COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC PROCESSES OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Our reality can be divided into the categories of natural and cultural objects, which are studied by their respective academic disciplines. Language as a tool owned solely by humans, is a cultural object that evolved in a completely natural way. Language is motivated and it is deeply involved in human cognitive activities. This is also a means of linking us to objects, not excluding technologies. Recent form of the language used in the cyberspace is represented by languages and slangs – netspeak. It is a linguistic shift, because in this case, the grammar, traditional word order, and rigid meaning do not have stable points. The objective of this work is to describe cyber-cultural forms of language represented by netspeak, which evolved from language as a cultural object.

Keywords: culture, emotions, language, motivation, tool

1. Introduction

The whole reality surrounding us is composed of objects. Naturally, it is not only the world, which we can perceive with our senses, but also the Universe, which seems distant to us, as well as the microcosmos of Quantum physics, the presence of which we cannot feel, yet it can be found everywhere around us and inside of us.

From the typology point of view, we can divide the objects into natural objects, independent from humans (studied by natural sciences), and cultural objects, created by humans for humans (studied mainly by humanities). It is well-known, however, that a human being is a very specific object, too. It can be generally stated, that besides the biological shell, everything in which humans differ from animals is the culture they created. This culture could not come to life without a language. The typical example of cultural objects are tools as extensions of human activity, through which humans deal with the environment and which they use to manipulate their environment. Language as a tool also falls into this category, although its evolution was conditioned naturally. It can be therefore stated, that language represents some interface, when an evolved

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ability and possibility, at the same time, becomes a tool for creating culture and its artefacts.

All objects are linked to certain behaviour or reaction, which are ruled by certain rules and laws in nature. According to the type of feedback, Y. Ikegami differentiates between [1]:

a) Cause – effect. This is a principle behind natural objects, they are predictable, because they work if certain conditions are met, and certain succession takes place. The behaviour is mechanical.

b) Stimulum – response. This relates to the living organisms. Those higher on the evolution scale behave subjectively, according to themselves, in contrast to those lower on the scale, which behave mechanically. Their behaviour thus cannot be predicted.

c) Motivation – action. This applies exclusively on humans. The norm is motivated, with some intention, but isn't predictable.

2. Language as a tool

Humans represent the apex of biological hierarchy. Therefore, there are the most evolved forms of biological movement in their nervous system – psychical life and thoughts. Within this layer of human existence, communication on the highest level takes place – using symbols and meanings. Therefore, this is not a relatively simple animal communication through signals. This is why the formation of human language opened the gateway to the symbol digitization of emotions, and to the revelation of meanings [2]. If we evolve from Ikegami's classification of the objects' behaviour, it is evident, that human behaviour is motivated, intentional, 'cultural'. This was achieved by nature itself by natural selection in cooperation with cultural evolution of the civilization, while using tools is the most remarkable characteristics of humans. It needs to be stated, though, that humans by no means have the monopoly on using tools, these are also used by some animal species. However indeed by motivated actions, tools are assigned more than just exceeding human capacities. D. Black argues that we should focus more on the tools from the point of view of demonstrating certain physical involvement into the objects around us [3].

Language can be understood in similar fashion. As a thinking tools, language (or, more specifically, speech, including inner speech), substantializes thoughts and things, creates or constructs the reality, mediates learning, and is something, which is owned indeed exclusively by humans as species. M. Veverka claims that language is the first and the most important cultural tool. By acquiring a language, a human being acquires access to the 'fortune' of the intellectual experience of the whole society. Symbolic communication in a group, and its conditional semantic fields create a collective consciousness, which exceeds the limits of an individual's long term memory and enables to pass the collective experience through generations [2, p. 216]. Language is motivated, since people use it within their cognitive activities with specific intentions, and it incorporates the deepest in human cognitive activities [1, p.

228]. It is amazing, how we can create images and ideas in minds of other people by making sounds with our lips, tongues and teeth.

Besides that, according to D. Black, we also have a monopoly on technologies. We create technologies using tools and vice versa, technologies help us to create new tools. Cooperation with technologies is natural for us [3], technologies serve us to remove and replace our own activity and industry, or as means to express oneself or sensation, which relates rather to culture.

The speaker (communicator) is in the position of subjectively acting element. As we know, it is not the position of mechanically reacting and answering to questions and stimuli, but first and foremost an unpredictable and cognitive subject. Each of these subjects constructs a situation before it gets to its linguistic decoding. This is how we are embodied into objects. This confirms our natural ability to develop new ways of our acting and imaging [3].

