redakcionnaya kollegiya zhurnala «Voprosy yazykoznaniya» stremitsya ukrepit' svyazi uchenyh-lingvistov.*

She words her attitude *interested, grateful* to the soviet scientists who share their results with her. *Kak tyurkolog ya osobenno zainteresovana v kontakte s sovetskimi kollegami po special'nosti, i ya mogu s blagodarnost'yu priznat'sya, chto ryad sovetskih uchenyh prisylaet mne svoi raboty* (a letter from A. von Gabech (Hamburg) to *Voprosy Yazikoznaniya* 1960, №6, p. 133).

A researcher from Novy Sad focuses mainly on his research interests: what has been done and the plans, describes his research method, refers to his previous works. The letter is full of contemplations on the general issues *as it often happens, I keep working on several issues simultaneously*, shares his experience *the experience and the knowledge acquired while working on one topic help in elaborating other topics: opyt i priobretennye vo vremya raboty nad odnoj temoj znaniya pomogayut razrabotke drugih tem.*

This letter mostly covers the author's research interests, his own plans and in general is mostly informative – not accompanied by author's ruminations or evaluations (a letter from P. Ivich (Novy Sad) to *Voprosy Yazikoznaniya*, 1960, №6, pp. 135-136).

One more letter is also devoted to author's research interests, mentions his book and his plan as regards his publications: *I keep working on the history of Greek lexicon, Mycenaean inscriptions* and the plan to complete a historical dictionary of Greek (*zavershitsya sozdaniem istoricheskogo slovarya grecheskogo yazyka*). He refers to successful decoding of Mycenaean inscriptions by his colleague (*rasshifrovka M. Ventrisom mikenskih nadpisej. sledit' za uspehami izucheniya mikenskih nadpisej. V blizhajshie mesyacy ya, vidimo, budu imet' povod napisat' neskol'ko statej po `etomu voprosu*) and announces his own plan to write some papers which he believes might be interesting for the editorial board (a letter from P. Shantren (Sorbonne, France), to *Voprosy Yazikoznaniya*, 1960, №5, p. 149).

Cf. also the letter of a researcher from the Netherlands who also defines his research interests, his publications, what topic he is currently working on and the plans, which he implicitly relates to the policy of the journal. (a letter from G. Gonda (Utrecht) to *Voprosy Yazikoznaniya*, 1960, №5, p. 148).

Or a twitter-format letter from French researcher who, though aged over 80, still intended to contribute to the journal and write a paper (a letter from J. Jerardemer Vogezy, France to *Voprosy Yazikoznaniya*, 1960, №5, p. 148).

The LE rubric – the peak fell on 1960 – lasted for some years and was replaced by a new emerging one which has something in common with it. LE gave in to the rubric featuring information letters on academic events, mostly conference announcements, i.e. *call for papers*. Widening academic contacts in a variety of events called for a larger-scale communication rather than for individual one-to-one contact and the scientists were afforded a better chance to communicate at linguistic conferences which made LE less efficient and, consequently, redundant. The section *Science Life*, from then on, contained calls for papers and the such.

The features that distinguish this genre are first of all related to the roles the participants play in the dialogue, i.e.: they address the official body (officially licensed organization such as an editorial board) or its spokesperson, who is expected to adhere to the editorial policy; the addressee is an individual who relates his interests to the editorial policy and is within the scope of editorial interests; he is directly applying seeking for chances and requesting for feedback. So, the functions here are contact-building, informational and self-presentation oriented.

It is one-time communication, in the form of direct dialogue where the addressee is waiting for an immediate answer.

6.3. Research Letters

Nowadays, as an inheritor, to some extent (see later), to the long-perished LE genre, a new genre emerged – within the academic “publish or perish” reality (Melliti, 2019) the scientists who failed to get the research paper published in WoS or Scopus journals still place their RL in the RL-journals, with the purpose to make public their achievements. Research Letters (henceforth RLs) are short scientific papers reporting new and innovative research findings allocated on the Elsevier platform: *Operations Research Letters, Finance Research Letters, Mutation Research Letters*.

