

Linguistic Levels of Social Epistemology

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Abstract: Summary: the topic of the article touches transformation of ideas of ethnolinguistics within epistemological spheres of “linguistic turn”. Nowadays problems of interactions between the language and the society are tied up with many interdisciplinary connections and are being discussed within several theoretical dimensions: psycholinguistics, social linguistics and social epistemology. Herewith we will try to analyze the key philosophical points deriving from theories of social linguistic levels and to observe the touch points within sociolinguistics and social epistemology. The term “epistemology” is traditionally defined as post-Kantian cognitive theory, researching the essence of cognitive attitude of a human towards the world, its primary and general bases.

Key words: Sociolinguistics % Epistemology % Social topos % Habitus % Linguistic worlds % Language-games

INTRODUCTION

It was first mentioned in linguistics in the XVII century that language adapts to social functioning levels. The following abstract from the work of Spanish scientist Gonzalo de Correias is usually brought as an example: “<...> except the dialects used within the provinces, the language possesses some variants related to age, social position and property of citizens of these provinces; there is a language of country-people, commons, noblemen, of a historian, an old man, preacher, women, men and even of children” [1].

Still the real prosperity of theoretic researches of social level of language’s functioning belongs to the first half of the XX century. This rise made great academic sociolinguistic centers appear in France, the USA, Check Republic and USSR. The term “sociolinguistics” was first used by American sociologist German Karri in 1952.

Such an interest towards the relations between language and society was caused - to our mind - by Humboldt’s ideas and their integration into new ideological programs. The last ones were so very necessary for many countries within unquiet period of 20-40s of the XX century. Indeed, if the language forms the reality and influences the ways of understanding of the world, than researches of class differences within “linguistic worlds” of all possible social groups seem to be quite actual. And it became pretty clear that formation of linguistic layers of being is effected not only at the

individual psychological level (that is the principle the theory of neogrammarians based on), but also at the level of social activity. Geographical determinism that used to be well-spread changed to a social one. And it became clear that new urban forms and social and cultural reality contribute quite intensively into historical transformation of used languages.

Premises of the “linguistic turn” within sciences about society generate from new tendencies of structurally and functionally organized type of sociology. E. Durkheim is considered to be the grounder and “father” of this trend; he was the first to introduce to the humanities such concepts as social reality and social fact which are determined further on as derivatives of the linguistic activity. These are linguistic researches that will prove that translation of social compulsion which influences a human within the social formation (presented as customs, convictions, rituals, ideas and cognition forms) is being expressed in the language material.

Works of Swiss linguist F.de Saussure, where the author defined language as a system of signs and meanings, played a rather important role for the formation of sociology. Differentiation was the most sufficient concept within his works *langue* (social side of language), *language* (linguistic activity), parole (speech). While differentiating, Saussure presented the language as “a life of signs in the depths of society”. The most important maxim of the Swiss linguist was also the statement that said: “a language is nothing but differences”.

The approach of Saussure effected both linguistics and language philosophy in an intense way. First of all the objects of research within these disciplines were differentiated.

W. Labov emphasizes an interesting paradox which came out within the development of ideas of Saussure. If langue as a universal grammatical structure is “virtually” present in any realizing person, parole in its turn become available for watching only within language behavior. “It is actually the paradox of Saussure: social aspect of language is studied by watching any certain person, individual aspect, however, is studied by watching the language in its social context” [2]. It is well-known that the object of linguistics has been defined for a long time by studying the grammatical norm of the language.

Sociolinguistics could not be formed and separated as a stand-alone trend because principles of analysis of “social interferences” haven’t been elaborated yet. Linguists always tried to conclude from language functions some norms and rules which explain the whole diversity of languages. Right after the relativistic ideas were spread and results of linguistic and anthropological researches appeared it became quite clear that these “interferences” (stylistic shifts, phonetic and grammatical errors, idiolects, slang expressions, etc.) contain some unique material for studying language not as a set of rules but as an alive communication tool which reflects the social reality and forms it at the same time. The key distinguishing feature of linguistics of that period is analysis of *linguistic variation* in social and cultural contexts.

It is the question of linguistic nature of the reality that becomes a common point of sociolinguistic and philosophic researches.

One can obviously notice naturalistic evolutionary metaphors and neohumboldtian ideas. The adherents of this trend state that interdependence between evolution of language and that one of society is caused by structure of language and is tied up to expansion of linguistic events due to extralinguistic factors, such as fixing of political borders, upcoming of territorial and religious combinations. The connection between linguistic forms of “reproduction of social reality” and fundamental philosophical problems.

Let us consider the interconnection of epistemological problems and sociolinguistic issues. Methodological parameters of sociolinguistics and social epistemology can be presented as follows (Table 1):

Just to summarize the data from this table: the key concept is the connection between language and global cognitive and communicative processes within the culture, the processes which form the diversity of social conceptualization.

