ЯЗЫКОВАЯ СИСТЕМА

LANGUAGE IN SYSTEM

Affinity of Saussurean Linguistics, World Englishes Paradigm, and Intercultural Communication Studies

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Abstract. This study traces the change-over from the Saussurean structural linguistics, with its focus on language form, to anthropological Firthian sociolinguistics that branched into the contemporary World Englishes (WE) paradigm, interlocked with the Intercultural Communication Studies launched in the USA. This change-over became possible to the semiotic position of Saussure's theory. The author analyzes Saussure's differentiation between *langue* and *parole* and how these concepts are applied to the WE paradigm: changes started in speech of educated users modify the norm and alternate the language system. Finally, issues of effective intercultural communication are discussed based on knowledge of World Englishes.

Key words: Saussurean semiotics, form, semantics, pragmatics, language and speech, norm, system, usage

Взаимосвязь Соссюровской лингвистики, контактной вариантологии английского языка и теории межкультурной коммуникации

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Аннотация. Рассматривается переход от Соссюровской структурной лингвистики, с ее фокусом на языковую форму, к антропологическим принципам социолингвистики Дж.Р. Фирта, в рамках которой была создана контактная вариантология английского языка, сопряженная с теорией межкультурной коммуникации, зародившейся в США. Этот переход стал возможен благодаря семиотичности теории Соссюра. Анализируется соссюровское разграничение языка и речи и рассматривается, как эта дифференциация сказалась на контактной вариантологии: изменения начинаются в речи образованных пользователей вариантов, модифицируют норму и варьируют языковую систему. Обсуждаются также условия эффективной межкультурной коммуникации на вариантах языка.

Ключевые слова: варианты мирового английского языка, семиология Соссюра, форма, семантика, прагматика, язык и речь, норма, система, узус

Introduction

Language and culture are inseparable. This premise has become a requisite for the sociolinguistic approach to communication studies, which followed the structural studies of language and became possible due to the anthropological approach to language. Probably, it is natural for scholarship — first to look at an object per se, its nature and structure, and then to see it in its environment and in a functional perspective. This multi-aspect view of the object results in interdisciplinary connections and enriches our understanding of it.

Saussure's Teaching and British sociolinguistics

Structural linguistics is associated with Ferdinand de Saussure who introduced the concepts of system and structure. However, Saussure named his theory semiology, for his approach was semiotic [1], which implies not only study of forms (object of later formal structuralism) but also semantics and pragmatics, and these are related to the meaning in objective reality and functional use.

The three semiotic aspects, formal, semantic, and pragmatic, have become part and parcel of a relatively new sociolinguistic paradigm known as World Englishes (WE). One of its father-founders, Braj B. Kachru (1932–2016), was a post-graduate student of John Rupert Firth, the famous British structuralist (1890–1960) who, together with the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), under the influence of French functionalism [2], turned the British structuralism to the sociolinguistic direction. After Firth's demise, B. Kachru got research advice from the outstanding British functionalist, another former doctoral student under J.R. Firth, Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (1925–2018) and defended his PhD dissertation "An Analysis of Some Features of Indian English: A Study in Linguistic Method" [3] at Edinburgh University in 1962. In the dissertation, Indian English was defined as "a cover-term for the texts under discussion which are chosen from the upper point on the Cline of bi-lingualism ..., and could perhaps be called, alternatively, 'Standard Indian English' or 'Educated Indian English' for the purpose of description." [3. P. 4] Here Kachru wrote about the acrolectal ("upper point of the Cline") type of the variety, typical of very well-educated users and produced in formal settings. This acrolectal variety was characterized by new norms of Indian English.

In fact, it was not just a new method that was developed by the Indian scholar but far wider – a new approach and a new paradigm that has resulted in describing the pluricentric language varieties, or world Englishes, in their sociocultural environment and functions that they carry out in new settings.

World Englishes Paradigm and Intercultural Communication Theory

In reality, Kachru's theory, followed and shared by a great many supporters, is in full alignment with Saussure's tenets. Firstly, it is in the semiotic flow: descriptions of varieties include formal and semantic features and are accompanied by the analysis of their pragmatic functions. Secondly, based mostly on synchronic analysis of the study of the language system, the World Englishes (WE) paradigm reveals variations as manifestations of language change, as well as the evolution of varieties, thus plunging the theory into diachronic research, which conflates the two approaches, static and dynamic. Descriptive, functional synchronic research methods are predominant, though they go hand in hand with interpretative methods of studying dynamic alterations and variety evolutions.

