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Secondary Language Communicative Environment, or Ager Publicus (общественное поле)

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The present-day key concept in language teaching known as 'learner-centeredness', and recent research in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics treat language less as an abstract construct of structures and forms and more as a dynamic product of psychological and social life. This article is a brief overview of the ideas connected to the problem of secondary language communicative environment in the modern university in Russia. The term 'secondary language communicative environment' is used here to refer to the complicated structure of the artificial English-speaking world in the educational institution, miles from England. The aim of this article is to explore the potential contribution of secondary language communicative environment to the professional development of the university world's residents, both students and teaching staff. The article does not attempt to provide complete coverage of all the aspects of secondary language communicative environment. It tries to emphasize four particular points: definition of language environment, particularly, secondary language communicative environment; attempts of structuring the secondary language communicative environment in academic context; conditions for creating secondary language communicative environment in the Russian university; obstacles to creating an effective secondary language communicative environment.

Keywords: language environment, secondary language communicative environment, linguistic persona, communicative milieu.

Secondary language communicative environment: definition

The ideas concerning language and environment were firstly expressed by the noted American linguist and anthropologist Edward Sapir and are now known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which states that the language a person speaks influences the way the world is perceived and interacted with. Today there is a number of different approaches to the relationship between languages and their environments and all of them emerge from different schools of linguistic thought. Noam Chomsky and cognitive linguists insist that the human language is independent of the environment. Another theory, well-known as 'social construction of knowledge', or 'constructivism' (Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey) considers that it is socialization, not merely cognition, which recognizes people as co-constructors of meaningful interaction within certain environment and active participants with prior knowledge and experience. Structuralists and poststructuralists (Bloomfield, Hjelmslev, Sommerfelt) claim that the world is constructed

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by the language, while ecolinguists (Halliday, Haugen, Voegelin) suggest that the language is interconnected with the environment as language constructs it and is constructed by it (Brown K., Ed. 2005). All these scholars though are rocking the same boat in the same sea, they all mean the native tongue users in their native authentic environment. Another matter that has not been touched on so far is dealing with another layer, which we call secondary language environment.

How would we define language environment?

In theory, we may define environment as the outer world, physical, intellectual, moral and social milieu people live in. Environment may also be understood as the inverse pole of inborn abilities, the areal, resource and complex of conditions for performance and development (Zorin, 2002).

In practice, an interesting phenomenon of environment itself could be encountered in many fields. We could hear, read and talk on built and natural, biophysical and social, active and passive types of environment. ICT community, or digital natives, talk on language environment as efficient and consistent means for developing quality applications with multiple languages in the complex world of the Internet. But the field of language environment, though densely crossed is not hedged by technology.

Some of the recent trends in language studies, cognitive linguistics particularly, have focused on the mental processes occurring in mind and their influence on the linguistic system. Lately also the relationship between the people's environment and their language have aroused linguists' interest. The term 'language environment' was first borrowed as a trivial name, later accepted and defined by a number of researchers (Gasparov; Prokhorov) in the so called theory of 'linguistic self'. Y. Prokhorov treats language environment as communicative field where a certain *'linguistic persona' (языковая личность)* is able to answer his own needs in accordance with the established particular cognitive and pragmatic rules in the particular society (Prokhorov, 1999). M. Gasparov identifies the language with the environment itself which, he considers, builds the human life, which does not exist without humans as objective reality, which lies in us, in our consciousness, which is shaped and reshaped by every single movement of our thoughts (Gasparov, 1996). In the wider aspect of linguistic system, language environment has an implication of the natural historically specific linguo-cultural social medium (Orekhova, 2007).

Recon up, by *secondary language communicative environment* we mean a communicative milieu which corresponds to people's needs to socially, culturally, linguistically belong to the global world.

Attempts of structuring

By creating secondary language communicative environment we mean perspectives of developing academic English-speaking milieu in modern Russian universities. Recently, the academic soil of the Russian universities has been enriched by the English language. V. Parmon tends to consider the turn of Russian science to the English-speaking world as an inevitable challenge. He also claims to reap the benefits of the time and transform the scheme of existing advanced and abstract information (Parmon, 1997). At a time when academic mobility seems to be more widely available than ever before, we all are well-aware of the promises associated with the English language, in terms of academic benefits for those who speak it fluently. The underlying message is that a good command of English can bring plenty of rewards. English which serves as a lingua franca allows both –university professors and students – to advance toward global academic exchange and solidarity

with the educational institutions and scientific research centers of the modern world, extending bonds between people far and wide across the globe.

For this reason, considering English as an international language can also bring a sense of possibility in terms of strengthening what might be called 'academic partnership'. Any language as means of communication performs the most important function – it fixes new certificated knowledge on at least two levels:

1) informal (e-mail and conventional correspondence, friendly discussions, university TV-interviews, the Internet-forums, etc.);
2) formal (conference talks, discussions and debates; publications in academic journals, international projects, grant proposals, lectures of foreign visit-professors, formal partnerships, web-sites, academic mobility, etc.).

As a rule, in native-language speaking environment language acquisition comes through real life. Non-native speaking environment brings the opposite way of cognition: reality is accepted by virtue of language. These considerations provide the necessity of phrasing the influencing factors that affect *a secondary linguistic persona* in non-native speaking academic environment, particularly Russian universities (Khaleeva, 1995). These factors could contribute to language learning, facilitate better and faster language acquisition, motivate development of secondary linguisticness and its actualization, which at long last helps achieve language competence. These factors include:

1) authentic unimpeachable *visual stimulus*: static and mobile patterns, non-verbal images of sociocultural context in language environment;
2) authentic unimpeachable *audio stimulus*: informative patterns for aural perception;
3) authentic *contextual and situational stimulus*: combination of interdependent components – language situations, communicative behavior, socio-cultural stereotypes and cross-cultural language contacts;
4) intensive cultural background;
5) powerful *language learning* environment.

