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Lingvoecology of classroom discourse:
student discourse practices and teacher perceptions

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Abstract — **The paper represents interim findings of research into the lingvoecology of the Russian academic discourse. The purpose of the present study was to reveal teachers' perception of the school environment and find out the dominant lingvoecological problems of classroom discourse in the regional context. The research employed a survey-based study with the data grouped and analyzed statistically and by means of intent-analysis. The main findings uncover the major problematic areas in the lingvoecological state of teacher-student communication in the regional context, lack of interpersonal rapport and teacher-student mutual respect being the most important one. The highest negative emotiogenic effect as perceived by the school staff was found to be produced by student conversational intentions of Quit, Self-justification, Threats and Ultimatums, Rejection, and Testing credibility. The results obtained were generally in conformity with the latest research in the target area.**

Keywords — linvoecology, student speech patterns, school climate, emotiogenic effect, survey-based analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

The current study represents a part of a larger research project devoted to the linguistic ecology of secondary school academic discourse in the Russian context. Academic discourse which is understood here as an aggregate of all discourse practices occurring in the process of knowledge acquisition and exchange [1] is what is found in the heart of what we call "education". However, like any other area of human communication, it often seems to go awry. Misunderstanding, poor teaching and students converting sensible ideas into destructive ones have to be regarded as communication failures. However, alongside with successes, failures are an important focus of research allowing to find the ways of getting on the right track. Obviously, they can be better understood by studying the discourse practices that generate them. Everything about human contacts and relationships is created and destroyed by words [2].

The language patterns used by the main participants of academic discourse have been found to possess either positive or negative emotiogenic potential which produces a significant impact on the classroom environment and the school climate as a whole [3]. School climate and classroom environment have long been recognized to be among the major factors predetermining the learning outcomes [4].

Classroom behaviour has been found to be an academic achievement predictor [5], which is further linked with life outcomes [6]. While much research effort has been made with the focus on students' perceptions of classroom environment, only a few works were devoted to staff perceptions of school environment [7], revealing a substantial gap in this area, especially in the Russian context.

Teachers have three major interpersonal adequacies: to be effective as a teacher, to be liked and respected by the students and to be able to provide control in the classroom. If these needs are not fully realized they can transform into adequacy fears: fear of being rejected, fear of students' failure, fear of disobedience. Thus, a teacher's perception of his/her job environment depends on these three basic areas, revealing problem zones in which is the present study aimed at.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Participant characteristics and scope of the study

The study was conducted on a sample of 202 secondary school teachers by stratified random sampling from 10 secondary schools in the Republic of Bashkortostan, in March, academic year 2018-2019 to reveal teachers' perception of the school environment and find out the dominant lingvoecological problems of classroom discourse in the republic from the teachers' point of view. The data for this study were obtained through questionnaire administered to the total number of 224 teachers (12 questionnaires were left unanswered). The subjects' age was between 26 and 68.

B. Instruments

The method of inquiry used in this study was a questionnaire which consisted of two parts. Part I contained 5 close-type questions aimed at revealing the teachers' perception of the current learning environment in their classrooms and the presence of teacher-student communication problems, if any. In Part II the respondents were asked to write up to 10 frequently occurring student phrases that may affect their emotional balance and make it difficult to choose the proper reaction strategy.

C. Procedure

After obtaining approval by Bashkir State University, schools were contacted and asked to participate. Of the ten

schools eight are located in Ufa (S1-S8), and two in other towns of the republic: Neftekamsk (S9) and Oktyabrsky (S10). Participation was voluntary and none of the teachers was paid for their participation. The presented data were collected as a part of a larger project. The questionnaire was administered in the Russian language. The purpose of the questionnaire was explained in the introductory part of the questionnaire. The respondents were informed that the information they gave would be kept confidential and be used for research purposes only. The respondents were asked to finish the survey within 15 minutes at the end of the staff meeting.

The Part I data of the questionnaires were analyzed in terms of frequency and percentages.

The Part II data of the questionnaires were grouped into categories according to their intentions and implicatures, and analyzed in terms of frequency and percentages.

For Part II data processing we employed:

1) intent analysis, a linguistic tool designed to analyze social and psychological relationships [8]. This method is applied for description of customized solutions of conflict speech interaction. The ecological properties of speech are determined by the speaker's intended aim and specific linguistic means applied by the speaker. Thus, intent analysis allows to assess the subject's mental state, motives, interests, estimations and intentions [9]. Intentions include object designation and the speaker's attitude to the object. The specificity of intentions, then, is determined by the objects selected and the attitude to them the speaker demonstrates. The criterion of relevance is the thoroughness of the object description.