The WE paradigm is viewed as a semiological linguistic theory that entered sociocultural gateways. It is here that it meets another paradigm that has become popular almost simultaneously with the emergence of the WE paradigm. The paradigm that somehow penetrates the one dealing with varieties of English is Intercultural Communication Theory (ICC), the first works about which were published in the 1950–1960s [4; 5], almost the same time as Kachru's first works [6–10]. What unites the sociolinguistic WE paradigm and ICC theory is the premise

that any variety of English is underpinned by the culture of people speaking the variety. Cultures are different and they cause language varieties to be different too. Each variety gets adapted to the community's communicative needs, community's mentality, and community's culture.

This tenet is harmonized by the three functions of language as highlighted by S.G. Ter-Minasova: language is a *mirror* of culture; language is a *condition* for culture, and language is an *instrument* of culture [11]. Language mirrors people's culture and reflects their worldviews, which might be primary worldviews in case of native speakers of a language, secondary — for people cognizing the world through a second or foreign language [11], and even a tertiary worldview when we learn a third culture via a lingua franca [12], for instance, when we, Russians, get acquainted with the Chinese culture through English. The tertiary worldview might be compared with watching a world through a looking glass in which one sees an object through another looking glass. As a condition for culture, language stores and preserves culture; it maintains traces of a certain stage of cultural development, which is evident especially in the lexical and phraseological language levels [13]. While explaining the newest policy of the Oxford English Dictionary, whose new message is to collect and document the vocabulary of different varieties of English [14], Charlotte Brewer [15] metaphorically named the Oxford English Dictionary a "treasure-house" of the language. As a tool of culture, language is an instrument to develop mentality, a means to educate a personality, to influence people psycho-logically and ideologically. These three functions are consonant with M. Halliday's inference: "Language as the creature and creator of human society" [16].

Language vs Speech and world Englishes

J. R. Firth as a founder of British sociolinguistics criticized Saussure's conception of langue in two aspects: first, for considering language system without a context and, second, for locating it in the mind of the speaker [17; 18], while he insisted on language being always implemented in material speech. Today this lack of distinction between language and speech is also found in works of some scholars (see, for example, [19]). British sociolinguistics and the World Englishes paradigm that evolved within it have focused their attention on speech events, thus describing language in the "context of situation", a term borrowed by Firth from Malinowski [20]. *Context of situation* is almost the same as *context of culture.* According to Firth, language is "a form of human living rather than merely a set of arbitrary signs and symbols" [18. P. 206].

However, today's WE paradigm removed the behavioral limitations expressed by Firth. Indeed, research into varieties begins with observation of the ways people, belonging to a certain culture, perform in English. It is not accidentally that Kachru named the varieties of the Expanding Circle as performance varieties, for the range of their use depends on the level of language competence of their speakers and their

performance. In his pivotal article "Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: the English language in the outer circle" Kachru used the term *speech fellowship* to indicate the "underlying distinct differences, and also their [variety users'] shared characteristics." [21. P. 16]. Most probably the term *performance variety* was chosen because it indicates exonormative varieties dependent of the norms and system of the inner circle Englishes. This implies that users of the performance varieties follow the norms of norm-providing varieties whose systems have evolved outside the performance varieties. However, these users' English speech, modelled by an exonormative English, tends to be changing, deviating from the model norm, due to the influence of the users' first language and their own culture. This is also typical of the so-called institutional varieties of the outer circle, whose norms develop with changes in their English language system also influenced by their first language and their culture. The impact results in setting up distinctive features of a variety that at first were taken for typical mistakes and deviations found in the speech of educated users and gradually codified — this means that the language system of such a variety is changing, as compared with its "linguistic parents" [22. P. 84]. If described schematically, the process can be formulated the following way:

> (1) typical deviations from systemic norms in oral SPEECH by educated users →
> (2) typical deviations from systemic norms in written SPEECH by educated users →
> (3) codification of a new norm (with a distinctive feature of a variety) →
> (4) changing LANGUAGE (variety) system

This scheme demonstrates that speech usage makes the language norm and finally shapes the system of a language. To illustrate this premise, let us take a well-recognized variety emerged in the 19th century — American English. Its language system is somewhat different from British, with stronger trends towards grammatical analogy and simplification: regularization of many irregular verbs (*learned, knitted, dreamed,* etc.); use of verbs *have, need,* and *dare* as normal words (*Do you have a sister?* — cf. BrE *Have you got a sister?; Do you need to go there?* — cf. BrE *Need you go there?*; using more simplified subjunctive forms: *He suggests that you do it.* – cf. BrE *He suggests that you should do it.*) Normative in informal (usually oral) American speech is the form *I just ate.* instead of the BrE *I've just eaten.* Standardized Spoken American English is gradually turning into Standardized Written American English. Even in the level of phonetics we see the regularized pronunciation as [eit] rather than [et], for the form of the word is one open syllable with a final mute *e* (like *Kate*). Webster Dictionary was the first to fix typical American words distinctive from British.