Language must be comprehensible to our cognitive system, which is possible firstly thanks to our brain, a very complicated organic structure. N. Chomsky states that human language can be understood from the aspects of sound, meaning and construction, as components of the mind [4]. Language therefore creates an organic unity with thinking. Human cognitive activity is characterized by genetically mutual features, as well as culturally specific features. Some authors, on the other hand, argue that the role of language as a tool of communication is secondary, and did not come to existence under the pressure of natural selection. S. Luria considers the quality of language, which makes it unique, not its task in mediating orders for actions or any other regular feature of 'animal' communication. He sees it rather in symbolizing, in evoking cognitive images, in shaping of our notion of reality and creating our thought and planning capacity, via its unique feature, which can mediate infinite combinations of symbols, and therefore mental creation of possible worlds [S. Luria, transcript of remarks at '*A Debate on Bio-Linguistics*', a conference organized by the Centre Royaumont pour une science de l'homme, Paris, held at Endicott House, Dedham, Mass. 20-21.5.1974].

Recently this has got to the point, where human cognitive activity is no longer completely 'natural', but many (planned or auxiliary) languages came, or are coming into existence. This means, that they were created by one or more people for a particular purpose. What is important is that they did not evolve naturally, they are not constitutional, and they are simplified, in order to serve as a means of communication between members speaking various constitutional languages. However the boundary between a natural and an artificial language is not so distinct, as it may follow from dichotomic classification. There is an interlinguistic phenomenon, auxiliary languages, who can take on the role of mediator of interlingual and interdialectal communication, i.e. both as natural and artificial languages, while the rules governing the formation of natural languages applied to the formation and creation of artificial languages [5]. As it will result later on, *netspeak* and *leetspeak* are also in this category.

3. Change of perception under the influence of technologies

The fundamental feature of the most modern electronic media (television and Internet) is the power of images, which changes the way of thinking, imagination, and recognition [6]. Our civilization ended up on the crossroad of two discourses, cogitation modes. A constant straight journey of linear thinking enhanced by books lies behind us, a labyrinth of multimedia data ahead of us [7]. I. Rusu and G. Petraru write that there is the risk of reducing the life to the relation with the PC and the virtual world. Nevertheless, the Internet and the PC supply an extraordinary amount of useful information but this does not turn the computer into an all knowing and wise god [8].

Getting back to the unique feature of language to mediate infinite combinations of symbols and creating possible worlds, it can be easily confirmed, that the electronic world of cyberspace exceeds far beyond its functional advantages and has the capacity to fulfil ancient as well as hypermodern aesthetic desires. What could have been described in the past, but not screened, is possible today, or furthermore limitless. Virtual reality as an idea must therefore inevitably refer to technology, which is capable of moving the consciousness of the subject to a different environment without its physical relocation. Representing forms generated within communication technologies, most of all digital technologies conform us to a brand new form of perception, than the one which was there decades ago. M. Heim claims, that cyberspace is a tool for the exploration of our sense for reality [9], which amends the McLuhan's sensory and nervous system extension. Using sight, hearing and touch, one exceeds the limits of his or her own perception and enters the world beyond the screen. And there are always more and more interfaces invented towards the human body and the cognitive system. The main objective of the virtual reality is therefore to create the illusion of being in an environment, which can be perceived as a believable place with interactivity sufficient for carrying out specific tasks in effective and convenient way [10].

Working on a computer, we are used to watching several screens and windows, at the same time, to surf between them and perceive more perspectives at once, and what is more, we often move our sight from the computer screen to the TV screen and subsequently to a mobile phone screen. A recent trend is to be always in touch, to have digital devices on us, anytime. As if we were not only interconnected with the technologies, but they would be 'embedded' in us. More and more often, virtual institutions and worlds come into existence, in which users communicate in online environment using avatars, in ways mimicking social structures of the real world via economic, law, psychological, and other interactions [11]. Physical reality is thus overcome, and hypertext symbolization is set, accompanying postmodern and hypermodern period as its inseparable part. Production of various types of significance substitutes blocks the natural, humanly acquirable significance as an act of understanding of the labelled reality in the place of their materiality, palpability and historical reality [12].

