

CRITICAL REMARKS IN THE GERMAN DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the phenomenon of criticism, describes the problems arising from the verbalization of critical intentions in the interpersonal and intercultural communication, and determines the characteristic features of the German communicative style, influencing the choice of speech strategies and tactics by the speaking subject in potentially conflictogenic situations of critical evaluation. The problems, arising in the process of verbalization of critical intentions in intercultural communication, are largely determined by the fact that the rules and regulations, the violation of which causes a critical evaluation, tend to be culturally-conditioned and have their own national-cultural identity in different ethnic societies. In addition, the attitude to critical statements in a particular ethnic society, the ways of verbalization of negative evaluation and the level of flatness of the latter cause a significant influence on the verbalization and perception of criticism. The German communicative style, traditionally defined as an explicit, direct, categorical, is currently undergoing a number of changes, which are reflected among other things, in the increasing use of mitigative tactics in the critical statements. The results of the study, aimed at determining the attitude to criticism in the German ethnic society and the mitigative tactics, which are actively used by the informants at the verbalization of critical intentions in the discursive questionnaires, specified in this article, confirm the mitigative modification of the German communicative style.

Keywords: *criticism, intention, communication, conflict regulation, discourse, speech strategy, mitigation, experience, questionnaire, culture, ethnosociety, emotions.*

INTRODUCTION

It is known that the statements containing the negative evaluation, especially if the evaluated addressee and the objects associated with it, are potentially dangerous both for the image of the addressee evaluated and for the image of the speaker, as such statements can characterize the addresser as a boorish, tactless interlocutor in case of using the inefficient speech strategies. According to O.S. Issers, a potential conflictogenic nature of the critical statements forces the speaker to be guided in his/her speech choice by the second-order goals complex in the implementation of the basic intention (to express a critical judgment), including among other things setting to avoid harm to a listener and to change the vision of the situation, if it can threaten the listener with a "loss of face" [Issers 2006, p. 256]. Thus, under the verbalization of the second-order intentions, which can be defined as phatic, an important role is played by the communicative categories that are relevant to the cooperative, unison communication, to which the category of communicative mitigation can be attributed [Caffi, 2007; Fraser, 1980; Takhtarova, 2014]. The national-cultural specificity of criticism verbalization in the German ethnic society, consideration of which is offered in this paper, remains poorly understood and is of an undoubted research interest in this context.

DISCUSSION

All cultures of the world involve the certain rules, which ensure the successful flow of communicative contact and appoint the certain standards of behavior to the communication participants. In this regard, the role of researches devoted to the study of the national specifics of communicative behavior of speaking subjects is increasing. As known, the national communicative style is assimilated by the individual language in the process of enculturation and socialization and is implemented in the communicative behavior of the individual language, which is the representative of a particular ethnic society.

In the studies, devoted to the examination of the German communicative behavior, the latter is traditionally defined as direct, explicit and the following characteristic features of the German communicative style are highlighted: focus on content, focus on oneself, directness, explicitness, flatness [E.T. Hall, M.R. Hall, 1996; House, 2000; Kotthoff, 2003; Viezhbitskaya, 1999; Kulikova, 2007 et al.]. These characteristics of the German communicative style, in our opinion, are closely related to the concept of "Ordnung", which stands out among the key cultural dominants of the German ethnic society.

In our opinion, exactly the desire for order explains a high level of imperativeness and an opportunity of direct criticism in the German discursive practices. However, the linguistic studies of the last decades state that the directness and honesty as a result can lead to the problems of cognitive and communicative dissonance, i.e., misunderstanding and inadequate verbal and nonverbal behavior in the situations of intercultural communication [Felderer, Macho, 2002; Ebert, 2003; Nixdorf, 2002 et al.].

The desire to avoid conflicts in the intercultural communication, the tendency of unification of communicative behavior in the potentially conflictogenic situations lead to a gradual modification of the German communicative style. Such traditional German communication features as explicitness, flatness, straightness and self-centeredness, as mentioned above, give way to the addresser-oriented communication under the influence of a number of factors - the addressee factor, the need of communicative adaptation in the intercultural communication situation, etc.

To confirm this suggestion and to identify the ethnic and cultural specificity of attitude to the criticism in the modern German society, we conducted a survey, which was attended by 150 informants who were conditionally divided into three age groups: young people and students (20-27 years old), working people (28-60 years old) and retiree. The respondents were offered the evaluation survey, in which they marked their attitude to criticism (Kritik) as "+" - positive, "-" - negative or "0" - indifferent, and the emotive survey, in which the informants were asked to answer the question, what emotions they were experiencing, if a) they criticized and b) if they were the object of criticism.

In addition to determine the lingvo-cultural characteristics of speech strategies that represent the critical intentions in the German interpersonal discourse, the informants have been offered 5 communicative situations, where they were asked to formulate in a sentence-criticism in the address of a girlfriend, who unsuccessfully bought the new dress; mother, who baked a tasteless cake; friend, who presented a boring report; colleague, who advised an uninteresting film; neighbor, who parked his car too close. The total amount of actual material obtained in the survey was 750 statements. Although, according to a justified remark of R. Ratmayr, it is impossible to obtain the data on the spontaneous speech using the questionnaires, but it gives the idea of communicative competence and clarifies the notions of language and speech norm [Ratmayr 2003, p. 15].