Where is the difference between social epistemology and traditional philosophic approaches? The concept of knowledge within the classical philosophy consisted of three components: object (as independently existing source of knowledge and empiric verifier), subject (an “individual filter” which deforms the conceptualization of the object and demands analytical self destruction, at the same time it is an active unit of cognition) and social conditions of cognition (“cultural and historical

Table 1:

Sociolinguistics		
Subject, object	Key concepts	Methods
CLanguage and nation,	CLinguistic community,	CFixing and analyzing of speech acts
CNational languages as a historical category,	CLinguistic code,	subject to social reasons
CSocial differentiation of language,	CSubcode,	CModelling of socially determined speech activity
CInterconnection between linguistic and social structures,	CSocial and communicative system,	CSociological experiments and elaborating of their
CTypology of linguistic situations caused by social factors,	CLinguistic situation.	results through the instrument of mathematical
CSocial aspects of multilingualism.		statistics, etc.
Social epistemology		
Subject, object	Key concepts	Methods
CConcept of sociality,	CSocial and cultural reality,	CAnalysis of discourse,
CRelations between sociality and knowledge,	CSubjective and anthropological reality,	CGame theory,
CSocial differentiation of language,	CEveryday routine,	CAnalysis of everyday language,
CCulture as a cognitive source of the mankind,	CPractical acts of thinking.	CCognitive and semantic analysis,
CSocial theory of sign,		CLogical analysis.
CHistorical bases of discourse.		

filter” - the source of prejudices and deception). The interconnection of cognition of language and this one of society is defined within the classic theory of cognition as follows: “knowledge is available for the subject of cognition itself by self-analysis and self-consciousness, other objects join it within the linguistic communication using specified and monosemantic words of natural and artificial languages” [3]. Representatives of social epistemology state that both a form and a content of knowledge are socially determined.

So, it is obvious that sociology of language is a natural continuation of linguistic relativism, the difference is only that within this trend the culture levels are specified. It is not the grammar of languages of primitive communities but linguistic “pictures of the world” of social layers and representatives of different social practices of any civilization level.

Within the philosophic tradition of analysis of sociolinguistic processes during the XX century appeared two global tendencies originating from two fundamental sources: structuralism of Saussure and theory of natural language of Wittgenstein. [4] I.T. Kasavin defines these two tendencies as a movement from *socium* to language and from language to *socium*. Within the first case the social linguistic practice is brought to some structural universals in the second one the motto of linguistic relativists and their followers is reanimated: “Language defines the borders of my world” (L. Wittgenstein).

From *socium* to language there is some movement: it derives from restrictions, regulations, norms and codes brought by social structure of speakers. Before we understand the language, we need to explain the ontology. According to this approach, language produces socially based senses. In other words, linguistic behavior is entirely subject to social roles which are “fixed” in the social environment. Quite a wide range of events may also be an influencing factor: from primitive taboos to complicated forms of etiquette. Language becomes not only a communication means but also a special code which “codifies” an additional hidden channel of social senses. “The key to analysis and understanding of linguistic phenomena should be found within the process of historical and sociological research”. [4,16]

From language to *socium*. As already mentioned, this tradition derivates from works of Sapir, Whorf, Wittgenstein, Heidegger. Ontology here origins from grammar, lexis and pragmatics. Despite the uniformity of physiological bases of perception, language and culture “refract” reality through their proper categories, filling

“linguistic pictures of the world” with the inner poetics of the speaker, not with definite objective definitions. *The existence becomes articulated again*. The access to reality is effected through the text within this version of social epistemology. An important role within the culture of XX century was played by metaphors which presented a semiotic text as a source of social senses. And it is rather logical to find a detailed analysis of the image of library-labyrinth as a symbol of the Universe, like “Babylon library” of J.L. Borges: “The world is like a library where each book tells about all other or where there is a book which describes all the other books” [4,17].

But there appears a serious question about the status of language. On the one hand we see that sociolinguists try to find regularities between the structures of linguistic variability and their social environment. On the other hand philosophers pose a question about ontological status of these linguistic transformations. If a Breton speak Breton dialect in his family and local French dialects with guests, so which transformations occur in the pragmatics of the statement while changing the codes. The question is also, what the Breton means while saying “*gwez avalou*” instead of “*pommier*”. Of course, it’s all about one and the same object (an apple tree) but where is difference between “cultural trains” connected to each of lexemes. Where is the source of differentiations between the word “*prairie*” from an encyclopedic dictionary and from the vocabulary of a Mongolian nomad? The answer is: it is in the communication. The meaning of the lexeme “*prairie*” gets its social senses within the discourse and texts of culture. *Philosophy is trying to define the ontological status of reality layers generated by the language and communicative practice*.

