

Linguistic Markers of Native Speakers

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Abstract—The article analyzes the relevant in modern sociolinguistic conditions notion of “native speaker”. The identification of traits, or linguistic markers, determining whether the speaker is a “native speaker” has a high practical significance. A pronunciation marker, a grammar marker, a lexical marker, a semantic marker and an extra-linguistic marker, which can most accurately demonstrate the level of language proficiency, and also show whether a person is a representative of a certain cultural and linguistic community, will help to recognize a foreign citizen as a language speaker of the Russian language. As an illustrative material, the article offers original authoring of special tasks and a system for the evaluation of the answers of applicants for recognition as a native speaker.

Keywords—*linguistic marker; native speaker*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, migration processes actively influence the sociolinguistic situation of many countries, including the Russian Federation. As it is known, in matters of determining the status of a foreign citizen in the territory of another state, the level of proficiency in the language of the receiving party is extremely important. In June 2014, the Law “On Citizenship of the Russian Federation” was amended, according to which persons who prove that they are the Russian language speakers can obtain citizenship in a simplified manner.

The decision to classify foreign citizens as carriers of the Russian language speakers is made by a deliberately created commission at a territorial body of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This commission includes not only employees of migration service, but also philologists, who, on the basis of the interview, must find out whether the applicant for citizenship is a speaker of the Russian language. Usually these are citizens of those countries that were previously included in the USSR. Visitors from these countries not only speak

Russian fluently, but are also representatives of the Russian cultural and linguistic heritage.

In the Chuvash Republic, which is a region of the Russian Federation, the commission on recognition of a foreign citizen or stateless person as the Russian language speaker also began its work in 2014. The commission includes teachers-philologists of higher educational institutions of the republic, including Chuvash State University, where the authors of this research work. Professional philologists develop tests for the interview, during which the level of language proficiency of a person applying for the status of a speaker the Russian language is determined, as well as the degree of relation of this person with Russian culture. The above mentioned aspects determine the relevance of understudied issue in terms of the markers of a native speaker.

It should be noted that the technology of recognition as a native speaker needs a detailed development and methodological substantiation of common approaches, since the very concept of “native speaker” has not received sufficient explanation in the research literature. Thus there are no criteria to evaluate whether a candidate for citizenship is a native speaker, and the methods of identifying markers are not fully developed and not fixed at the legislative level.

General requirements for language proficiency were reflected in only one official document (Order of the Federal Migration Service of Russia No. 379 of 05/26/2014), which stated that during the interview, the ability of foreign citizen to “understand and be able to interpret authentic texts on any topics, including abstract-philosophical, professional, journalistic and literary, as well as texts with subtext and conceptual meanings”; “to fully understand the content, in particular, radio and television programs, films, television performances, plays, recordings of public speeches, freely perceiving the socio-cultural and emotional features of

speakers, interpreting phraseological units, famous utterances and hidden meanings”; “to be able to achieve the stated goals of communication in situations of prepared and unprepared monological and dialogical communication, including public, demonstrating various tactics of verbal behavior”; “to be able to demonstrate a complete knowledge of the language system and fluency in the means of expressiveness of the language in all the diversity of lexical and grammatical, stylistic, synonymous and structural relations”.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the course of the research with the help of the method of comparative lexicographic analysis, the meaning of the term “speaker of a language” was investigated in explanatory dictionaries and in research literature. The methodology for developing test for the determination of linguistic markers of a native speaker was based on the traditional principles of linguodidactic testing, covering different types of speech activity and different levels of language system.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of research literature and vocabulary articles describing the concept of “native speaker” does not provide a clear picture that would establish clear boundaries of this concept.

According to the dictionaries, a “native speaker” is “a representative of a sociocultural and linguistic community who is proficient in the language and actively uses this language (usually his mother tongue) in various every day, sociocultural, professional, and other spheres of communication”. This definition does not specify the level of language proficiency of a native speaker. Besides, a foreigner, being in a foreign language environment, is also forced to actively use this language in various household, socio-cultural, professional and other areas of communication.

