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Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

ON THE ISSUE OF INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES CONVERGENCE

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Abstract

Over the recent decades, institutional discourses have become the focus of researchers' attention in multiple ways. Being specialized cliched communication among people belonging to an institutionalized entity, these discourses currently tend to demonstrate a number of structural changes caused by numerous factors. Within our research we aimed at establishing whether institutional discourses of economics, law and politics actually go beyond their own limits and converge with each other, thereby showing a certain degree of convergence and mutual exchange. In our experiments, both specialists in the fields under consideration as well as non-specialists, upon being presented with lexical units of different institutional discourses, revealed profound knowledge of other discourses, demonstrating no difficulty in defining the meaning of such lexical units. This led us to the conclusion that institutional discourses oftentimes tend to cross their boundaries, being found in other discourses as well as in personally-oriented discourses, the reasons for this phenomenon being technological advances, changes in discourse functions as well as characteristics of modern agents of institutional discourses

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1. Introduction

Over the recent decades, various types of discourse have become the focus of researchers' attention. Institutional discourse (further referred to as ID), demonstrating certain changes of its structure and components is of particular interest for those engaged in such studies. According to the experts, ID is communication within the institutions established in a society, accompanied by the activity thereof (Van Dijk, 2013). ID can be also regarded as 'verbal exchange between two or more people, when at least one of the speakers is a representative (agent), while communication and objectives of the speakers are partly determined by a given professional institution' (Tracy et al., 2019).

Karasik (2016) emphasizes metaphorically that ID is a specialized cliched variety of communication between people who might not be familiar with each other, however, who have to communicate in accordance with the norms of a given social medium (our translation). Shiryayeva (2008) suggests the following definition: 'Institutional discourse is a status-oriented communication, i.e. verbal interaction of representatives of social groups of institutions with each other, with people implementing their status possibilities within established social institutions, the number of which is determined by the society's current needs' (our translation). According to Sheigal (2004), such kind of discourse is communication being inherent in social institutions (our translation). Experts highlight that 'institutional communication is a status-oriented communication between two parties, the latter being representatives of such institutions (agents) and clients who are in need for their services' (our translation) (Sheigal, 2020).

Arutyunova (2019) views ID as 'connected text together with extralinguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural, psychological and other factors, text taken within a conceptual aspect; speech considered to be an intended social impact, as a component involved in human interaction and mechanisms of their consciousness (cognitive processes) (our translation).

Although ID are considered to be open, flexible and volatile formations which interact and conflict with each other on a regular basis and constantly compete for a certain kind of interpretation and denotation, still there is a set of functions typical of any ID (according to Beilinson):

- 1) Performative function: a social institution performing its intentions, realization of verbal acts with the help of existing range of linguistic means inherent in this or that language;
- 2) Normative function: supporting norms and values of a corresponding institution. This function is aimed at developing and further fixation of social behavioral norms corresponding to the interests of ID agents, forming the system of mutual interaction between ID agents and clients.
- 3) Presentation function: reveals stylistics of agents and clients' behavior, various expression of stereotype intentions;
- 4) Coding function: emphasizing boundaries between agents and clients (our translation) (Beilinson, 2009). Establishing boundaries of ID participants, this function closely correlates with emotiveness as it allows ID agents to be aware of their elitism at the expense of understanding (decoding) the information coded in the discourse content, the so called cultural and discourse codes.

Reasoning about ID, most researchers rely on the so called 'field-type' model of an institutional discourse within which its prototype genres form the ID nucleus (with prototype being the benchmark, a

model for the given class of objects) (our translation) (Chernyavskaya, 2006), whereas there is also close periphery (genres typical of a given discourse but not being its benchmark) and far periphery (genres common for various ID types) (our translation) (Danilova, 2015).

Concerning the kinds of ID, researchers traditionally demonstrate a variety of opinions: for instance, Karasik (2000) distinguishes the following kinds of ID: administrative, legal, military, pedagogical, religious, medical, business, advertising, sports, academic, mass media and political IDs (our translation). However, a number of experts assert that there are also other kinds: government discourse (Tagalo, 2019), Internet discourse (Richardson, 2019), restaurant discourse (Mapes, 2017), etc.

