TO THE QUESTION OF COMMUNICATORS' INTERPRETATIONAL ACTIVITY

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze verbal and non-verbal addressee's responses as a reflection of understanding, non-comprehension or misunderstanding between interlocutors. The research focuses on addressee's responses in the aspect of their structural, semantic, communicative and pragmatic peculiarities as a result of understanding, non-comprehension or misunderstanding between communicators in business discourse. The results of the research show that the interplay of presuppositions manifests itself in a phenomenon that the mismatch of presuppositions of one type entails the mismatch at a higher level: the mismatch of syntactical presuppositions hinders understanding and the mismatch of semantic presuppositions mostly often relates to communicators' personal sphere.

Keywords: communicative failure, presuppositions, understanding, non-comprehension, misunderstanding.

I. Introduction

The modern stage of linguistics development is characterized by both integral and differential processes. It is relevant for the linguistic researches of the late 20th and early 21st century to accentuate attention on efficacy of anthropocentrism principle that represents the general tendency of modern linguistic noesis – movement from the area of systems to their centre – the person. As O.O. Selivanova points out, turning to a person as to the producer of language and knowledge, fixed in verbal and symbolic results of human activity – in texts, linguistics escaped from monologicality and engaged in dialogue with other branches of science, applying them for cognition of its own object [6: 6].

The essence of the interpretational school researches is that the same interpretational mechanism serving various types of linguistic activity forms the basis of language proficiency. The main notion of the theory is the definition of the term *interpretation* meaning, according to K.A. Dolonin, *explanation, disclosure of the meaning* [4: 5].

II. The aim of the research

The aim of this article is to analyze verbal and non-verbal addressee's responses as a reflection of understanding, non-comprehension or misunderstanding between interlocutors. The object of the article is addressee's responses in business discourse. The subject of this research is structural, semantic, communicative and pragmatic peculiarities of addressee's verbal and non-verbal responses as a result of understanding, non-comprehension or misunderstanding between communicators.

Communication as a purposeful process, activity one of the means of which is language and sign cohesive form of organization is the text [6: 32], in any of its types allows for an addresser and an addressee. Study of the addressee factor is connected with the problem of adequate understanding of the speech situation, with modeling of the communication of understanding [1: 90].

III. Results

According to V.Z. Dem'yankov's point of view, the definition of the term *understanding* comprises the set of auxiliary characteristics which are called by the scientist "modules of understanding" [2: 58]. Nine modules of understanding are allocated. The first one is the use of lingual knowledge. In the framework of this module language defines understanding and is its prerequisite. The second module is construction verification of hypothetical interpretations. Understanding as the process of origination of expectations (hypotheses) as far as the further course of events being interpreted, comprises in understanding the procedure of hypotheses verification or rejection. The third module is the "digestion" of what is being said. The scientist distinguishes such characteristics of this module of understanding as the degree of

realism (or, visa versa, fantasy) of the interpretation, probability, the contrast between interpreter's model and inner world, interpretation "stress field", activity of understanding. The forth module defines the aim, intentions and motivation of the utterance. The interpretation of the aim is possible in two aspects: a) establishing what is meant by the utterance; b) discernment of the speaker's strategic plan. The fifth module is an awareness of model and inner world nonidentity. (The inner world is understood as a fragment or instantaneous cut of inner life. The model world is as if being added to an interpreter's inner life and sometimes exists parallel to his/her further inner life or sometimes completely excludes it.) The content of the sixth module is the relation inside the model and inner worlds, which are understood differently in interpretation. Correlation of the model world and stock of knowledge about the objective world is the content of the seventh module. Interpretation leads to constant changes in interpreter's informative fund. The eighth module correlates interpretation with the interpreter's line of conduct. The ninth module is connected to the choice of understanding 'tonality'. An interpreter should always select a 'key' for understanding to ensure its unity and integrity [2: 58-64].

Perceiving the utterance, an addressee refers its designation content with what he/she knows (or thinks that knows about the referential situation, verifies addresser's statement about the referential situation being guided not only by what he knows, but also what is possible and probable, according to his/her point of view. As the knowledge of different people about the same phenomenon varies, not just the transfer of information from one person to another occurs but much more complicated process, as an addresser's significatum differs greatly from an addressee's significatum that, in its turn, leads to understanding, non-comprehension or misunderstanding between communicators.