2) analysis revealing conversational implicatures based on Grice's principles of logic and conversation [10].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Part I data analysis

Part I of the questionnaire contained 5 statements to agree or disagree with: Q1 "Positive emotions in the classroom contribute to knowledge acquisition whereas negative emotions may hinder it"; Q2 "In recent years, it has become more difficult to find a common language with students"; Q3 "In some situations, I find it difficult to contain negative emotions"; Q4 "I always find the proper wording to avoid conflict and stay on good terms with students, parents and colleagues"; Q5 "I would like to get acquainted with scientifically-verified discourse techniques facilitating communication with students, parents, colleagues in order to achieve better results and get more positive emotions from my work".

The statistical analysis of the total sample showed that Q1 received nearly unanimous agreement (186 / 92%), which means that the respondents feel that eco-friendly communication practices in the classroom play a significant role in academic discourse and facilitate the process of knowledge acquisition. However, in Q4, nearly a half of the respondents (90 / 44.5%) admitted that avoiding conflict that can affect the relationships with students and the learning environment in their classrooms is sometimes a hard task for them. Even a larger proportion of the respondents gave a positive answer in Q3 (118 / 58.5%) admitting that they feel

at risk of getting involved in emotiogenically negative or conflict discourse practices in their jobs. It should also be taken into account that the data analyzed represent the teachers' self-assessment. According to Kruger and Dunning [11] self-assessment tends to be higher with low-qualified and lower with high-qualified individuals, which might change the real picture to a certain extent and therefore may be considered as a limitation to this study. However, significant distortion is unlikely due to the sufficient scope of the sample and the fact that from the psychological point of view admitting weak points is hard and tends to be avoided.

The majority of positive answers to Q5 141 (70%) shows that the respondents feel that certain clear-cut linguistic means used in specific practical situations may help them avoid emotiogenically negative, polluting and destructive discourse practices and contribute to making the school environment more supportive. In their answers to Q2, 81 respondents (40% of the sample) reported that their perceptions of finding a common language with the students were lower than the desired level. This finding is consistent with the existing literature studying the changes in the new generation, the so-called i-gens [12]. A positive answer to this question could have been given by the senior part of the sample, though. As for younger teachers (26 to 35), their job experience is based on teaching i-gens only. It suggests that the ratio of positive answers to this question might have been higher if based on the opinion of teachers with more than 10-year experience only.

The quantitative analysis showed that there were no significant differences among the respondents' answers in 9 of the ten schools constituting the sample. The only school that produced slightly different results (the difference reached up to 9% in Q3 and 10% in Q4) was a prestigious linguistic gymnasium in Ufa (S3). Surprisingly enough, but this finding may mean that the school climate is approximately the same throughout the region. All the minor discrepancies then may be explained by the headmaster's personal influence and the individuality of each staff member.

B. Part II data analysis

The Part II data were represented by 824 examples of student phrases that the respondents perceive as the most emotiogenically negative. Most of these phrases were frequently and word-for-word repeated by the respondents, which allows to regard them as speech patterns. The intent analysis of the patterns supports the data obtained in Part I. All the data were divided into 8 categories by the intention parameter: Quit (refusal to contribute), Self-justification, Threats and Ultimatums, Rejection, Testing credibility, Begging for grade-up, Button-pushing, and Self-accusation. In every category explicit and implicit ways of expressing the intention were then revealed.

The category of Quit (refusal to contribute) was the most numerous and contained 311 reports, in 199 of which the intention was expressed explicitly:

I don't want to do this. (42) / *I (we) forgot it.* (37) / *I won't do this.* (21) / *I am not ready for the class.* (14) / *I didn't learn it.* (13) / *I don't know.* (12) / *I don't care.* (10) / *I don't want to write.* (9) / *I don't understand it.* (7) / *I'm not really interested.* (7) / *I won't go to the blackboard.* (6) / *I don't want to study.* (6) / *Why don't you ask someone else?*

(6) / *We won't do this.* (4) / *I don't want to do anything.* (4) / *We don't remember.* (4)

In 112 patterns the intention of Quit was expressed implicitly:

Why me? (19) / *We are tired.* (17) / *I didn't understand.* (8) / *Explain it in a way that I can understand.* (8) / *May I go out?* (every now and then) (7) / *Let's just sit here and chat.* (6) / *Can I bring it tomorrow?* (6) / *I didn't take it down.* (5) / *Let's not simply have the class today.* (4) / *Let's do nothing.* (4) / *Why does it have to be me?* (4) /*I will do it tomorrow.* (4) / *I want to go home.* (3) / *Not sure.* (3) / *Tell me what I should do.* (3) / *Help me understand.* (2) / *Don't give us home assignment.* (2) / *I will bring it tomorrow.* (2) / *I didn't understand the material.* (2) / *What do you mean?* (2)