4. Language mutations and cyberspace discourse

Technologically processed communication nowadays strictly requires dynamics of the form and the possibility of variation. The level of globalization tendencies can be felt in various degrees, and one of its stable displays is the aspect of language. English has literally 'colonized' professional, and media discourses, but also ordinary informal discourses, violating the integrity of national languages. This significant loss of the original stylistic dispositions and hybridization of national languages and dialects is gradually becoming an asymptomatic part of the nature of culture, which does not attract attention, and is becoming common. In terms of cyberspace, *netspeak* has formed as a mother-form of language, its sub-branches being, for example *leetspeak, secret lingo of children* and *lolspeak*.

4.1. Netspeak

Netspeak is a cybercultural variation of language, created spontaneously by web users, almost in parallel with its creation. It is necessary to say, that it is not used exclusively on the Internet, but many times in SMSes, or in offline communication. It can be however considered as Internet slang, or a set of languages used by various Internet communities. It is thus nor constitutional, nor homogenous. Equivalent terms for netspeak are *cyber-slang, internet shorthand, chatspeak* or *translexical phonological abbreviation*.

Typical attributes of netspeak are acronyms, neatness, keyboard symbols, and abbreviations. This phenomenon came into existence as a reaction to text fields limited to certain number of characters. Clearly, digital media users were very resourceful and overcame this limitation lexically – by saving characters, so that they could fit meanings into fields without 'loss'. This trend is most evident applied to English. As any other language, any netspeak works on the principle of understanding of the language system by its users, on a mutual consent, while the language cannot be understood but someone, who does not know the rules. It would be difficult to decode the abbreviations and acronyms without the knowledge of the rules, but in their nature, they are very simple, straightforward, and exact.

The most common examples are 'words' such as OMG (Oh my God), LOL (laugh out loud), BTW (by the way), K (Ok), BFF (best friend forever), BRB (be right back), u (you), g2g (good to go), 2nite (tonight). Further examples include: totes (totally), probs (probably), dorbs (adorable), CUL8R (see you later), +1as a means of expressing an agreement, KISS (keep it simple, stupid), OOM (out of mana – mana is magical power, while the acronym OOM refers to a lack of it, and therefore a desperate, hopeless situation). The Internet language, however, also utilizes archaic words or obscure meanings of terms, and interchanges common words for ones with similar pronunciation, but different meaning (i.e. *source* for *sauce*, or *PWNED* as a mistyped version of *OWNED* – 'got you').

The environment of internet communities and chat rooms has also spawned so-called kid-lingo, a version of netspeak used by children, the function of which is to disable the parental control of their internet communication, mainly by the means of ciphering and abbreviation use. In kid-lingo, number 143 signifies 'I love you', number 182 'I hate you', PAL 'parents are listening', number 420 refers to marihuana, 8 to oral sex, the acronym LMIRL means 'let's meet in real life', MOS 'mom over shoulder', and CD9 (code 9) alerts to the approaching parents. Many parents, however, have already learned about these ciphers and acronyms thanks to some of netspeak dictionaries, and it is up to the children to cope with this situation and avoid the control of their increasingly digitally literate parents.

4.2. Leetspeak and memespeak

While the original cyberspeak puts emphasis on shortening and simplifying the communicated text, there are languages, which, conversely, attempt to render the communication more formally complex and time-consuming. In these cases, the purpose is to display a cultural distinction of certain user communities.

The leetspeak originated as a substitute cipher system for hackers, and today is also used by *geeks*, who display their 'superiority' by using it. Hence the etymological origin of 'leetspeak' in the English word 'elite'. Leetspeak substitutes alphabet characters for numbers and other symbols, and rarely also other letters, so that they visually refer to intended phones. One character can be substituted in dozens of different ways, depending on the amount of user's creativity. The leetspeak is intentionally protracted and convoluted, with its main function in entertainment and satisfying of the cultural identification needs. The word 'media' could be typed-in in up to 201 600 variations.

Another example of formally more complex netspeak is the memespeak. Every Internet user, and especially user of social networks, has probably already encountered memes. The memetic information transfer is analogical to the genetic one, although the non-genetic evolution of language is much faster than the progress of its genetic counterpart. According to R. Dawkins, the replicator, which is a unit of cultural transfer, is a meme that replicates itself mimetically, by the means of imitation [13]. This may include any artefacts or ideas; therefore, the internet memes may not be excluded. In their case we are dealing with an ideographic abbreviation, a combination of image and text. One constituent complements the other, while in the common context, they transmit a cultural idea. Inside the internet user's community a several kinds of memes were spawned, and within the memes, a language of its own. A good example would be the LOLspeak (or kitty pidgin), typical for the so-called LOLcat meme, where the graphic component includes a picture of a cat, and the textual component is idiosyncratic, and deliberately grammatically flawed, resembling the speech of a toddler. It originated as a parody to the grammatically poor dialects and argots ascribed to the Internet slang [M. Liberman, *Kitty pidgin and asymmetrical tail-wags,* online at http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/004442.html]. The transformation of the language, is however, not random, and is based on its own

rules. For example: i iz in ur cooka warmin mah butt in ur noms (I am in your cooker warming my butt in your noms), seez dis eye? i killeda man wif dis eye (Can you see this eye? I killed a man with this eye).

