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A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LINGUOCULTURAL NATURE OF SOCIAL DISTANCE AND THE MECHANISMS OF ITS EXPRESSION THROUGH LINGUISTIC UNITS AND COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This article provides a scientific-theoretical analysis of the linguocultural nature of the social distance phenomenon, its functional role in the system of communicative relations, and the peculiarities of its expression through linguistic units. It also examines the mechanisms of formation and regulation of social distance through speech strategies, revealing the integrative potential of pragmalinguistic, sociolinguistic, and linguocultural approaches in this process. The research results substantiate the importance of social distance in ensuring communicative effectiveness.

Keywords

social distance, linguoculture, speech strategy, communicative behavior, pragmalinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse, etiquette units.

INTRODUCTION. In modern linguistics, the dominance of the anthropocentric approach requires interpreting language not merely as a grammatical structure, but as a system inherently linked to human activity, social relations, and cultural values. In this regard, the phenomenon of social distance is an important component of the communicative process, determined by the level of mutual relations between communication participants, their social status, age characteristics, professional position, and cultural experience. These factors are expressed through linguistic units and speech means, forming a specific model of communicative behavior. The relevance of studying the category of social distance from a linguocultural perspective is explained by the intensification of intercultural contacts in the context of globalization. In communication between representatives of different cultural environments, the correct determination of social distance and the selection of appropriate speech strategies ensure communicative effectiveness. Conversely, ignoring these factors can lead to misunderstandings and communicative failures. Therefore, the scientific study of the mechanisms of expressing the social distance phenomenon through linguistic units and speech strategies is one of the urgent issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW. The phenomenon of social distance is one of the important research objects in contemporary linguistics and is studied through a comprehensive approach in sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics, and linguoculturology. This phenomenon is interpreted as a significant communicative category reflecting the interrelationship between language and society. An analysis of scientific sources shows that social distance is explained in direct connection with the formation of speech behavior, the choice of communicative strategies, and the system of

cultural values.

In foreign linguistics, the theoretical foundations of the social distance phenomenon are primarily addressed within the framework of the politeness theory developed by P. Brown and S. Levinson. According to this theory, social distance is a factor determining the level of psychological and social closeness between communicants and directly influences the selection of speech strategies. The authors identify social distance, power, and the ranking of imposition as the main parameters regulating communicative actions. This approach serves as a fundamental theoretical basis for explaining how social distance is reflected in speech behavior. In G. Leech's pragmatic theory, social distance is also interpreted as a means of ensuring communicative balance. The politeness principles he proposed—particularly the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, and modesty—play an important role in regulating social distance in the communicative process. Leech links social distance to the adaptability of speech acts and their conformity to communicative goals. In English linguistics, the concept of social distance is often explained through the categories of “formality,” “distance,” and “solidarity.” For example, R. Lakoff developed a system of rules regulating speech politeness, highlighting “be clear” and “be polite” as the main criteria. This enables the management of social distance through speech strategies. In English, the distinction between formal and informal styles, forms of address (“Sir,” “Madam,” “Mr.”), and the widespread use of indirect speech constructions serve as important linguistic means for expressing social distance. In Russian linguistics, the phenomenon of social distance has been studied on the basis of linguocultural and discursive approaches. V. I. Karasik interprets social distance as an important component of discourse and explains it as a category reflecting cultural models of communicative behavior. According to him, the expression of social distance in each linguoculture is determined by the system of national values. In Russian, the use of the pronouns “вы” and “ты,” formal forms of address, and speech etiquette formulas are considered the main means of expressing social distance. Additionally, within the framework of the cultural semantics theory proposed by A. Wierzbicka, social distance is interpreted in connection with national mentality and communicative values. She analyzes the expression of categories such as respect, closeness, and formality in different languages through semantic primitives, revealing the universal and national characteristics of social distance. In sociolinguistic studies, social distance is examined in close connection with the main social factors determining the communicative situation—age, gender, profession, social status, and group affiliation. According to this approach, social distance directly influences the choice of language variants and styles. In particular, the differences between formal and informal communication are determined by the level of social distance. In Uzbek linguistics, the phenomenon of social distance has also been studied from linguocultural and pragmatic perspectives. Research has analyzed its expression through the category of respect, forms of address, etiquette units, and honorific forms of verbs. In the Uzbek language, the opposition between “siz” and “sen,” honorific affixes, and speech formulas serve as important tools for determining the social level of communicative relations. This provides an opportunity to identify the mechanisms of expressing social distance in national linguoculture. In recent years, the social distance phenomenon has also been studied from a pedagogical perspective. In particular, the correct understanding of social distance and the ability to apply appropriate speech strategies are regarded as important professional skills in developing the communicative competence of future teachers. Organizing an optimal level of social distance between teacher and student in the pedagogical communication process enhances the effectiveness of education and forms an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. The analyzed scientific sources indicate the multifaceted and complex nature of the social distance phenomenon. It is necessary to study this phenomenon not only within the framework of linguistic units but also on the basis of the integration of social, cultural, and pragmatic factors.

Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the linguocultural essence of social distance and the mechanisms of its expression through linguistic units and speech strategies is one of the urgent scientific tasks facing modern linguistics.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS. Within the framework of the linguocultural approach, the phenomenon of social distance is interpreted not only as a phenomenon reflecting the socio-psychological aspects of communicative relations between people, but also as an integral component of the system of cultural values specific to a particular nation.

This phenomenon is formed as a result of the interrelationship between language and culture and is an important factor determining the norms of communicative behavior. Therefore, studying social distance as a linguocultural category makes it possible to deeply understand the semantic and pragmatic potential of linguistic units.

Social distance is formed on the basis of the social status of communication participants, their communicative experience, and cultural values. It is determined by the following main factors:

social hierarchy and status relations (vertical connections such as teacher–student, manager–employee);

age differences between communicants;

the presence of formal and informal communicative environments;

national-cultural traditions and the system of values;

the communicative characteristics of the interaction situation.

These factors are expressed through linguistic units and determine the level of formality and the communicative tone of the interaction. In particular, in Uzbek linguoculture, social distance is manifested in close connection with the category of respect. This is expressed through forms of address, honorific forms of verbs, etiquette units, and speech formulas. For example, the use of the pronoun “siz” indicates the presence of a certain social distance between communicants, while the form “sen,” on the contrary, expresses the level of closeness. In this regard, social distance is one of the important indicators of national communicative culture.

Social distance manifests itself through linguistic means of various levels, which directly influence the content and form of the communicative process. These means can be systematically divided into the following groups: Lexical means. Lexical units perform an important semantic load in expressing social distance. For instance, units expressing respect and reverence such as “iltimos” (please), “marhamat” (you are welcome), and “rahmat” (thank you) increase the level of formality in communication. In addition, forms of address (“ustoz” – teacher, “aka” – elder brother, “opa” – elder sister, “janob” – Mr.) define the mutual relations between communicants. Euphemisms and softening devices serve to reduce the sharpness of speech and normalize social distance. Morphological means. At the morphological level, social distance is expressed through honorific forms of verbs, the pragmatic use of plural affixes, and modal means. For example, forms such as “keldingiz” (you came, honorific) and “aytdingiz” (you said, honorific) express a respectful attitude toward the interlocutor. The use of the plural form in the singular meaning is also one of the important means of expressing respect in the Uzbek language. Syntactic means. Syntactic constructions also play an important role in expressing social distance. In particular, the use of complex sentences, indirect speech forms, and softened imperative constructions (“iltimos, yordam bera olasizmi?” – “Could you please

help?") increases formality in the communicative process and expresses respect toward the interlocutor. Such constructions ensure the pragmatic flexibility of speech. Paralinguistic means. Social distance is not limited to linguistic units alone but is also expressed through paralinguistic means. Factors such as intonation, pauses, and speech tempo determine the emotional background of communication and clarify the content of communicative relations. For example, speaking in a low tone and at a slow tempo often expresses respect and caution. In general, these linguistic and paralinguistic means, in their mutual integration, determine the communicative level of social distance.

From the perspective of the pragmatic approach, social distance is managed through speech strategies in the communicative process. In each communicative situation, interlocutors choose a strategy corresponding to the level of their mutual relations. This is of great importance in ensuring communicative success. Formality strategy. This strategy is used in situations with high social distance. Here, formal forms of address, standard etiquette formulas, and clear, coherent speech structure predominate. This strategy is often applied in formal meetings, official correspondence, and academic communication. Closeness strategy. This strategy is aimed at reducing social distance and ensures sincere communication. It employs informal vocabulary, short sentences, and a free speech style. This strategy is effective in friendly and equal-status interactions.

Politeness (face-saving) strategy. This strategy serves to preserve the social reputation of communicants. It is implemented through indirect speech, softening devices, and cautious expression of opinions. This strategy is particularly important in conflict or delicate communicative situations. Discursive adaptation strategy. This strategy involves adapting to the interlocutor's social status and communicative characteristics during the interaction. Communicative harmony is achieved by changing the language style, speech tempo, and forms of address. This increases the effectiveness of communication. The phenomenon of social distance is a complex category reflecting the interaction between language and culture, and it is one of the main factors determining the effectiveness of the communicative process. The harmony of linguistic means and speech strategies enables the correct expression of social distance. Otherwise, communicative errors and failures in interaction may arise. The practical significance of this phenomenon is particularly evident in pedagogical activity. In the process of developing the communicative competence of future teachers, the correct understanding of social distance and the ability to apply appropriate speech strategies constitute an important professional skill. This contributes to the effective organization of pedagogical cooperation and the improvement of the quality of the educational process.

CONCLUSION. In conclusion, social distance is a complex communicative phenomenon with a linguocultural nature, expressed through linguistic units and speech strategies. This phenomenon plays an important role in the effective organization of communication and ensures the stability of the communicative process. Lexical, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic means function in mutual harmony in the expression of social distance. Therefore, the comprehensive study of social distance on the basis of an integrative approach is one of the urgent scientific tasks facing modern linguistics and pedagogy.

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