Within our research we consider three kinds of IDs: economic, legal and political.

1.1. Economic ID

No doubt, for modern society economics is an integral part of life for practically every person. For this reason, economic ID is a vast layer of discourse units, the latter forming the given system. Some researchers put economic and business discourse on par (Danilova, 2015), however, the others fairly point out that ‘business (professionally directed) discourse is limited by communication of specialists of a certain sphere only) (our translation) (Evtushina & Kovalskaya, 2014). A number of experts (Sheigal, 2020), (Kuzmina, 2020) regard economic ID as a part of political ID. However, within our research, after Evtushina and Kovalskaya (2014), we define economic ID as ‘a total of speech acts in the economic sphere as well as created by professionals and not professionals verbal and written texts or their components which reflect realities of economic world’ (our translation).

1.2. Political ID

Under political discourse in a broad sense, following Sheigal (2004), we understand ‘any verbal forms which content refers to political sphere’ (our translation). Researchers vividly emphasize that ‘political discourse is a special language of politics, representing this world’ (our translation) (Kuzmina, 2020). According to certain experts, political ID is also an ‘important way of conducting political activity’ (Van Dijk, 2013). The main intent of political ID is to influence those to whom this discourse is addressed. The clients of this type of ID, along with specialists of this field, is the society at large. It explains a wide range of lexical means and stylistic versatility employed by this ID. Experts are unanimous that ‘implementing imperative and convincing tasks, political ID aims at impacting not only mind but also human feelings’ (our translation) (Ukhvanova-Shmygova, 2019).

1.3. Legal ID

According to Kozhemyakin’s (2007) definition, legal ID is a ‘sense-making and reproducing activity regulated by certain historic and social cultural codes (traditions) aimed at formulating norms, legitimation, regulation and control of social relationships’(our translation).

Legal ID , being revealed in interinstitutional and intercultural medium, on the one hand, is based on values and principles of such cultural institutions as politics, religion and economics, however, on the other hand, it also services other institutions, forming stable and efficient mechanisms of demarcation of

legitimate and illegitimate, supporting social control and regulating institutional relationships (our translation) (Kozhemyakin, 2007).

The language of legal ID is one of the most peculiar communicative codes which are traditionally used in institutional medium. Its peculiarity is expressed in a wide usage of conceptual and sense bearing verbal means (terms), cliches and bureaucratic language, lack (and even intended displacement) of the means of expression, complex syntax structures, stable use of a limited specter of genre-stylistic means, low degree of contextuality (our translation) (Kozhemyakin, 2007).

It is to be mentioned that those types of ID under our consideration are characterized by ‘various degrees of openness’, according to Karasik (2016): in this respect, legal discourse demonstrates a drastic difference between a ‘client’ and an ‘agent’ of ID (our translation).

1.4. ID Convergence

Throughout recent decades we have been observing multiple cases of ‘mixing’ separate ID with each other as well as cases of ‘mixing’ personally-oriented discourses with ID. This trend was noticed already in the second half of the 20th century: the experts emphasizing at that time that ‘the boundary between everyday routine and special being quite value’ (our translation) (Berkov, 1973). This process affects not only ID peripheral areas but also ‘nuclei’ of any ID, demonstrating transfer of lexical units, terms, terminoids, professional jargon and cliché from one ID to another. For many years, the academics have been observing the phenomenon of interdiscursivity which we understand as intended use within established institutional discourse material both structural and lexical semantic specifics of other discourses.

We suggested using the term ‘convergence’ (from Latin ‘convergentio’ – ingression, drawing together, approaching) implying various IDs drifting together and those integration processes taking place among them. The main difference between interdiscursivity and convergence is that interdiscursivity suggests occasional use of various ID elements within each other, while convergence implies that such mutual ‘exchange’ is of regular nature, with the units of corresponding IDs being used on a permanent basis.

Converging with each other, institutional discourses establish the so called ‘converging zones’ which become inherent in IDs. As a result, one can observe a gradual alignment of versatile elements of each ID.