RESULTS

The conducted survey enabled to establish the following:

1. In the older age group 75% of the respondents marked their attitude to criticism as positive, 19% - as neutral and only 6% of this group had a negative attitude to criticism. However, the situation is quite different in the middle age group: criticism is positively accepted by 48% of the respondents, neutrally - 43%, negatively - 9% of the respondents. In the youth group, a positive attitude to criticism is observed only in 8% of the questionnaires, neutral - in 49% of the responses, and 43% of the respondents have a negative attitude to criticism.

2. In our opinion, the results of "emotional" survey, in which the informants of all three groups have shown a surprising unanimity, are of particular interest. Despite the fact that the representatives of the oldest groups in the evaluation survey showed a positive attitude to criticism, the majority of respondents of all three groups called a number of negative emotions in response to the questions related directly to the emotions experienced in the situations of critical evaluation: verärgert; schlechtes Gefühl; Unsicherheit; innerlich verletzt; enttäuscht, evtl. Niedergeschlagen; Scham; Ärger; Traurigkeit; beleidigt bis wütend; fühle mich dumm; Betroffenheit; Empörung; Verunsicherung; Trauer; Unzufriedenheit.

Most of the emotions experienced by the informants, if they serve as the object of criticism, are associated with a sense of shame, worthlessness, uncertainty, and as a consequence - grievance, frustration and even anger.

In the situation where the respondents are the subject of criticism, the emotions are not so diverse - there are often marked such emotions as Unsicherheit; unangenehmes Gefühl; ein un gutes Gefühl; Zurückhaltung; Rücksicht. The vast majority of questionnaires (94%) noted the importance of correct formulations, correct choice of words, unwillingness to hurt a criticized person in response to the question which indicates, in our opinion, the change in the communicative stereotypes in the German linguistic culture: ich versuche es so vorsichtig und einfühlsam wie möglich zu sagen; Fühle mich unwohl und versuche die Kritik so zu relativieren, dass sie nicht trifft; fällt mir schwer, ehrlich zu sein und sage, dass es ganz gut war; Da achte ich sehr auf die Formulierung; die Wortwahl ist mir wichtig.

The answers of the respondents, received as a result of a discursive survey, allowed to reveal that the mitigative tactics are widely used in the German linguistic culture. The vast majority of criticizing remarks formulated by the informants (96%) contain a variety of mitigative tactics, verbalizing the mitigated negative evaluation:

- litotes mitigation tactics: Naja, ich fand ihn nicht so toll; Na ja, nicht wirklich spannend; Der Film hat mir nicht so recht gefallen; Es ist nicht ganz Dein Stil, daran muss ich mich erst gewöhnen; das war nicht so der Bringer; Naja, nicht grad berauschend.

- indication on the subjectivity evaluation: Ich finde, es steht dir nicht so richtig gut; Der Film hat mi nicht gefallen, aber es gibt unterschiedliche Empfindungen, die Geschmäcker sind unterschiedlich; War interessant – aber nicht ganz mein Geschmack; Diese Art von Filmen ist nicht so mein Ding; Glaube, es ist nicht so dein Stil, probiere noch was anderes; Dein Vortrag war ok, aber das Thema hat mich persönlich nicht besonders angesprochen.

- semantic restriction tactics evaluation, implemented primarily by various semantic operators: Das Kleid ist schon schön, aber irgendwie gefällt es mir nicht so richtig an Dir; wenn ich ehrlich sein will, etwas langatmig; Du musst das Thema ein bisschen raffen; Ja, es ist ganz gut, nur ein wenig trocken.

- modus mitigation tactics, which is based on the use of modal words and subjunctive: Du hättest ihn vielleicht etwa spannender gestalten müssen; Vielleichtsolltest Du Deinen Vortrag mit einigen eigenen Erfahrungen lebhafter gestalten; Könnten Sie nicht versuchen, Ihren Wagen etwas weiter entfernt zu parken? Ich hätte mir wohl ein anderes Kleid gekauft;

- in a number of responses to verbalization of criticism in address of a friend who gave a boring speech, a negative evaluation has been mitigated by the advisory tactics for the future: Gut warst du, vielleicht könntest du da nächste mal mehr Abbildungen und Filmsequenzen rein machen; Was Du inhaltlich im Vortrag gesagt hast, war nicht schlecht, aber mir persönlich hat der Pepp gefehlt, der Deinen Vortrag etwas lebendiger gemacht hätte, z. B. ein paar praktische Beispiele; Dies und jenes fand ich gut! Die Stelle x od. x würde ich etwas ändern;