A Research Letter is a concise report of original research; it is to meet the requirements as follows: be a maximum of 600 words with no more than 6 references and 6 authors, and no supplementary material or subsections; may include up to 2 tables or figures. An abstract is not required for this article type. The format guidelines suggested are: CONSORT reporting guidelines for randomized trials; STROBE reporting guidelines for observational studies, and PRISMA reporting guidelines for systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

RLs are shorter in terms of number of pages (Maci, 2008; Rutkowsky & Ehrenfest, 2012, as cited in Melliti, 2019). The body of any publishable RL is to contain 58 sentences where 49 are obligatory and 9 are optional. Being aware of the requirements helps researchers in scientific disciplines in writing publishable RLs (Melliti, 2019).

This genre has only recently got into focus of attention abroad and is still under-researched (Melliti, 2019). The basic difference between the LE and RL is that in the former the scientists focused on their own research interests, while the functions of the latter ones are mostly informational, the author is not directly addressing the audience, i.e., the broad academic community (whom it may concern). It is self-presentation oriented, or the author is propagating his research views and promoting his research results. Long-term, he is expecting some recognition in the academic circles, it is not meant to involve the recipient in regular communication, waiting for an immediate answer, or not. The number of recipients is taken into account – it may be addressed to a person / group of persons representing the pool of professionals.

What distinguishes the RL is that it focuses on some specific topic, is oriented on some delayed answer, or action – e.g. proposal to publish some research results in universally acclaimed academic periodical. It is a fat chance that the publication can get noticed and the author finally rewarded in some way – either invited to a more influential journal, make himself outstanding on the vast academic horizon.

We do not observe here any direct dialogue.

6.4. Academic Blog

6.4.1. Pros and Cons of Writing a Blog

On the one hand, as Peironcely (n.d.) remarks, “a science blog gives you exposure”, on the other – it’ll give you a chance “to write more publications” and easily get public. “As a relatively new and rapidly growing academic genre, the academic blog offers an open space for scholars to disseminate their work and discuss research issues” (Zou & Hyland, 2020, p. 1475). Besides, “scientists have mixed feelings about running a science blog. Senior researchers and group leaders have too many things in their plates. Getting grants, publishing, presenting at conferences, supervising young scientists, it is a busy life. This is their main argument for not writing a science blog. In any case, they are not digital natives and technology is a barrier for them. They feel they are going to need time to learn how to operate a science blog and decide to argument that they are busy...” (Peironcely, electronic resource, p. 2). He continues that “young scientists are more technologically savvy, but also busy. They are trapped in the scientific rat race: publish a lot in high impact factor journals, cross your fingers and pray for tenure track” (Peironcely, electronic resource, p.4).

True it is that the problem is that young researchers are capable of running a science blog, but they are also too busy.

Still, the blog lets the blogger tackle some vital concerns, e.g. to share one's worries and experience and expertise with more experienced colleagues, to ask for help from the coach/psychologist the university offers to scientists.

6.4.2. Operating Academic Blogs

This new academic communication genre is gaining momentum which is attributed, inter alia, to its being extremely appealing – being technologically advanced – to the younger generation. This genre combines a variety of features making it a cross-section of genres, the interfering mix. It shares some features with other academic discourse genres. What makes it akin to RL is that it is not directly contact-building, to the two previous genres – it is also informational (rather than entertaining), presenting research results, sometimes initiating academic discussions, sometimes educational. It is addressing a multiple recipient unlimited. Sent on spec into space, etc.

There are English “must-read” science blogs that focused on a variety of issues relating to PhD research: *The Thesis Whisperer*, or *PhD2Published*; or to writing and reading issues: *3 Month Thesis* or *Literature Review HQ*; or *Study Hacks* devoted to time management techniques for academics.

Within this variety there are different blogs such as on academic writing, e.g. *Hands On Writing: How To Master Academic Writing In The Sciences*, by M. Aliotta, a scientist, blogger and the author of the course. She teaches how to ban procrastination and stay on track with your writing project, to finally complete a chapter of your thesis, draft your paper without struggles or anxiety, gain confidence and enjoy your writing project.

We can try and reconstruct the author and his characteristics as well as those of the blog. The academic blogger is different from bloggers featuring everyday life or some goods. First of all, the stimulus to open one's own blog is the intention to share one's views and ideas, get response (may be even critical) of the interested members of the academic community and in this way to test the ideas and at the same time to represent oneself to the community, to make public one's views and oneself. In this respect the blog is similar to the RL, also meant to propagate one's academic achievements. What makes it singularly remarkable is that its educational and didactic perspective. Then, when the blogger starts he is not reaching out to diversified multiple recipient, he is looking for the academic circles which are potentially sharing his ideas. Though he is not counting on any immediate direct dialogue, any direct request for feedback – he may be hoping for feedback delayed in time. “The response from everyone has been incredible. This is the course I wish I had followed at the beginning of my PhD. Click here to get the *Hands On Writing* course now”.