The main emotion underlying this speech behavior pattern is frustration. The intention to refuse from contributing during the class (the more so because the majority of the patterns are expressed explicitly) may suggest both lingvoecological and course content problems in the classroom discourse. On the one hand, the school program is tough and intense, which, to a certain extent, may serve as a barrier to successful knowledge acquisition and result in loss of interest to studies. On the other hand, though, information is one of the basic human needs and the teaching-and-learning process can and should be arranged in a way that is understandable and motivating the students. The course content may suggest either tasks that lie in actual development zone, or beyond the zone of potential development. In the first case, the emotiogenic effect on student can take the form of boredom (too easy to be motivating), in the second it may result in frustration (too difficult to be motivating). The only zone where a student may feel motivated is the zone of proximal development (what the learner can do efficiently with the teacher's help) [13].

Explicit refusal to contribute also suggests lack of respect to the teacher and the teacher's fear of being ineffective in his/her job. However, as it has been shown in our previous studies, lack of respect is one of the major factors aggravating academic discourse and hence learning environment, as viewed by students [14]. It was also revealed that students put interpersonal rapport higher than professionalism, and the category of respect is the most significant one in the students' interpersonal rapport expectations from the teacher [ibid.]. Thus, both teachers' and students' perceptions in this category are in consistence, which can indicate that academic discourse practices lack respect on both sides.

The category of Self-justification, the second largest group, was represented by163 reports, in 50 of which the intention was expressed explicitly:

I didn't do my home assignment because I didn't have enough time. (15) / *I was away from the previous class so I am not supposed to know / do the homework* (11) / *I don't know where that came from.* (9) / *I didn't do that.* (8) / *Where was my fault in it?* (4) / *I'm not obliged to do it.* (3)

In 113 patterns the intention of Self-justification was expressed implicitly:

I left my notebook behind. (19) /*You didn't say that.* (14) / *I overslept.* (13) / *It was him who started it!* (9) / *What did I do?* (7) / *I have a headache (stomachache).* (7) / *I got in a traffic jam.* (6) /*The others do so, too!* (6) / *I didn't hear.* (6) / *You didn't teach us this.* (5) / *I didn't know.* (4) /*He is doing the same things!* (4) / *What did I say?* (3)/ *I was framed.* (3) / *I'm ill.* (3) / *That's what he/she (a classmate) told me.* (3) / *I didn't see.* (2) / *You didn't explain this.* (2)

The main emotion underlying this speech behavior pattern is fear to assume responsibility. The student's intention to justify him/herself mostly reveals problems with classroom management. Even though the majority of the patterns are expressed implicitly, which ameliorates their emotiogenic effect, the respondents perceive them as affecting their emotional balance. This may be due to the teachers' fear of being inefficient in providing control and making the students obedient. Probably the main focus in child development is constructing their responsibility instead of obedience. The latest findings in this field reveal that domination strategies in teacher–student interactions and classroom context affect students' emotional and behavioral difficulties [15].

The category of Rejection was represented by114 reports, in 88 of which the intention was expressed explicitly:

Addressing the teacher with obscene words (29) /*You are picking on me!* (11) / *When anything goes wrong you just blame it on me!* (12) / *I hate school.* (9) / *You graded my work unfairly.* (8) / *I'm sick of you.* (7) / *You are biased.* (4) / *I hate you.* (3) / *This is unfair.* (3) / *I hate both teachers and classmates.* (2) / *You are getting on my nerves.* (2)

In 26 patterns the intention of Rejection was expressed implicitly:

Why, am I a scapegoat? (6) / *Why did you grade his/her work higher than mine?* (5) /*I'm bored.* (4) / *I'm fed up.* (3) / *Why do I have to take charge of everything?* (3) / *I got sick of everything.* (3)

The main emotion underlying this speech behavior pattern is strong dislike (in some cases even disgust) formed by long-accumulated fear and frustration. The student's intention to reject the teacher / the school / the fellow students reveals the state of active conflict in the classroom. It also suggests the state of school staff emotional exhaustion and burnout which has been found to be able to produce a negative impact on the teaching outcomes [16]. Rejection is mostly expressed explicitly, which shows the high level of the negative emotion experienced.

