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LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF SPEECH BEHAVIOR OF RUSSIAN-UZBEK BILINGUALS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the linguocultural specificity of speech behavior of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of two language systems and two cultural codes. The author argues that bilingual speech behavior cannot be adequately described through grammatical or lexical interference alone: it represents a synthesis of value orientations, communicative norms and culturally conditioned models of interaction inherited from both contact cultures. The paper outlines the conceptual framework of contrastive linguoculturology, introduces the notion of the culturogenderema as a unit of cultural-linguistic analysis, and identifies the principal domains in which Russian-Uzbek bilingual speech behavior manifests culturally specific features: forms of address, greeting and farewell formulas, strategies of politeness, expression of respect, family and gender-marked communication, and pragmatic code-switching. The findings contribute to the comparative study of speech etiquette in conditions of stable mass bilingualism in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: linguoculturology, bilingualism, speech behavior, Russian-Uzbek bilinguals, speech etiquette, culturogenderema, code-switching, politeness, contrastive linguistics, intercultural communication.

Introduction

Bilingualism in Uzbekistan represents one of the most stable and socially significant forms of language contact in the post-Soviet space. The coexistence of the Uzbek language as the state language and the Russian language as a language of interethnic communication, education and professional activity has produced a particular type of speaker whose communicative competence is shaped simultaneously by two cultural codes. The speech behavior of such a bilingual cannot be reduced to the technical mastery of two language systems: it reflects a complex synthesis of value orientations, ethical norms, models of self-presentation and patterns of interaction belonging to two civilizational traditions — the Slavic-European and the Turkic-Islamic.

Modern comparative-contrastive linguistics has moved well beyond the structural opposition of languages and now treats language as an instrument for the embodiment of culture (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 2005; Maslova, 2001). Within this paradigm, the speech behavior of bilinguals becomes a

particularly informative object of study, because it reveals the boundary zones where two linguocultures come into contact, cooperate, compete and produce hybrid forms (Weinreich, 1953; Grosjean, 2010). The relevance of the present research is determined by the necessity to describe these zones systematically and to identify the regularities governing the choice between Russian and Uzbek linguocultural models in concrete communicative situations.

The aim of the article is to characterize the principal linguocultural features of the speech behavior of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals and to demonstrate that this behavior constitutes a distinct communicative phenomenon possessing its own logic, its own norms and its own units of cultural-linguistic analysis.

Theoretical framework

The methodological foundation of the present study lies in linguoculturology — a discipline that investigates the interrelation of language and culture as two semiotic systems jointly producing the worldview of a linguistic community (Vorobyov, 1997; Maslova, 2001). Linguoculturology operates with such central notions as the linguistic worldview, the concept, the cultural code, the cultural script and the linguocultural type (Telia, 1996; Karaulov, 1987). In the context of bilingualism these notions acquire a doubled character: the bilingual speaker simultaneously possesses two linguistic worldviews and continuously negotiates between them in everyday communication (Grosjean, 2010).

The contrastive perspective is essential here. Unlike monolingual analysis, which describes the cultural content of a single language, contrastive linguoculturology juxtaposes two languages and two cultures and identifies points of convergence, divergence and lacunarity (Wierzbicka, 2003). In application to Russian-Uzbek bilingualism, contrastive analysis reveals that the two cultures differ in fundamental parameters: the Russian linguoculture is oriented towards a relatively horizontal model of interpersonal relations and a higher degree of verbal directness, whereas the Uzbek linguoculture is built upon a vertical hierarchical model in which age, family position, social status and gender determine the choice of communicative strategies.

As a tool for the description of culturally significant fragments of meaning that combine ethnocultural and gender-marked components within a single semantic unity, the present study employs the notion of the culturogenderema. The culturogenderema is understood as a complex linguocultural unit that integrates cultural, value-based and gender-related semantic dimensions and is realized in speech behavior through specific verbal and non-verbal markers. The introduction of this unit develops the tradition of identifying culturally bound units of description proposed in Russian linguoculturology, in which the linguoculturema is treated as a basic operational unit (Vorobyov, 1997, pp. 44–52). The application of the notion of the culturogenderema makes it possible to describe culturally conditioned models of male and female speech behavior in Russian-Uzbek bilingual communication without reducing them either to purely social or to purely linguistic phenomena.

Speech behavior in the framework adopted here is interpreted as the totality of verbal actions of a speaker conditioned by linguistic competence, communicative situation, cultural background and the social role of the interlocutors (Karaulov, 1987, p. 38). In bilingual conditions, speech behavior includes an additional component: the conscious or unconscious choice of language and of the cultural code attached to that language (Grosjean, 2010, pp. 51–67).