Misunderstanding and miscomprehension correlate with the concept of communicative failure. O.N. Yermakova and Ye.A. Zemskaya define communicative failure as a complete or partial misunderstanding of an utterance by a partner of communication that is a speaker's communicative intention failure [5]. Communicative failures are classified according to different grounds: lingual, socio-

cultural and psychosocial. One of the basic factors which predetermines the occurrence of communicative failures is the mismatch of communicators' presuppositions that is reflected in contradiction of interlocutors' communicative expectations.

Misunderstanding which is caused by the breach of perception of speech flow and leads to communicative halting: asking again, clarification e.g., attests the mismatch of syntactic presuppositions.

For example:

The phone rang a little after eleven p.m. ...

"Bette, listen to me. I don't know why I didn't think of this earlier, I'm positively idiotic for not seeing the potential, but tell me, darling, what did you think of Kelly?"

"Who's Kelly?"

"The woman you sat next to at Charlie's dinner at Elaine's. So, what do you think?"

"I don't know, she seems really nice. Why?"

"Why? Darling, you are positively brain-dead these days. What do you think about working for Kelly?"

"Huh? Who's working for Kelly? I'm so confused." (9 :57)

Communication on the phone which is contact in time and distant in space has its specificity. Lack of visual perception of a partner, sign-mime data reception, various distractions, communicative noise can easily cause communicative failures. As suggested by Ye.A. Selivanova, communicative noise occurs in the area being either because of semiotic abnormality of the text in universe or in communicators' spheres of consciousness as a result of divergence of mental lexicon, thesauri or as a result of insufficient or incorrect text program of interpretation [6: 147]. Syntactic presuppositions regulate syntactic coherence of the dialogical speech, as only an utterance grammatically and syntactically linked to the preceding one may be appropriate in the context.

Misunderstanding which could be caused by discordance of communicators' knowledge fund regarding the referential situation characterizes the mismatch of semantic presuppositions.

For example:

…"Who is it?" I asked, leaning in conspiratorially. I didn't really care, but thought I should.

"Not 'who', 'what'!" she practically scream-whispered. She hadn't yet moved her eyes from the woman.

"What?" I asked, still clueless.

"What do you mean, 'what'? Are you kidding? Do you not see it? Do you need glasses?" I thought she was mocking me, but she reached into her tote bag and pulled out a pair of wire-rims. "Here, put these on and check that out."

I continued to stare, clueless, until Elisa leaned in closer and said, "Look. At. Her. Bag. Just try and tell me it's not the most gorgeous thing you've ever seen."... "Ohmigod, I can barely stand it, it's so amazing. It's the crocodile Birkin. Rarest of them all."

"A what?" I asked. I briefly considered pretending to know what she was talking about, but it felt like too much effort at that point in the day….

"You really don't know, do you?"

I shook my head. (9 :65-66)

Any dialogue takes place within the context which changes constantly. This context may be imperfect (when communicators' presuppositions are not congruent) or nondefective [3: 36]. An aforecited conversation is a vivid example of a defective dialogue that leads to a communicative failure. Semantic presuppositions are responsible for notional, logical coherence of the dialogue and their mismatch can cause misunderstanding or miscomprehension.

Misunderstanding caused by the disparity of knowledge about the communicative situation reveals the mismatch of pragmatic presuppositions. Sharing N.I. Formanovskaya's point of view, we understand a communicative situation as a

complex set of external conditions of communication and communicators' inner states presented in an utterance or discourse [7: 42].

For example:

"Oh yeah, and I've also sorted the gifts," Lisa accused. Was she the only one who did any work around here? "As each guest leaves, we'll present them with a bottle of wee."

"A bottle of what?" Ashling was weary and perplexed – if this was Lisa's idea of joke, it was an extremely poor one.

"Wee. A bottle of wee."

"You are going to give a thousand of Ireland's movers and shakers a bottle of wee?" She didn't have the energy to laugh. "That's an awful lot of wee. Where are you going to get it? Do we all have to make a contribution?"

Open-mouthed, Lisa surveyed Ashling. "From Lancôme, of course."

… "That's very decent of them." What was Lisa on about?

"It's only the fifty-ml bottle." Lisa persisted with her parallel-universe chat. But it looks big enough, no? She held up a little bottle of Oui.

"Oh," Ashling breathed in enlightenment. "You mean Oui!"

"Yeah, wee. Why, what did you think I said?" (8: 424)

IV. Conclusions

The interplay of presuppositions manifests itself in a phenomenon that the mismatch of presuppositions of one type entails the mismatch at a higher level: the mismatch of syntactical presuppositions hinders understanding and the mismatch of semantic presuppositions mostly often relates to communicators' personal sphere.

The analysis of addressee's responses from the point of view of balance or imbalance of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic presuppositions is valid and needs further research.

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