The category of Threats and ultimatums was represented by 93 reports, in all of which the intention was expressed explicitly:

You don't have the right! (22) / *So what will you do to me?* (18) / *So what?* (13) / *You just prove it!* (11) / *I'll take you to court.* (8) / *I'll tell my parents* (7) / *Just prove that I did it.* (6) / *Just prove that I said it.* (4) / *I'll kill you* (2) /*I'd like to punch you in the face right now.* (2)

The main emotion underlying this speech behavior pattern is anger. Similar to Rejection, Threats and Ultimatums suggest the state of active conflict with the teacher, however, unlike the previous category it also involves direct verbal aggression. It is only natural, therefore,

that all the patterns are expressed explicitly. This type of speech behavior arises when the teacher who has no power of authority tries to use his/her authority of power to force the students into obedience [17]. This bully-victim speech behavior has been found to be one of the main reasons of conflict in an academic setting [18; 19] and research is being done into finding the ways to prevent these behaviors [20].

The category of <u>Testing credibility</u> was represented by 76 reports, in 52 of which the intention was expressed explicitly:

I (we) don't need it. (18) / *I don't need your subject!* (17) / *It's none of your business.* (4) / *I've no interest in what you are saying.* (4) / *Mind your own business.* (3) / *You do it.* (3) / *I like it this way.* (2) / *I won't ever need that in real life.* (2) / *Do it yourself.* (2) / *You are supposed to arrange recreational activities every month.*

In 24 patterns the intention of Testing credibility was expressed implicitly:

Why do I need it? (15) / *It won't make me smarter.* (4) / *I want it to be like this.* (3) / *Why do I have to study?* (2) /

The main engine under this speech behavior pattern is strive for independence. Testing the powers of adults who are in charge of them is psychological norm for adolescents. Making the teacher feel guilty or frightened gives way to manipulating him/her: an irresistible temptation, the more so as it allows to make an impression on the classmates. However, the participants' perception of these speech patterns as emotiogenically dangerous is statistically significant. This may probably be explained by insufficient level of acceptance of adolescent needs in school teachers [21].

Other three categories are significantly less considerable in terms of frequency.

The category of <u>Begging for grade-up</u> was represented by 27 reports expressed explicitly:

How can I get the grade up? (from those students who hardly ever contribute during the classes). (16) / *Can I have an extra credit assignment?* (11)

This speech behavior based on the fear of low grading at the end of term is relatively unfrequently perceived as emotiogenically negative by the respondents.

The category of <u>Button pushing and sarcasm</u> was represented by 26 reports expressed explicitly:

I'll Google it (15) /*Grown-ups don't understand a thing.* (3) / *What can I do?* (3) / *All that interests you is dough* (money). (2) / *Those who can't do anything, teach, right? / Your parents didn't have the money to get you a better education, right? / A satisfactory mark is enough for me, right? / This is my personal opinion but if you don't like it I have another one.*

These patterns are used by students in the similar ways as Testing credibility, though they are marked by significantly higher sarcastic spirit, which makes them even more emotiogenically painful for the teacher. Fortunately, speech patterns entering this category were rather modest in number. The most frequent pattern in this category mentioned by 15 respondents reflects the students' awareness of the teacher's negative attitude to using gadgets in the classroom, and the teacher's low tolerance to button-pushing.

The category of <u>Self-accusation</u> was represented by 14 reports expressed explicitly:

I'm dumb. (11) / *I'm too lazy to do it.* (2) / *I will be a flunkey and become a hobo.*

This speech behavior is based on the feeling of guilt that was inspired to the student either by the family, or the teacher. The respondents' negative perceptions of it may be associated with fear of being ineffective as a teacher.

These findings are consistent with the latest scientific effort in this area. Thus, it has been found that avoidance and lower complexity and negative emotiogenic valence of teachers' narratives were associated with lower positive climate in their classrooms, which, in its turn affects teacher sensitivity and may lead to lack of regard to students' learning outcomes [22].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data obtained, it is possible to make the following conclusions:

1) The present study showed that the present state of lingvoecology of academic discourse in the regional secondary school setting is far from the desired level. Teacher expectations of obedience and respect are frequently ruined by disobedience and disrespect, instead.

2) The student speech patterns most negatively perceived by the teaching staff fall into 4 main intention categories: Quit (refusal to contribute), Self-justification, Threats and Ultimatums, Rejection, and Testing credibility.

3) The most problematic zones in the academic discourse in the regional context are lack of interpersonal rapport, inefficient communication of course content, and insufficient professionalism in classroom management. The major concern is probably the categories of respect and politeness which are not fully observed by both of the sides, thus putting the ligvoecology of academic communication at risk.

4) The study also revealed a high level of conflict teacher-student relationships in the regional context. Although conflict naturally and normally occurs in schools, teachers' using inappropriate conflict solving strategies such as domination strategies can negatively affect the students' emotional state, social behavior and further their academic achievement. A sustainable, emotiogenically-positive school climate facilitates student development and learning needed for their further productive and successful life. This climate should be grounded on eco-friendly discourse practices and include academic communication norms supporting the discourse participants to feel both emotionally and physically safe. Teachers and students should be respected and engaged.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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