The Russian-Uzbek bilingual situation

The bilingual situation in Uzbekistan possesses several characteristics that distinguish it from many other contact situations described in the literature on language contact (Weinreich, 1953; Grosjean, 2010). First, it is mass and stable: the Russian language has retained its functional status across several generations and continues to operate in the educational, scientific and professional spheres. Second, it is unequally distributed across the urban and rural population, with stronger Russian-Uzbek bilingualism in urban centres. Third, it is dynamic: after independence the structural relations between the two languages have been reconfigured, with Uzbek expanding its functions and Russian retaining a specialized role.

Within this configuration the bilingual speaker develops a flexible communicative competence in which both languages occupy clearly differentiated functional niches. Uzbek is associated predominantly with the domain of family, religion, traditional ceremonies and ethnic identity. Russian is associated with formal education, science, technology, administrative communication and intercultural contact. The boundaries between these domains are nevertheless porous, and it is precisely in the zone of overlap that the most interesting linguocultural phenomena emerge (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 2005).

It is essential to emphasize that the speech behavior of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals is not the simple sum of Russian and Uzbek behavioral norms. It is a new communicative reality, in which both repertoires are present simultaneously and the speaker selects, combines and re-semanticizes their elements in accordance with the communicative situation — a position consistent with the contemporary holistic view of the bilingual as a unique speaker-hearer rather than two monolinguals in one person (Grosjean, 2010, pp. 13–18).

Principal linguocultural features of speech behavior

I. Forms of address and greeting

Forms of address constitute one of the most culturally saturated layers of speech behavior (Wierzbicka, 2003, pp. 309–324). In the Russian linguocultural tradition the system of address is built around the opposition of the polite (“Vy”) and familiar (“ty”) forms and around the use of name plus patronymic in formal contexts. In the Uzbek tradition the system is considerably more differentiated and incorporates kinship terms used outside the family circle: opa (elder sister) and aka (elder brother) are addressed to non-relatives as a sign of respect, while amaki, tog’a and xola are extended to acquaintances of the parents’ generation.

In the speech of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals these two systems interact in a productive manner. Bilinguals frequently transfer the Uzbek kinship-based model into Russian-language communication, addressing older colleagues or acquaintances as opa or aka even when the conversation as a whole is conducted in Russian. The reverse transfer also occurs: the formal Russian model of name plus patronymic is used in Uzbek-language official communication and has become an integrated element of Uzbek administrative discourse. Such reciprocal borrowings demonstrate that bilingual speech behavior is governed by a unified pragmatic competence which freely selects the most communicatively appropriate form regardless of its linguistic origin (Grosjean, 2010).

Greeting formulas exhibit a similar hybrid character. The Uzbek formula assalomu alaykum carries an explicit religious-cultural marking and is regularly used by bilinguals even within Russian-language conversations, particularly when greeting older interlocutors or persons of higher status. At the same time,

the neutral Russian *zdravstvuyte* functions as a default greeting in formal and intercultural contexts (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 2005).

2. Strategies of politeness and expression of respect

Politeness in Russian and Uzbek linguocultures is realized through different sets of strategies (Wierzbicka, 2003, pp. 25–97). Russian politeness relies primarily on grammatical means (the imperative versus the conditional, the use of *Vy*, modal constructions of mitigation) and on a moderate amount of verbal formulas. Uzbek politeness operates with a much wider repertoire of honorific formulas, with rigorous attention to age hierarchy, and with characteristic indirectness in requests, refusals and disagreements. The expression of disagreement, in particular, is regularly accompanied by hedging formulas and is rarely articulated in a direct form to older or higher-status interlocutors.

The bilingual speaker tends to integrate these two strategies. In Russian-language communication the bilingual is typically more indirect than a Russian monolingual would be, more frequently uses formulas of apology and self-diminishment, and more carefully observes age hierarchy. Conversely, in Uzbek-language communication the bilingual may introduce Russian-origin pragmatic markers when seeking a more neutral or business-like tone. The result is a politeness profile that does not coincide with either monolingual norm and constitutes a distinct cultural phenomenon (Telia, 1996; Wierzbicka, 2003).

3. Gender-marked speech behavior

Gender constitutes one of the most culturally sensitive dimensions of speech behavior in the Uzbek linguoculture. Traditional norms prescribe a differentiated communicative style for men and women, with women observing a higher degree of softness, indirectness and avoidance of conflict, and with men employing a wider range of categorical and assertive forms. The Russian linguocultural tradition, while not free of gender stereotyping, is considerably more permissive in this respect, and women in Russian-language communication enjoy a broader stylistic range (Maslova, 2001).

This is precisely the area in which the notion of the *culturogenderema* demonstrates its analytical power. The *culturogenderema* unites in a single descriptive unit the cultural prescription, the gender role and the linguistic means of its expression: the choice of a specific address form, the selection of a softening formula, the recourse to a particular set of intonational and lexical markers. In the speech of Russian-Uzbek bilingual women the *culturogenderema* is realized through the systematic use of softening particles, of mitigated requests, of indirect refusals and of culturally connotated kinship terms (Telia, 1996, pp. 198–234). In male bilingual speech the corresponding *culturogendereme* privileges directness, the use of authoritative formulas and the appeal to age-based hierarchy. The bilingual context modifies but does not abolish these distinctions: instead, it produces a new configuration in which Russian-language pragmatic resources are mobilized to articulate Uzbek-culture gender expectations.