2. Problem Statement

Within the framework of our study, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

- i. Under current circumstances, ID of various spheres of human activity are less and less separated from each other, demonstrating evident convergence and mutual impact.
- ii. The possible reasons for this phenomenon are technological advances, weakening normative and coding functions, characteristics of new generations of ID agents

3. Research Questions

In the light of those hypotheses suggested by us, the following research questions are to be addressed:

- i. Does ID actually demonstrate going beyond its limits and crossing other ID boundaries?
- ii. What are the possible reasons for this phenomenon?

4. Purpose of the Study

Within our research we aimed at defining the cases of various ID converging into each other as well as the reasons for such dilution of ID boundaries. We also made an attempt to decide if this phenomenon is of positive or negative nature.

5. Research Methods

The issues under consideration were researched throughout specifically designed questionnaires distributed among the objects of our experiment. We also made use of economic, legal and political discourse materials in various forms (video/ audio recordings, texts etc.).

5.1. Experiment 2

The objects of Experiment 1 were the agents of the institutional discourses we focused on, namely, professionals in the economic, legal and political spheres (N=22). Out of these 22 objects, 8 people were economists, 9 people – lawyers, 5 people were related to a political sphere. The objects' average age: 29,5, level of education: 17 people possessing master degrees, 5- bachelor degrees. All the objects were native speakers of English, residing on the territory of Great Britain. All the participants were aware of the objective of the experiment and gave their voluntary consent to take part in it.

Each object was presented with the list of 10 key terms not referring to his or her professional activity sphere (See Table 1 below). Thus, agents of economic ID were presented with the legal and political discourse units, agents of legal discourse considered economic and political discourse units, whereas those belonging to politics, were to deal with the economic and legal discourse units. Further, the objects were to give an oral definition of the units presented.

Table 1. Units of institutional discourse presented

Type of ID	Economic Discourse	Legal Discourse	Political Discourse
			Exit polls
			A conservative
			Electorate
	Household	Civil Code	Caucuses
	Fiscal policy	Common law	Front Runner
	Quantitative easing	Affidavit	Lame Duck
	Money supply	Acquitted	Right Wing
			Talking heads
			Welfare state
			Turnout

Currency intervention	Bail
Output	Homicide
Exchange rate	Warrant
Interest rate	Petty offence
Payroll	Plaintiff
Stock market	Defendant

5.2. Experiment 2

We conducted the experiment aimed at demonstrating that units of discourses under consideration (both from ID nuclei and ID peripheries) go outside the boundaries of their institutional usage and actively enter into personalized discourses. Our experiment objects (N-18) in no way were related to those spheres our IDs belonged to: 7 objects were technical support engineers, 1 object- a beauty stylist, 1 object – an architect, 3 objects – primary school teachers, 3 objects -university professors, 2 objects-nurses, 1 object -copywriter). The age of the participants to the experiment ranged from 24 to 37 years old, all the objects were native speakers of English, residing on the territory of Great Britain. All the objects were given a small remuneration for that time they took to provide their definitions, namely, a one-month subscription to a popular film series channel.

Each object was presented with total 30 lexical units: 10 units of economic ID, 10 units of legal ID and 10 units of political ID. The task was to give an oral definition to each unit of language, explaining their meaning in their own words. We gave an average of all definitions given in accordance with each category of ID under consideration.

6. Findings

6.1. Experiment 1

It was revealed (see Table 2) that that the economic ID agents, (8 people) identified 77 out of 80 units of legal ID, while out of 80 units of political discourse 79 were identified. When the agents of legal ID (9 people) were faced with economic discourse units, they defined 90 units out of 90 presented, showing similar result regarding the political ID. Finally, when political discourse agents (5 people) came across economic ID units, they gave definitions to all the lexical units, whereas in respect of legal ID they defined only 46 units out of 50, which is evidently due to lesser degree of openness thereof.

Table 2. The number of identified units presented

ID Agents	The number of units identified	The number of units identified
Economic ID (8 people)	Legal ID (77/80)	Political ID (79//80)
Legal ID (9 people)	Economic ID (90/90)	Political ID (90/90)
Political ID (5 people)	Economic ID (50/50)	Legal (46/50)

According to the data accumulated (See Table 3), on average, all 10 units of economic ID were recognized and successfully defined, while only 6 out of 10 units of legal ID were identified and given a definition. As for political ID units, on average, 8 units out of 10 were identified.