The blog is usually not institutionalised or officially registered, not chartered, and in this sense it is independent. It is not restricted by any topic or a specially designated task, it can cover a variety of related topics. Some academic blogs are actually motivating the addressee to pursue the chosen academic career and can render psychological support; there are blogs which focus on DIY-sharing.

What appeals to the reader / subscriber is that he feels free to join the communication and in this way the blog makes the reader feel involved (this blog feature is shared by all blogs). What makes the blog appealing for the reader is that it is accessible, very often is visually attractive, well-structured.

The reader feels free to (anonymously) contribute – critically, inter alia – actively involved and to proceed to make your own contribution.

The academic blog happily combines the principles the scientist is seeking: independence in voicing his ideas, however fantastic or wild they may seem, finding like-minded researchers and supporters, it answers the challenges of the modern world and fully complies with the visually attractive and easily accessible resource.

A blogger shares his experience:

I decided that my science blog would contain what I learnt during my PhD. What it means to be a graduate student. The do's and don'ts. Those things I wish someone had told me earlier. Those things that you wish were written in the contract before you sign it. ... in fact, I was reflecting on all I had learnt up until that moment. I was giving to myself the advice I needed.

I started putting vague ideas I had in the back of my mind into words. This exercise turned out to be vital. It helped me to see the causes of my frustration. Once I knew these causes I could act upon them. After I wrote several posts about PhD life I started to be more calmed, I regained some hope in my PhD. ...is covered how to handle better the frustration. This kept me going in my PhD. (Peironcely, electronic resource, pp. 18-21)

The blogger says that at first he didn't know if the advice he shared in his science blog helped other people and addressed the potential readers with the questions: "What is your experience writing a science blog? Did it help you? What were the benefits? Please share your point of view in the comments below" (Peironcely, electronic resource, p. 23).

He was surprised to have got an amazing lot of responses, which means that such genre is in great demand with the scholars, especially young ones.

Besides, the bloggers give practical advice on how to start a blog (the point is that the web offers an infinite space and opportunities, and academic bloggers actually support each other rather than compete). Cf. e.g., the step-by-step instruction from the blogger veteran: 1. Check our *Resources for Digital Scientists* page to find all you need to get started in science blogging. 2. Register to our newsletter and have access to 6 videos that teach you *How To Create A Own Science Blog*...

It seems that scientists found an ideal communication format for exchanging and testing their views and ideas, in a very dynamic chronotope which makes communication dynamic and exciting. This new type of brainstorming can result in new insights and theories. The only curse is that it adds nothing to the official chronography of a scientist, to his Hirsh index or WoS and Scopus history. At least nowadays.

7. Conclusion

Academic communication has traveled a long way – which is in line with the way the society has – from preferably printed communication in LE, directly addressing the recipient (very often a single person, affiliated with some official organization) in the form of direct address, hoping for some response and further cooperation. To facilitate the, e.g., editorial board decision, the author explains his motifs and arguments of his appeal, provides his bona fide and track record. This communication can be treated as personal and as such it pursued personal academic ambitions of the author and turned quite limited.

Gradually, it gave way to other communication channels, such as Research Letters.

With the reigning WoS and Scopus indicators determining academics' efficiency and the resulting limited publication opportunities, as an alternative, a new option – RL – was initiated to promote those ideas that were not accepted in WoS and Scopus journals. This genre is quite traditional – it follows the rules and regulations of any printed edition, though what makes it outstanding is that the published collections of papers had to meet the thematic requirement only and do not offer an edition with diversified sections – it is a collection of papers, period.

A new genre, reflecting the web-oriented society focusing on web formats, offered plenty of opportunities for academics, practically with no restrictions, to make oneself known, noticed and recognized.

We believe that such genres are promising, being, inter alia, even ecologically more advanced as they do not claim printing facilities, labor expenses, and do not call for organic resources – paper, toxic waste, etc.

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