Actual papers about ontological status of social reality are widespread in the economic and politic domains. This type of communicative space consists of emergence, organisation, community, power, social relations, corporations, artefacts and money. Even there are some hypothesis about the natural features of social reality which is compared with the modern interpretations of quantum field theory. [5]

Social epistemology summarizes actually strict sociolinguistic descriptions in a special metaphysical way:

“The world we live in, is being synchronized with the principles of our communicative activity. We see the world in a way our language, our communicative habits and our social institutes allow us to see it. Just due to them we can experience the reality in a conscious way.” (G.B. Gutner) [6].

It is worth mentioning that it is mostly due to the works of P. Bourdieu who introduced the concept of "habitus" that the interest of philosophers towards sociology and later to the sociology of language raises. Works of this French thinker let us see the methodological transfer from linguistic analysis of so-called "social dialects" to the theory of "social space" or "social topology". Social space was divided by Bourdieu into several fields: economic, political, religious ones. And all these fields are subject to influence of three types of capital: economic, cultural and social ones. The interaction of the fields and capitals generate languages of social topos (socially marked sense fields) [7].

The possible question here is: what connection is there between Bourdieu's theory, linguistics and epistemology. The matter is, in order to describe this ontology within each field of social space its own language is used (this term is to be understood here on the informational side as a form of presentation of knowledge). Linguistics describes rather strictly language variability of each field either regarding the norm, or other fields. By the way it is not sufficient anymore, whether the language is described on the point of view of structuralism or constructivism. Philosophy - in its turn, poses the question about ontological and epistemological meaning of communication quite broadly.

Just an Example: In his article "Dialectal and social differences within city society" [8] R.I. McDavid Jr. characterizes dialects as follows: "Dialects appear upon availability of geographic or social barriers in the system of communication. It means that the stronger is the barrier, the more obvious are dialectal differences" [7, 364] In order to describe peculiarities of American English, the author has to describe social and historical context of linguistic fields in a rather detailed way. While analyzing "the melting-pot" of Chicago of the beginning of the XX century, McDavid tells the story of populating of this region by Irishmen, Jews, Afro-Americans, Latino-Americans; he reconstructs life of different generations. He also studies phonetic deviations according to the social group:

"First of all, the language of the city itself differed from that one of the suburbs because of interfusion of four migrating generations from the northern and middle parts of the country, Irishmen and due to slow assimilation of remnants of immigrants from continental Europe as well. People from the suburbs call Chicago /Sikâgo/, a butcher - /hagz/ and suffer from the

spring-time /fag/ ("weakness, fatigue"); most off the citizens call the city /Sikogo/, the old variant /hog/ - for "butcher" - was changed for a softer /fog/ (Sandberg). For Chicago citizens the words "prairie", "gangway" and "clout" have entirely other connotations than for people from inner parts of the country [6, 374-375].

The researches of pidgins can be interesting here as this linguistic concept is a result of a strong necessity to reach the maximum within pragmatics of communication. These language possess a number of specific features (minimum of lexical units, simplified grammar, phonetics which is as similar as possible to the norms of native languages of speakers, almost no morphology), just because they are not to reflect any implications of national spirit, they are there just to serve for understanding (Table 2).

Theory of evolution of contact languages is also interesting. Grammatically correct sentence is an "indecomposable" genetic core which is only subject to a number of formal changes. Social space plays the role of a processor - codified transformer which lets convert lexical and syntax range into forms which are relevant to social and cultural conditions of communication. There is a striking example of contact transformations of a simple English sentence into Atlantic pidgins:

Not only social premises of linguistic transformations are important for philosophy in this case, but interaction between the "reality" expressed in the language and the reality experienced by native speakers, as well. The key question is here the one of modes of functioning of habits (communicative habits) in the forms of communicative rationality. Social variability in the language is actually adaptive properties of communication. Rationality is defined here as the least labor-consuming way of reaching goals (from the relativistic point of view). We may suppose that in a isolated male group (i.e. in prison or at military service) it would be more difficult to systematize communicative relations by using Homer's hexameters than with the help of socially caused linguistic code. So, a language is not just a way for transfer of thoughts or an instrument of thought-formation but a social act; while stating something a human shows its belonging to one or another "world of senses".