6.2. Experiment 2

Table 3. The results of identifying ID units

Economic ID	Legal ID	Political ID
Average marking of 18 objects participating in the experiment – 10 /10	Average marking of 18 objects participating in the experiment – 6/10	Average marking of objects participating in the experiment – 8/10

The material analysed allowed us to draw the following conclusions. Under the current circumstances, one can observe a certain degree of convergence of various institutional discourses, the latter demonstrating no tendency to linguistic ‘segregation’ and forming dividing lines between them. Contrary to this, there is an intent to include the elements of other ID into their structure. Also, the units of ID are actively entering personally-oriented discourses.

The most evident reason for the phenomenon observed is, above all, the present state of technological development, mainly Internet, which provided the society with a unique opportunity of ‘inclusion’, interconnectedness and simply an access to huge amounts of professional information, the latter being unavailable to a mass user before the Internet emergence. If, in pre-Internet era, for any reasons, someone was keen to find out the way the Arbitration Court meetings are organized or how foreign trade agreements are arranged, one had to put certain efforts in order to reveal this kind of information: a visit to the library, in most cases, a specialized one, to question those people who are related to this sphere etc. However, nowadays, just in one click one can find out practically everything connected with ID and the way they operate.

Another important reason is weaker normative and coding functions inherent in any ID.

Normative function. It is to be specifically mentioned that over the recent several decades any activity on systematizing and streamlining terminological systems of the ID under our consideration has been hindered as terminological standardization and systematization was historically stronger in sciences, while humanities could not boast similar level thereof: already in the previous century, the experts pointed out that ‘such disciplines as economics, law, politics and sociology are subject to strong impact of cultural and social norms (our translation) (Berkov, 1973). As a result, the nucleus and the peripheries of each ID are not impacted by standardization processes, allowing them to develop in their own ways.

Coding function. Unfortunately, this function reveals itself in a lesser degree than it used to be in the past due to the fact that agents demonstrate less intention to emphasize the boundary between them and clients, they do not feel the necessity of establishing clear linguistic dichotomy ‘us and them’ and due to this they are ready to vary their discourse in order to facilitate understanding of their speech by others.

Another important factor is the characteristics of new generations of ID agents, the latter being users of the discourses we consider. The generations of Zoomers and Millenials tend to show less sensitivity towards genre differentiations, and they are less concerned about contrasting themselves with

those who are outside their professional field. Moreover, they are not actually keen on anything 'common' or shared by many, in fact, they are more inclined towards their own 'ways' in order to demonstrate their skills and abilities. It is fairly emphasized that due to their upbringing, this generation is more concentrated on their own unique characteristics and interests rather than things of value for groups and communities (Duffy, 2018). Also, these young people are oftentimes subject to the so called 'stylistic deafness, a certain insensitivity towards the difference of styles and genres and their evident mix in their colloquial speech' (our translation) (Polskaya, 2014).

The above described processes can be regarded as positive development as this reflects interdisciplinary nature of current knowledge, no longer being the attribute of one particular field of human activity, but being distributed among different fields.

7. Conclusion

Our experiments allowed us to conclude that nowadays traditional institutional discourses of economic, legal and political fields tend to mix with each other, converging within their nuclei and peripheries. This mutual 'exchange' of their elements occurs in a natural way, with agents of the ID not attributing anything special to the use thereof.

The agents of each ID, while 'building' their own system of ID, make use of other ID, as a result, certain elements and structures of different discourses converge with each other, being engaged in different contexts and verbal communication. Along with ID agents, one can observe non-professionals, or otherwise clients of different IDs also making use of lexical units of such discourses, demonstrating proper understanding of such units.

There is a range of reasons behind the above-mentioned convergence, namely, turbulent advance of informational technologies, normative and coding functions of ID losing their power as well as distinct characteristics of new generations of ID agents, being impartial to stylistic differences between various discourses.

Thus, in a broad sense, ID convergence is a reflection of global and general processes of discourse democratization and alignment.

No doubt, there are certain limitations to our study. Firstly, we are not able to extrapolate the conclusions made to all the agents and clients of economic, political and legal institutional discourses as our samples consisted of 22 and 18 people only. Secondly, further research is definitely required in order to provide better understanding of the linguistic processes occurring within institutional discourses.

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