4. Code-switching as a culturally meaningful act

Code-switching in the speech of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals is not a sign of insufficient command of either language. On the contrary, as Grosjean (2010) has shown for bilinguals in general, it is a refined pragmatic instrument used by competent speakers to achieve specific communicative goals. The switch from Russian to Uzbek frequently signals an appeal to in-group solidarity, an emotional intensification, a return to family or traditional values, or a religious connotation. The reverse switch from Uzbek to Russian signals a transition to a more formal, professional or neutral register, a distancing from the emotional

content of the conversation, or an orientation towards external interlocutors (Weinreich, 1953, pp. 73–80).

Particularly characteristic are intra-sentential switches involving culturally specific lexemes that do not possess full equivalents in the other language. Words such as *mahalla*, *osh*, *navro'z*, *to'y* and *qatorlik* are routinely preserved in their Uzbek form within Russian-language utterances, since their translation would destroy their cultural density (Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 2005). Such switches function as miniature culturogendereme and culture-bound markers that anchor the utterance in the local linguocultural reality.

5. Family and ceremonial communication

The domain of family and ceremonial communication is the most conservative segment of the speech behavior of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals. Here Uzbek norms dominate almost without competition: traditional ceremonies (*to'y*, *marosim*, *ma'raka*) are conducted in Uzbek and follow strictly codified scripts. Russian elements penetrate this domain only as marginal insertions or as features of generational variation. At the same time, family communication in mixed urban environments often combines Uzbek vocatives and respect formulas with Russian-language conversational flow, producing a hybrid family register that has become characteristic of educated urban bilingual households (Grosjean, 2010).

Conclusion

The speech behavior of Russian-Uzbek bilinguals constitutes a coherent communicative phenomenon that cannot be adequately described either as a Russian-language behavior with Uzbek influences or as an Uzbek-language behavior with Russian influences. It is a third entity, organized according to its own pragmatic logic, in which elements of both linguocultures are systematically selected and combined according to the communicative situation, the social roles of the interlocutors, and the value orientation of the speaker (Grosjean, 2010; Wierzbicka, 2003).

The linguocultural features identified in this article — the hybrid system of address, the integrated politeness strategies, the gender-marked patterns describable through the notion of the culturogenderema, the pragmatically motivated code-switching, and the layered structure of the family register — demonstrate that bilingualism in Uzbekistan has produced a distinct communicative culture. The systematic description of this culture is a task of considerable theoretical and practical importance: it contributes to comparative linguoculturology (Maslova, 2001; Vorobyov, 1997), to the theory of language contact (Weinreich, 1953) and to the methodology of teaching Russian as a non-native language in the Uzbek linguocultural environment. Further research should be directed at refining the typology of culturally significant units of bilingual speech, at investigating the dynamics of intergenerational change in the bilingual norm, and at developing applied tools for the description and teaching of bilingual communicative competence.

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	TABLE OF CONTENTS	
1.	THE SEDENTARIZATION PROCESS OF NOMADIC KIPCHAKS IN THE FERGANA VALLEY (SECOND HALF OF THE 19 th CENTURY) Shamshidinov Bakhridin Sharobiddin o'g'li	3
2.	THE PROBLEM OF THE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE IN PHILOSOPHY Yusupova Ranoxon Tolibjonovna	8
3.	LEVELS OF HUMAN EVOLUTION, STAGES OF INTELLIGENCE Mukhitdin Nazarov	13
4.	LINGUODIDACTIC FOUNDATIONS AND MODERN METHODS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A NON-NATIVE LANGUAGE Islomova Sevara Pozilovna	16
5.	INTEGRATION OF COMMUNICATIVE AND COGNITIVE METHODS IN TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE Islomova Sevara Pozilovna	19
6.	STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE Khalikova Mukhtaram Yursunovna	22
7.	LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF SPEECH BEHAVIOR OF RUSSIAN-UZBEK BILINGUALS Tursunova Nadira Arabbaevna	24
8.	THE INTERRELATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: THE NOTION OF GESTALT Tursunova Nadira Arabbaevna	30
9.	ANCIENT FERGANA AND THE FERGANIANS (historical and ethnographic information) Abdullaev Ulugbek Saydanovich	35
10.	PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS STUDYING IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION FIELDS Rakhmonova Dilnura Saidovna	38
11.	DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INDEPENDENT THINKING THROUGH THE CASE-METHOD APPROACH Yakubova Barno Baxtiyorovna	43
12.	THE ROLE OF THE GREAT SILK ROAD IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL EXCHANGES	46