The effective *language learning* environment might be presented as a clear methodological structure consisting of at least seven components:

- well-defined aims and objectives;
- well-designed tailored courses;
- well-thought assessment scheme;
- up-to-date recourses (authentic materials, premises, the Internet, ICT support);
- competent faculty (well-trained staff);
- responsible learners;
- good rapport in the classrooms: tense but relaxed, stress-free climate.

Linguistic persona of a university teacher of English is another important component of secondary language communicative environment. No doubts, teachers of English must possess all the qualities of good teachers, be proficient in the target language, use varied teaching methods, maximize exposure to the target language, and receive ongoing professional development. But to top it off, they should demonstrate their competence in secondary language communicative environment management and best teaching practices implementation.

Conditions

The number of non-native English speakers in the world is increasing every day, and may even exceed that of native speakers. The pressure for international intelligibility is very strong, and may by now be unstoppable. International travel,

satellite broadcasting, world press and television, world stock markets, multinational corporation, intergovernmental agencies, and many other institutions have guaranteed a situation of daily contact for hundreds of millions of native and non-native English speakers (Crystal, 1995). Consequently, many non-native speakers will spend a good deal of their time communicating with other non-native speakers. As a result, it seems appropriate to create comfortable language environment to enable sharing professional experiences and developing professional competences.

The leading role of the English language, which is regarded as a mainstream discipline, is no longer discussed in the world science. The role of English should not be underestimated: it is revealing a world that is diverse, and yet able to create spaces for academic and scientific actions of the Russian scientists on common ground. The problem of language barrier should not be overestimated: it is secondary language communicative environment that will serve the purpose of bridging the gaps.

The use of English as an international language of science (EILS) is by now well-documented, though the scientific community recognizes the dual roles of English in scientific communication. Younger generation of Russian scientists could hardly imagine the conditions from the recent past: before 1990 scientists were not allowed to publish their articles in foreign scientific journals until they are published and censored at home. Scientific correspondence was also under tough state censorship.

English may be seen as a neutral lingua franca or it may be regarded as a dominating and overpowering force. Excess of anything might lead to overbalance. It seems a bit doubtful that English is sometimes claimed as the only language to present most valuable scientific achievements. Even British and American science theorists warn against such snobbery. The benefit of publishing research in English might seem obvious, but so does the problem: authors with a low command of English find it difficult to compete with their proficient colleagues. Contemporary evidence indicates that some provincial universities in Russia are challenged by English in science and English for academic purposes.

Language environment promotes language learning and motivates to raise language competence. Seen as a whole, the conditions for creating secondary language communicative environment in the Russian universities are quite favorable:

- As a rule, university authorities set ambitious targets to raise English competence of the staff.
- The needs of the global world challenged the attitudes to English as a means for professional communication which involves a paradigm shift in Russian universities, a systemic, rather than a surface, change.
- There is a strong tendency of getting better recourses.
- The faculty faces wonderful opportunities of international research and publications.
- Academic mobility seems to be more widely available than ever before. It helps resolve the problem of formerly existing barriers between scientific schools from different cultures.
- The Internet serves as a mighty source and motivation.
- E-libraries give the researchers access to published scientific results.

Obstacles

On the other hand, some conditions for creating secondary language communicative environment may be regarded as obstacles.

- Certain reluctance of some staff to accept the challenge of dynamic society in sense of global languages.
- Mental barriers, especially in provincial Russian universities, which come about from relative remoteness from the big-name academic English-speaking centres.
- Wide diversity of 'Englishes' for academic and specific purposes, consequently, insufficient pre-service university training and in-service staff training to meet specific needs in minor sectors.
- The problem of linguistic and cultural barriers in the professional communities is still strong.
- Those who use English for academic and scientific purposes have to read great quantities of English text in books, journals, on the Internet; low reading fluency leads to deficient current information in the specific field.

Anyway, in the course of time these obstacles should definitely turn into challenges and conditions for better modeling secondary language communicative university environment in Russia.

Conclusion

The problem of modeling secondary language environment encompasses a whole stew of aspects crucial for language learning. Given that the field is complex and interdisciplinary thus laying out directions for future research. Still as shift happens on a big scale, it might facilitate second language acquisition, which at present is equated with intelligence, well-being and lifelong success.

This subscription to the development of a secondary language communicative environment might be viewed as a commitment to a challenge. This commitment is a necessity, drawing us out of isolated academic sphere into promising prospects of the small global world.

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Вторичная языковая среда, или общественное поле

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Одной из ключевых концепций в современной методике преподавания иностранных языков является личностноориентированное обучение. Последние достижения психолингвистики и социолингвистики рассматривают язык не как абстрактный набор грамматических структур, а как динамичный продукт жизнедеятельности социума. В статье представлен краткий обзор научных идей, связанных с проблематикой вторичной языковой среды в российском университете. Статья предлагает рассмотреть потенциальный вклад вторичной языковой среды в обучение студентов и профессиональное развитие преподавателей. Статья не претендует на полное освещение множественных граней вторичной языковой среды, а даёт её определение, предпринимает попытку структурирования языковой среды, также описывает условия её создания и возможные препятствия её функционирования.

Ключевые слова: языковая среда, вторичная коммуникативная языковая среда, языковая личность, коммуникативное поле.