To conclude we consider one more segment of social epistemology which is tied up to linguistic processes, it is sociology of knowledge. The subject of sociology of knowledge can be presented in a following way: "reality is socially constructed; sociology of knowledge is to study processes which let effect this construction". [10, 5] Previous examples show us that the reality is built

Table 2: [9,130]

A dialog in Russenorsk (Russian-Norwegian pidgin, spread in between negociant and seamen in the basin of Barents Sea)	Norwegian translation	Russian translation
- <i>Tvoja fisk kopom ?</i>	- <i>Kjeper du fisk ?</i>	- <i>Ty kupish rybu? (Will you buy a fish?)</i>
- <i>Da.</i>	- <i>Ja.</i>	- <i>Da. (Yes.)</i>
- <i>Kar pris ?</i>	- <i>Hvilken pris ?</i>	- <i>Kakaya tvoia tsena? (What is your price?)</i>
- <i>En voga mokka, sa to voga treska.</i>	- <i>En vog mel, sa to</i>	- <i>Odin ves muki za dva vesa treski. (One weight unit of flour for two weight units</i>
- <i>Eta mala.</i>	- <i>vog torsk.</i>	<i>of codfish)</i>
- <i>Slik slag, en a en hal voga treska, sa en voga mokka.</i>	- <i>Det er litet.</i>	- <i>Eto malo. (It's not enough.)</i>
- <i>Eta grot djur.</i>	- <i>Slik slag (det er det samme), en og en halv</i>	- <i>Ladno, poltora vesa treski za ves muki.</i>
- <i>No davaj pa kajut sitte ne, sa nokka</i>	<i>vog torsk, so en vog mel.</i>	<i>(Ok, 1,5 weight unit for a unit of flour.)</i>
<i>lite tjai drinkom, ikke skade.</i>	- <i>Det er meget dyrt.</i>	- <i>Eto ochen' dorogo. (It's far too expensive.)</i>
	- <i>Kom og sit ned I</i>	- <i>Nu davai posidim v kaiute i malenko chaiku</i>
	<i>kahytten og drik litt te,</i>	<i>popiyom, ne povredit. (Let us drink some</i>
	<i>det skader ikke.</i>	<i>tea in the cabin. It will do us good.)</i>

Table 3:

English	: The dog of the man who lives in that house, is named king.
Sarramaka	: Di dagu fu di womi dati di libi n' a wosu de a ne kin
Sranan	: A dagu f a man di libi n' ini a oso dati nen kir)
Guayan	: A man wa liv a da hous dag neem kin
Nigerian Pidgin	: Di dog we na di man we liv fo da haus get am, i nem kin
Crio	: Di man we tap na da os dog nem kin
Black-English	: Da mee hav in dai haees docog nel kian
Jamaican	: Di maan wa lib iina da hocos daag nyem kin
Barbadian	: Di dog da? bilon to di man da? liv in da? hocos, i neem kin

by communication; it affects so-called “linguistic processor” in an inimitable way. Norms of communicative behavior which are based on social knowledge get fixed within the language:

Language forms semantic fields which are linguistically marked and sense zones as well. Vocabulary, grammar and syntax encourage the organization of these semantic fields. So, language forms schemes of classification for distinguishing of objects by “gender” (concept which is entirely different from sex) and number; it forms statements of action and statements of existence; it shows the measure of social proximity, etc. In languages in which formal and intimate forms of address can be distinguished by pronouns (such as tu and vous in French, or du and Sie in German), the last ones present coordinates of a semantic field which can be defined as an intimacy zone. The world of brotherhood

(Tutoiement, Bruderschaft) with a great amount of meanings available for my systematizing of my social experience is to find here [10, 31].

Social knowledge affects the whole structure of semiotic representation. Language means here not only communication or historical discourse but the whole system of memes, with the help of those a human expresses himself. Memes (as genetic units of cultural revolution) “react” sensitively to social environment and use the field of linguistic routine in order to be “fixed” within the code of culture.

The phenomenon of social status, for example, is studied by methods of linguistic semantics, not anthropology or sociology nowadays. Linguistic indices of social status which are presented on different levels of everyday discourse are studied within this field. And it is actually the sphere where the meaning of communicative competence becomes obvious. High level speech competences evidence mostly a high status of a speaker.

“It is well-known that many people stammer from excitement, mumble, express their thoughts not clearly while communicating to superiors or speaking from a without having a relevant skill. In Burundi it is obligatory for people of a lower social status to talk unclearly and stumblingly while talking to superiors. It is a behavioral norm. So, while communicating to subordinates, one should talk fluently” [11].

There are, however, some exclusions - when a communicant talks too gaudily that makes feel unsure of his competence.

Linguistic indication of social status is obviously just a tiny part of social ontology realized through linguistic activity. We may characterize the trend as a semiotic approach within sociology of language: senses of social activity come clearer in semantics, syntax and pragmatics. We see here an effect of a back action: *it is not a human who speaks the language; it is the fullness of interaction of language and social reality that influences a human*. Philosophic analysis of language practices could clarify some difficulties in the cognitive and communicative processes. It's possible to reproduce the hidden epistemic levels not only on an individual scale or in the context of idealized dialog but in whole for global human communication. True, in this case we take chances to fall into universalism - very tricky position in terms of ontology.

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