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ՕՏԱՐ ԼԵԶՈՒՆԵՐԸ ՄԱՍՆԱԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ
ՆՊԱՏԱԿՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԱՐ

№ 5 (14)

Հրատարակության է երաշխավորել
ԵՊՀ ռոմանագերմանական բանասիրության ֆակուլտետի
գիտական խորհուրդը

Գլխավոր խմբագիր՝   **Մարգարիտա Ապրեսյան**
ԵՊՀ անգլերեն լեզվի թիվ 1 ամբիոնի վարիչ, բան.
գիտ. թեկն., պրոֆեսոր

Խմբագրական   **Դորա Սաքայան**
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Խմբագրակազմ՝   **Սամվել Աբրահամյան**
ԵՊՀ ռոմանագերմանական բանասիրության ֆակուլտետի
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ԵՊՀ գերմանական բանասիրության ամբիոնի վարիչ,
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ԲՈՎԱՆԴԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ
CONTENTS

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PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE ECONOMY
IN E-DISCOURSE

ABSTRACT

The paper explores the basic features of e-discourse which is used to communicate across time and geographical borders and is used for communication in virtual space. The main characteristic of e-discourse is the principle of language economy realized on different levels (phonetic, syntactic, lexical, etc.) This principle plays a great role in electronic communication as its application significantly eases understanding between internet users. Thus, dwelling on the language economy principle in e-discourse in the language classroom will significantly help develop the learners' communication skills across time and space boundaries.

Key words: *e-discourse, e-communication, computer mediated communication, language economy*

РЕЗЮМЕ
ПРИНЦИПЫ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ ЭКОНОМИИ В ЭЛЕКТРОННОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

В статье рассматриваются основные характеристики электронного дискурса, который используется при компьютерно-опосредованном общении. Одним из важных признаков электронного дискурса является принцип языковой экономии, знание видов которых значительно упростит коммуникацию в электронной среде. Языковая экономия реализуется на разных уровнях языка, в том числе фонетическом, синтаксическом и лексическом. Таким образом, изучение основных принципов языковой экономии при обучении английскому языку способствует развитию коммуникативных навыков студентов в компьютерно-опосредованной среде.

Ключевые слова: *электронный дискурс, электронная коммуникация, компьютерно-опосредованная коммуникация, языковая экономия*

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ
ԼԵԶՎԻ ՏՆՏԵՍՄԱՆ ՍԿԶԲՈՒՆՔՆԵՐԸ ԷԼԵԿՏՐՈՆԱՅԻՆ ԴԻՍԿՈՒՐՍՈՒՄ

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում են էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցման նպա-տակով կիրառվող դիսկուրսին բնորոշ առանձնահատկությունները, որոնցից թերևս ամենակարևորը կարելի է համարել լեզվի տնտեսման սկզբունքները: Վերջիններս մեծ դեր ունեն հաղորդակցման գործընթացում, քանի որ լեզվի տնտեսման տեսակների և ձևերի իմացությունը նշանակալիորեն դյուրին է դարձնում հաղորդակցումը էլեկտրոնային հարթակում: Լեզվի տնտեսումն իրագործվում է տարբեր մակարդակներում, այդ թվում՝ հնչյունաբանական, շարահյուսական և բառային: Լեզվի տնտեսման սկզբունքների ուսումնասիրու-թյունը անգլերենի դասավանդման գործընթացում կնպաստի համացանցում ուսանողների հաղորդակցման հմտությունների կատարելագործմանը:

Բանալի բառեր` էլեկտրոնային դիսկուրս, էլեկտրոնային հաղորդակցում, համակարգչային հաղորդակցում, լեզվի տնտեսում

The interaction via computer or e-communication is considered to be a relatively new phenomenon and is represented by a variety of forms as e-mail, chat, forums and blogs. Tornow describes the written interaction that occurs in electronic mail and online courses as a kind of 'written talk' (Tornow, 1997: 1). Davis and Brewer use the term 'electronic discourse' to refer to written talk – 'writing that stands in place of voices'. It is interesting to note that electronic discourse or computer-mediated communication (CMC) has its own linguistic and extralinguistic peculiarities. On the one hand, it is similar to an ordinary conversation as it involves repetition and direct address. However, because 'turn-taking occurs differently in CMC, the interruptions so characteristic of conversation do not occur' (Davis, Brewer, 1997: 3). There is also an absence of fillers (e.g., uh, er, mmm) so often met in oral conversations (Brown, Yule, 1983).