4.3. Emoticons, verticons and keyboard symbols

Emoticons represent a very popular iconography, easily recognizable by anyone. The first emoticon – the smiley – originated as a reaction to the tedious communication of scientists. On September 19th, 1982, Scott E. Fahlman introduced an idea of labelling scientific messages as serious and humorous ones by utilizing keyboard symbols. Their meaning has to be interpreted after they had been rotated by 90° to the right. Jokes were to be symbolized by :-), and serious messages by :-(. This resolved into a convention, which has quickly spread from electronic scientific discussions into wider public audiences. The abbreviation (symbol) denotes a sad or a happy face, with the connotations such as 'I feel alright', 'I'm joking/kidding' or 'This is a serious matter', 'The message requires serious attention'.

Today, we know many more emoticons, expressing different moods, attitudes and emotions. These consist of the ASCII coding system (American Standard Code for Information Interchange), which can be also used to create ASCII art (the presence of which significantly diminishes nowadays thanks to the much more sophisticated graphic possibilities). The ASCII art is based on well thought-out composition of the 95 keyboard symbols (letters, numbers, and several other characters) into a picture. The simplest, comprised of 2–3 characters, are the emoticons. The more complex ones, which do not require the mental 90° rotation to the right, are called verticons.

Since inside the cyberspace, the communication lacks its extra-verbal aspect, the context is not complete. It would be a mistake to suppose that this function can be substituted by emoticons, even though they may appear to have such ambition. The image codes change their meanings in different contexts. What a smile aims to express, is dependent on its context. The smiley itself may express, aside from cheerfulness or happiness, an effort to relieve an uncomfortable utterance, or to avoid any further communication completely, when there is nothing more to be said. Another meaning could be found in a connotation 'duly noted', again, possibly cutting off any further communication. Conversely, more examples can be found in sad emoticons being used in jokes or non-serious contexts.

A recent novelty appearing predominantly on social networks (as well as marketing communication, nowadays) is a so-called hashtag, symbolized by the number sign '#'. A topic, an idea, a short utterance, keyword or subject of interest tagged with this symbol, and often accompanied by some image, are supposed to call attention, uncover further meanings, complete it, or add a recommended meaning to this image. The hashtags began appearing on Twitter in 2007 in order to recognize a context or a shade of meaning. Two years later they became searchable in the precisely same manner in which we search for

keywords in archives. A hashtag may consist of maximum of 140 characters, while becoming a hyperlink. It is capable of connecting people or events with the same tag. However, according to some people, this symbol has become overused or misused, to which many users reacted by using hashtags with hints of parody or even sarcasm. A good hashtag should be short, simple, memorable, relevant, meaningful, and not superficial [R. Ferguson, *Making a hash of social media use*, online at http://www.smh.com.au/comment/making-a-hash-of-social-media-use-20131127-2ya8o.html].

4.4. Psychological-cultural aspect of netspeak

It is a well-known reality that with progress and improvement, new media, which encompassed attributes of their predecessors, enriching them with added value and innovation, always appeared. What is not so common, however, is the appearance of a new medium of linguistic communication [14]. We know that the language and thought are connected to the interpretation of signs, which obviously do not exclude communication, perception and the language of cyberspace. Netspeak, which asserts itself via digital tools, can be called a language game. It is a game, which encompasses its own rules, its own mode of interpretation, a certain involvement (or, an absence) of context, code system, and least, but not last, its own circle of users. Since this language is free from strict grammatical rules, punctuation and traditional syntax, it is, in a certain sense, ephemeral. Despite being a new, unifying language, it is not progressive, but rather regressive. This view may be supported by the statement of Louise Menand, who rejected the utopia of Internet communication as a step towards a more effective scientific communication. Menand speaks of more primitive and improvised communication [15]. Elias Aboujaoude adds that netspeak forces us to be more dependent of the pace of our interactions with others, which disembodies our utterances from the body language. Communication inside the cyber-culture thus seizes to be a communication in the framework of the whole and of the context, and is sometimes reduced to simple information exchange, rather than focusing on an actually meaningful conversation.