- the indication tactics of one's own incompetence in the evaluation and other problems in the evaluation are of particular interest: Bei Mode solltest Du mich lieber nicht fragen; Du weißt, ich bin ein Mann, wir Männer haben kein Auge für so etwas; Für mich war der Vortrag nicht so spannend, aber ich bin ja auch nicht vom Fach! Vielleicht war ich nicht in der Stimmung dafür – aber der Film war nicht mein Fall;

- In addition, the rhetorical message tactics, which enables to get away from the direct evaluation, is used quite actively. Using this tactics, the speaker can implicitly express his/her negative evaluation of the reported, without naming a specific object or subject of criticism: Deinen anderen Kuchen fand ich noch besser; Weißt Du, Du hast so viele schöne Kleider. Ein schooner Kuchen, gut sieht er aus, und fein dekoriert. Du weißt ja, am allerliebsten esse ich deine Kirsch- und Apfelkuchen; Das Kleid finde ich gut – nur hätte ich eine andere Farbe gewählt; Du hast wie immer viel Mühe gegeben, aber dein Apfelkuchen schmeckt mir immer noch am besten;

- topic switch tactics, which has been sometimes labeled by the informants using the meta-discourse operators: - Ja, sieht net aus. Wo hast du das den gekauft? (Ablenkung); Also, letztes Mal hat er mir besser geschmeckt. Hast du was andersgemacht? Hast du schöngemacht. Hast du dich sehr lange vorbereitet? Ja, gut. Wieviel hat es denn gekostet? Ah ja, woher das Kleid?

- positive attitude tactics. However, it is important to note the comments of the respondents indicating the non-verbal component of this tactics, in particular - smile or general context of a conversation, for example: Lieber Herr Nachbar – Lächel-Gesicht – ich habe ein sehr großes Problem: ...; Süßer, Du könntest dir für nächste Mal vornehmen, etwas impulsiver/ motivierter zu sprechen, damit man merkt, dass du Spaß am Thema hast. Sei bitte nicht böse, aber ich finde du siehst in anderen Kleidern besser aus; Darüber reden wir lieber bei einem Bierchen. Dann bekommt er eine (möglichst) differenzierte Kritik.

- omission tactics, which is singly represented in the responses by virtue of defining role of the context for the successful implementation of this tactics:

Der schmeckt lecker, nur mit Rosinen habe ich es nicht so – weißt du, ... ja, ne?

It is noteworthy that the informants have used several mitigative tactics in many replicas, which verbalize the mitigation evaluation strategy, taking to the "gain of positivity" technique. This technique is used by the speaker to emphasize his/her willingness to act cooperatively, taking into account the norms and rules of conflict-free communication:

Das Kleid ist schön, aberirgendwiegefälltesmirnicht so richtig an Dir; Ichpersönlichfandesallerdingseinbisschenschleppend; FürmeinenGeschmack war ereinwenig süß. Könntest du das nächste mal vielleichtetwaswenigerZuckerverwenden; Könntest du dein Auto einwenigweiterwegstellen? KönntenSiewohleinbisschenweiterdrübenparken? Das würdemir das Einkäufeausräumensehrerleichtern.

In addition, in our opinion, a special attention should be paid to the fact that the informants have offered quite stereotyped formulas at the criticism verbalization in the address of colleague and neighbor, but they have showed greater diversity in the choice of mitigative means in relation to girlfriend/friend and mother.

Such question as in whose address it is easier to make a critical evaluation - relatives, friends or strangers, and from whom the criticism is less offensive, deserves a special attention. In the study, devoted to the analysis of critical statements in the Austrian, Italian and French linguistic cultures, Gudrun Held notes that the greatest difficulties in the criticism verbalization are represented by the situations of converged personal distance, communication with family, friends, as the criticism conflict potential cannot be weakened by the frameworks of social institutions or functions in this field of communication [Held, 2002, p. 117]. The results of the carried out experiment - have shown that this feature is characteristic for the German ethnic society.

Thus, it can be assumed that a trend towards the unification of communicative behavior is reflected at the criticism verbalization. Thus, in particular, G. Held notes in the above-cited study that despite the greater categorical nature of the Austrian evaluation acts, a negative speech act has been compensated in the vast majority of responses of all three lingvocultures by the strategies of positive politeness which indicates, according to the linguist, a trend towards the convergence of cultures in the sense of politeness category [Held, 2002, p. 127].

CONCLUSION

Thus, this study has led to the conclusion that the traditional German explicitness and focus on the content are irrelevant in the communicative risk situations, when the orientation not toward the self, but toward "Other some" is determining.

This confirms the assumption made above about the change in the degree of criticality and categoricity of the German communicative behavior, which is reflected in the mitigative trend in communication emerging now. A variety of mitigative tactics and language/speech means, implementing them, confirms the fact that the speaker is provided with a greater communicative freedom when verbalizing his/her intentions in the situations of converged distance, especially in the friend and family communication, which in turn leads to less clichéd nature of the mitigative tactics that represent the evaluation mitigation strategy.

All of the above determines the urgency of studying the discourse implementation of critical intentions on the material of various lingvocultures.

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