Sims points out that electronic mail is deliberate in that the writer has the opportunity to plan and organize the discourse. Yet, it has some of the spontaneity of oral discourse as most of the users report spending little time planning and revising electronic mail messages. This spontaneity may in its turn

lead to misspellings and the use of unconventional punctuation and capitalization in electronic discourse (Sims, 1996). Chafe and Danielewicz claim that speakers, in contrast to writers, produce language "on the fly" and therefore tend to use the first words that occur to them. As a result, the vocabulary of spoken language is more limited in variety and range. At the same time, the language of CMC shares more similarities with written language in terms of its "lexical density" (Chafe, Danielewicz, 1987:88).

The functions expressed by voice quality, intonation and pauses in speech have traditionally been performed by such graphical means as capitalization, punctuation, italicization, and paragraphing in written language (Brown, Yule, 1983: 10-11). In e-discourse, participants convey their feelings with the help of the so-called *emoticons* (Hightower, Sayeed, 1996: 463; Jacobson, 1996: 467). The latter are small icons created from various combinations of keyboard characters. They express various attitudes and facial expressions and therefore enable quite detailed and emotional discussions. The most frequently used emoticons are those for a smile and a frown, usually represented as :) or :-) and as :(or :-(.

The tone of an e-mail message can be made clear in more ways than by the use of emoticons and explicit statements. Many users apply lower-case letters to mark the speech-like nature of the medium and the casual tone of messages. Furthermore, the use of lower-case letters increases the "economy of writing" (Goodman, Graddol, 1996:120). The process of typing becomes easier and faster, thus approaching the rapidity of spoken discourse.

The economy of language is an inextricable feature of everyday communication. As it is known, this implies spontaneous unprepared speech with a quite frequent exchange of sentences and word combinations which, in its turn, results in the application of simple short syntactic structures, unprepared phonetic articulation as well as negligible vocabulary choice with the consequent avoidance of complex long words and the use of short ones, including abbreviations, graphical signs, etc.

The concept of economy implies "the principle of least effort", which consists in tending towards the minimum amount of effort that is necessary to achieve the maximum result. This principle is at the very core of linguistic evolution. The concept of economy can be interpreted at all linguistic levels, including phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexis, discourse.

Martinet describes a primary mechanism of language change as coming from the interaction of two factors: first, the requirements of communication, the need for the speaker to convey his message, and second, the principle of least effort, which makes him restrict his output of energy, both mental and physical, to the minimum compatible with achieving his ends. (Martinet, 1995: 79).

In his study of linguistic evolution, Leopold discovers that there are two contradictory tendencies in any linguistic systems. Linguistic development follows not one tendency, but two opposing ones: towards distinctness and towards economy. Either of these poles prevails, but both are present and alternately preponderant (Leopold 1930:102). The tendency to distinctness stems from the fact that any speaker has 'the predominant intention of being understood'; tendency to economize on words is 'the innate tendency of man, wisely given him by nature, not to spend more energy on any effort than necessary' (Leopold 1930:102). In some languages, one of the two factors usually prevails on the other, generating different balances depending on the social or professional level.

Valter Tauli assumes that linguistic evolution is determined by five active driving forces: (1) tendency towards clarity, (2) tendency towards ease or economy of effort, (3) emotional impulses, (4) aesthetic tendencies, (5) social impulses (Tauli, 1958:50).

Zipf tried to investigate speech as a natural phenomenon and discovered that an inclination to economy is a criterion regulating any aspect of human behavior, which is governed by this 'principle of least effort', operating within linguistic evolution as well. In such a dynamic process as linguistic change, words are constantly being shortened, eliminated, borrowed and altered in meaning, but, thanks to 'the principle of least effort', balance with a maximum of economy is always preserved (Zipf, 1949). By studying large samples of written text, Zipf noted the intrinsic statistical interdependence between the length of a specific word (in number of phonemes) and its rank order in the language (its position in order of its frequency of occurrence in texts of all kinds). The higher the rank order of a word or expression (the more frequent its usage in parole), the higher was the probability for it to be 'shorter' (made up of fewer phonemes). For example, he found that articles *(the)*, conjunctions *(and, or)*, and other function words *(to, it)*, which have a high rank order in English, are typically monosyllabic, consisting of 1–3 phonemes. He also saw that this compression force in language does not stop at the level of function words. It can be met in a

wide range of cases, such as the abbreviation and acronymy of commonly used phrases, (*ad, photo, aka, DNA, IQ, VIP, etc.*). Zipf concluded that the more frequent or necessary a form is for communicative purposes, the more likely it is to be rendered 'compressed' or 'economical' in physical structure. The reason for this seems to be an innate psychobiological tendency in human species to expend the least effort possible in speech.