Similar but somewhat different changes take place in the Outer Circle varieties that are developing their own norms (e.g., new grammatical plural forms of the so-

called uncountable nouns in many Asian and African Englishes: *equipments, furnitures* — these forms emerge because the concepts are understood discretely: they can be counted, which points to the contrast of mental concepts between British and Asian/African minds.) The language systems of these Englishes are gradually changing, even in slowly alternating grammatical level, to say nothing of phonetics and lexis.

Effective intercultural communication in world Englishes

Language and speech are regarded as a two-pronged phenomenon. They are as inseparable as language and culture are, and make the object of research in the WE paradigm that syncretically unites advertence to the internal structure and system of a variety (its distinctive features) and its socio-cultural issues (external aspect). Successful understanding of varieties is indispensable for effective intercultural communication. Larry E. Smith, a co-founder of the WE paradigm, came up with the idea of three factors of successful understanding [23] in intercultural communication: a) intelligibility — word / utterance recognition; b) comprehensibility — word / utterance meaning recognition (locutionary force); c) interpretability — meaning behind word / utterance (illocutionary force) [23. P. 76].

And here again we see the semiotic triangle. Intelligibility is associated with a form. Communicators have to understand each other's accents (to know typical sound substitutions, which might be expressed unusually by unexpected letters in writing, like in Chinese English (ChE) *peminina* might mean 'feminine'; *Betikan* — 'Vatican'; phonotactics, or combinability of sounds, and syllable division: e.g., ChE *Gu de mao ning*, which means *Good morning*; typical features of intonation — for example, Australian English is now known for its rising tone in statements, which sometimes makes them difficult to differentiate from questions). In writing, we are challenged by the specificity of transliteration or transcription — for instance, for unprepared Russians, Chinese Roman letters have an unusual correlation with Cyrillic letters: *Xianggang* correlates with *Сянган*, not *Ксиангганг; *taiji quan* should correlate with *тайцзи цюань* rather than *тайчи-куан. As was shown in our previous works [24; 25], this stage of intercultural understanding is associated with what might be called intervarietal translation: e.g., a Russian communicator hears English words/phrases/utterances pronounced by a Chinese communicator and mentally compares them with the image made by the sounding forms s/he has learnt as a model, i.e. translates them from Chinese English into Russian English, and in case of strong deviations the Russian communicator has to recode the form. Another example: the word *play* might be pronounced by a Chinese speaker as [pulei] and to recode it, one should know that a Chinese person, due to the mother-tongue influence, is apt to insert a vowel in a consonant cluster, thus making a monosyllabic word sound with two syllables [26].

The second stage of understanding a word meaning also causes many challenges. To begin with, culture-loaded words might be incomprehensible to communicators from other cultures; therefore, they should be properly explained:

> *Videos showing older men diving along the Haihe River, a regular activity for years, suddenly went viral on social networking platforms, and attracted an influx of tourists to the city, not only for the diving, but also to enjoy the city's cuisine, mix of history and modernity,* **traditional cross-talk shows (xiangsheng***), and above all, its slow-paced life and sense of humor for which residents are known* (China Daily. 13.09.2024).[1]

The loanword *xiangsheng* is supported here by the preceding explanation, which will become clear to the reader only if s/he is aware of this traditional Chinese cross-talk show — in China a comic dialogue is usually implied by the term, while in other countries it may be a political genre.

Comprehension or semantic problems are also caused by home-made words from English roots that not infrequently change their semantics: e.g., ChE *wet market* 'marketplace selling fresh foods such as meat, fish, produce and other consumption-oriented perishable goods in a non-supermarket setting', which corresponds to the Russian *продуктовый рынок*, not *влажный рынок.