Hence, based on its regression and non-complexity, netspeak often resembles the communication of an infant, which may be testified by the increase in popularity of video and online games (with an average age of players being 30 years [1, p. 138] – as if we indeed enjoyed returning to the age of infancy; the age of games, without troubles and responsibility. The counterpart of not using any punctuation is the overuse of it, especially when it comes to emphasizing by using exclamation and question marks, as if it was 'the more, the better'. This is another example of childlike (even childish) impulsivity.

The situational ambiguity which characterizes the online environment often influences the behaviour of people and their emotions, so that they rely more on their own imagination, cognitive processes and personality dynamism than on actual, valid external information [16]. In the case of emotions, feelings, and their expressing, we can see two basic orientations.

The first orientation points towards the use of emoticons as an inseparable part of messaging. While the 43 muscles on the human face are capable of creating a wide variety of facial expressions, the emoticons do not profess such quality. Nevertheless, we rely on them, even though they are often open to interpretation, and therefore ambiguous in their meaning. Expressing emotions on one's face shows that in human beings, the natural and the social aspect is always inseparably interconnected [17]. This was confirmed by a research from 2005, the result of which showed that people are overtly confident in communicating, as well as decoding sarcasm, seriousness, anger, and sadness via the e-mail. The results pointed out the fact that we are losing the ability to communicate our emotions in a precise and open manner [1, p. 154]. The communication technologies can therefore, indeed, disembody us from our complete utterance in its full context.

The second orientation for researching the emotions on the Internet is based on perceiving the cyberspace as a safe psychological space, a space, which an individual perceives as a 'room for oneself', as his 'own' world, which can be controlled according to one's preferences and desires. In the cyberspace, people are opening themselves to others more rapidly and more profoundly than in the physical world [16]. This manifestation of human behaviour results in great popularity of the Internet dating services, where users find other people, with whom they seem to share 'mutual understanding'. This contradicts the opinions stating that the internet causes lowering of intensity of feelings. Quite contrary, in some cases, the emotions mediated via the Internet can be experienced as very intense and unique.

In the case of the Internet, these might not be only pleasant situations. Dark aspects of numerous Internet users are a evidence from the 21st century, confirming Freud's theories of id - a problematic, instinct-driven aspect of our psyche, which we keep under control within socialization [1, p. 93]. Sad witnesses are suicides, or homicides of teenagers, who could not control their chat with somebody on the 'other side'. Id is passionate, impulsive, bearing the human aggressive tendency towards others in itself. The Internet serves as a depository of our dark impulses and secretes, and it is a modern window into our frustrations and complexes [1, p. 118]. However, it is necessary to remember that people are easily mistaken in their interpretations of the mediated emotions, their meaning, however, does not necessarily have to be transparent.

5. Conclusions

In the '50s, when behaviourism ruled in social sciences, the basis was that we use language on the principle of *stimulum – response*. Now we know that language, or *parole,* are not just mere sounds coming out of our mouths as we breathe out. Language represents an original structure of words capable of evoking imaginations in our minds, which almost exclusively is motivated, and cannot be predicted. The nature of the motivated language arises also from its contextuality, when non-verbal communication takes place. However neither

these are mechanical responses, but they are interconnected to emotions, and the character of a person. The function of emotions is the evaluation of a situation, which expects its cognitive procession, relates on cognitive processes. The interconnection between emotions and cognition is functional, and gives psychological meaning to an emotional reaction [18].

These facts can neither be ignored in the discourse on virtual space and the communication within it. Motivated behaviour and emotional involvement in the situation remain present elements, but what it lacks, is the clearly defined context of the message [19, 20]. The language of cyberspace, netspeak, has a lot of forms and possibilities. However, generally, we can consider it as a non-filtered, unedited, sometimes too expressive, childish, fast (even immediate) alternative. Human language as a condition for the existence of more complex emotions changes its function in cyberspace to a mere exchange of information among subjects. Among other things, web has become a playground for id – we feel free in expressing negative emotions and urges in the online world [1, p. 117]. Id as a stage typical for a child is a symptom of regression for language, if we speak about netspeak. Culturally-wise, we can consider it a shift, something innovative and creative. This only reinforces the tendency of community to create their own cultural specifications and way they communicate, create and share cultural content. Steven Pinker claims that in any given phase of a natural evolution of a person, language would be something very exceptional [21]. And exactly the way a language is a condition for a formation of a culture, netspeak is its next stage.

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