In virtual communication, language compression can be realized at various levels. First of all, this is the phonetic level, where characters of the words are reduced to minimum as to convey the meaning of the utterance. For instance, it often happens that we see in e-communication texts such letter combinations where single characters come to substitute whole words. For example, *y* for *why*, *b* for *be*, *u* for *you* etc.

There are cases when we can observe vowel and vowel group reduction. For example, *sqre* for *square, prdn* for *pardon, crcle* for *circle, wtr* for *water.*

However, this is not the case with the linguistic units where vowels are in the initial position. Here the leading vowels remain unchanged whereas the rest of them are reduced. For example, *eqlty* for equality, *undrstng* for understanding, *intlgnt* for intelligent, etc.

When speaking about letter group substitution it is worth mentioning the role of numerical forms which are widely used in these terms:

1drfl – wonderful, 2mrrw – tomorrow, 2sdy – Tuesday, 4 – for, 2 – to or too, b4 – before, etc.

At the grammatical level, language compression avoids the application of any tense forms provided there are other time indicators, as in the following cases:

m wrk *tmrw* = I'm working tomorrow.

m wrk *now* = I'm working now

Jane wrk *ystrdy* = Jane worked yesterday

I red tis *recently* =I have read this recently

Language economy at the syntactic level in e-discourse is also achieved by ellipsis. Buzarov defines ellipsis as the result of contraction determined by the tendency of language towards economy. It is an implicit sign which can be inferred either by preceding or succeeding context. The main reason for ellipsis is that through the omission of items attention is focused on what is new. A response said by the second speaker may contain different types of ellipsis in order to avoid the repetition of the whole or the part of what has been said by

different speakers. On the basis of the present elements in the preceding context we are informed about what has been omitted (Buzarov, 1992:57). In traditional lingusitics ellipsis is defined as a process which excludes only structurally important elements in the sentence (Shakhmatov, 1991: 115). It is most likely to occur in dialogues and plays an important role in the connection between sentences said by different speakers.

At the syntactic level language compression tends to the ellipsis of various sentence members. Here we can observe:

The omission of the subject (especially when expressed by pronoun):

m busy now (*I* is omitted)

couldn't say better (*I* is omitted)

was nice to chat with you. (*It* is omitted)

The omission of the predicate:

- Did u *go* to the party?

- Yeah, I *did*. (the verb go is substituted by the auxiliary verb *do*)

As it can be seen, ellipsis in the verbal group is carried out by means of the verb *do*, which can substitute for any verb provided it is active not passive, except *be* or in some cases *have*.

It is of importance to note here that it is not always possible for the substituting part to coincide with the ellipted one in tense. In the above-adduced example the verb 'go' is substituted with the past form 'did' to denote that the person applied the action was true in the past.

The omission of the subject and the whole predicate:

- Where are u going?

- (I am going) Germany.

- When are u leaving?

- (I am leaving) Early tomorrow morning.

The omission of the object of the sentence:

- Have u bought *those red shoes*?

- No, preferred the blue *ones*.

- Did u do *exercises*?

- The shortest *one*. (the nominal substitute *one* (plural *ones*) can substitute for any noun)

The omission of the whole sentence:

- Have *u finished your homework*?

- *Not yet*.

83

- Are *u coming to the cinema*?

- Think *so*.

Thus, at the syntactic level, various types of ellipsis can be found in e-discourse. The element omitted can be the subject expressed by personal pronouns, the predicate, the subject and the whole predicate, the object of the sentence, the omission of the whole clause. It should be mentioned, that elliptical sentences are grammatically incomplete but can be easily understood from the context of the sentence.

As we can see, the principle of language economy is one of the main characteristics of e-discourse, which functions at all linguistic levels. This principle initially originated with the purpose of saving keystrokes caused by the general tendency of not spending more effort than necessary. The knowledge of the basic means of language economy will greatly contribute to the development of students' communication skills at the level of virtual world.

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