In a text, English words can acquire new contextual meanings: *A truck carrying 16.6 metric tons of miscellaneous goods left the Suifenhe* **highway port** *in Heilongjiang province on Saturday for Moscow in Russia*[2] In the example above the word *port* is used in the meaning 'truck station,' which is supported by the attribute *highway,'* rather than 'an area of water and the land and buildings surrounding it, where ships can take on and off goods and passengers.' A similar meaning of a 'train station' is found in another issue of the *China Daily* newspaper: *The train is expected to leave the mainland via Horgos* **Railway Port** *in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and reach Tashkent, the capital of the Central Asian nation, in 12 days after it completes the 6,700-kilometer journey...* (China Daily. 13.07.2024).[3]

The third stage of understanding is regarded as the most difficult one. It requires insight into culture, sharing background knowledge, reading between the lines. In other words, it is associated with pragmatics of a word, utterance, and text. The challenges are evident in interpreting culture-load words which might have different associative connotations for communicators from different cultures. When

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[1] China Daily, 13 Sept. 2024. 24 Sept. 2024, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202409/13/WS66e3dd52a3103711928a7ded.html

[2] China Daily. 18 June 2024. 24 Sept. 2024, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202406/18/WS667177a8a31095c51c5098f6.html

[3] China Daily. 13 July 2024. 24 Sept. 2024, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202407/13/WS691b5d8a31095c51c50dd81.html

these words are found in newspaper article headlines, it becomes more evident. For example, the title of the *China Daily* article: *Kunqu Opera is a hard act to follow* (China Daily. 23.09.2024)[4] raises many questions from a Russian reader: what is *Kunqu Opera? How is it different from other traditional Chinese operas? Why does the author speak about it being difficult in following?* Of course, some of these questions are answered when the reader finishes reading the article, and probably the most important and key statement is as follows: *Combining songs performed in the Suzhou dialect, graceful body movements, martial arts and dance, Kunqu Opera uses a great variety of gestures to express specific emotions.* This sentence reveals the reasons of people's pride in this art and combines many features of the country's cultural heritage the Chinese people are so much proud of.

For a person who does not know Chinese history, the expression "cultural revolution" might seem quite positive due to the semantics of the word *cultural*, and in this case the person will be confused about the Chinese feelings and sense of the abstract: *Their expansive exhibitions featuring what they call "evidences of livelihoods" — including family relics, leftover building materials and household items as well as rejected ceramic objects and textiles —* **evoke both grief and remembrance of a lost generation defined by poverty and the 'cultural revolution'** *(1966-76).* (China Daily. 14.06.2024).[5]

Pragmatic confusion might also be related to Chinese names. Their elements can be positioned in two ways: traditional Chinese, with a family name preceding the given one, and Western, when the family name is used after the given one. Chinese traditional way is consonant with Chinese collectivist values: the name of the family clan is more important than an individual given name. It is easy to guess the family name of a person if the given name is two-syllabic: ***Zhang** Yuchen, **Guo** Xiaojun*, even when the given name precedes the family name in a Western style: *Yuchen Zhang, Xiaojun Guo,* as the family name usually consists of one syllable. However, even in this case we encounter mistaken forms — e.g., *Лицюнь Л. Специфика языка современных СМИ // Аспирант и соискатель. 2014. № 4. С. 28–30.* URL: https://rucont.ru/efd/489526. The author of the article is Li Liqun and the family name is Li. In the example represented by the Russian article descriptoion, a biblio catalogue will have to identify the person by his/her given name, not by the surname (just imagine O.S. Akhmanova's works catalogued as Olga A.).

The problem becomes even worse when a given name is one-syllabic; then it is difficult to say what is what, a family name or a given name. My colleagues and I had an argument concerning a way of citing a famous British sociolinguist of

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[4] China Daily. 23 Sept. 2024. 24 Sept. 2024, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202409/23/WS66f0abfba3103711928a921c.html

[5] China Daily. 14 June 2024. 24 Sept. 2024, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202406/14/WS666bfcf9a31095c51c508fe2_4.html

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Chinese origin, expert in bilingualism, *Li Wei.* Should we cite him as Li or as Wei? How should we address him — Dr. Li or Dr. Wei? Different authors refer to his works either as Li W. or Wei L. The answer was received when we looked up his own article with reference Li W., which means that he prefers traditional Chinese way of identifying despite having lived in London for a long time. This delicate issue is definitely of pragmatic nature, and it is very important and sensitive in intercultural communication, either in business or academic setting or in everyday life.

Conclusion

To conclude, studying varieties of a pluricentric language (e.g., English) is impossible without studying their cultures, for culture accounts for the specificity of the variety. And intercultural communication is impossible without insight into specificity of a variety. That is why the two studies were brought to life almost simultaneously. They are like two sides of the same coin. Though the paradigms are believed to be relatively new, having emerged in the second part of the 20th century, their founders came from the structuralist and anthropological grounding that was laid by F. de Saussure, the eminent scholar, whose theory was sometimes contended with but in fact is proved by the Word Englishes paradigm reinforced by the Intercultural Communication Studies.

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