In the dictionary of linguistic terms, “native speaker” is defined as 1) an individual who speaks a language as a native; 2) an individual, a social group, people using one or another language [8]. This definition is also too general. Real situations are much more complicated than any definitions.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary of English, a native speaker is “a person who speaks a particular language from an early age, and did not learn it at a later age, or already being an adult” [13]. However, in this case there are questions related to the vagueness of the concept of “young age”.

In scientific literature, the term “native speaker” is analyzed in connection with the concept of “linguistic personality” [2, 7]. For example, G.I. Bogin [2], considering the term “linguistic personality” in the framework of linguodidactics, suggests evaluating its development by five criteria: correctness (degree of proficiency in language norms), internalization (speech speed, depending on the degree of formation of internal structures of psyche associated with speech actions on language), richness (vocabulary and diversity of syntactic constructions are assessed), adequate choice (accuracy of choice of language units is assessed),

adequate synthesis (adequacy of speech actions is assessed in discourse).

These five criteria are too broad to solve the problem. With regard to the technology of the determination of native speaker, it becomes unclear what the “reference point” is. It is difficult to determine the minimum threshold that a language personality must overcome in order to be considered a native speaker, and when the process of improving his skills begins. It is not clear how correct the speech of a speaker should be (native speakers also make mistakes in their speech, it depends on their level of education), how fast it should be (after all, the psychological characteristics of a person influence speech rate), which vocabulary should be considered minimally sufficient for a speaker, how accurate the choice of words of real native speakers is, is their speech behavior always adequate? Consequently, the criteria developed by G.I. Bogin are not decisive in solving the problem of identifying a native speaker.

There is also a point of view that persons speaking Russian at the fourth certification level should be recognized as a native speaker (in the Russian state linguodidactic testing system, the certification level of TORFL-IV (Test of Russian as a Foreign Language) corresponds to level C2). In any case, in the preparation of tasks, the requirements for IV level [10] are taken into account. However, there are some contradictions, since it is quite possible to master the language at the level of TORFL-IV (C2), get tested and get the appropriate certificate, but not be a native speaker. On the other hand, there are speakers who could not pass all subtests of the fourth level.

In world practice, a distinction is also made between the “highest level of proficiency in a foreign language” (C2), which is defined as the level of a “highly educated native speaker” and language speaking.

Although C2 is defined as “fluency in a language,” this does not mean language proficiency at the level of a native speaker or close to a native speaker. “Not a highly educated native speaker” still remains a native speaker, while having mastered a foreign language is not equivalent to a native speaker, even if he speaks a language better than “not a highly educated native speaker” («...it implies that a “not so well-educated native” is still a native speaker whereas an “expert” (the level before the “well-educated native”) is not equal to a native speaker even if s/he is able to do things that a “not so well-educated native” can’t») [12].

The studies on sociolinguistics [14, 16] state that the concept of “native language” includes three aspects: linguistic competence (level of language proficiency), linguistic heritage (linguistic traditions of family and community), and linguistic affiliation (identification with any language). The term “native speaker” is a partial combination of these three aspects. Therefore, the use of the term “native speaker” only in relation to the level of proficiency in the language is not correct, because it includes the concepts of linguistic heritage and linguistic affiliation. This explains the fact that a person is not perceived as a “native speaker”, even if his language level corresponds to or even exceeds the level of a “native speaker”.

It is also necessary to take into account the fact that it is difficult to determine whether a person is a native speaker of a particular language due to the different levels of education and intellectual development. Is it possible not to consider a person, who speaks no other language other than Russian, but cannot reveal the implications of a statement, recognize a language game, formulate the same content using different language means, etc?

Thus, the interview for the identification as a native speaker of the Russian language should not turn into a test for the level of development of a language personality. In addition, this procedure does not provide long-term testing. Consequently, we need deeper, capacious, universal signs, by which one can unambiguously determine whether a person is a native speaker of a given language. Such criteria should be called linguistic markers.

In our opinion, there are four such markers.

Pronunciation marker.

Grammar marker.

Lexical semantic marker.

Extralinguistic marker.

Pronunciation marker. The importance of spontaneous sounding speech for the objective consideration of the peculiarities of an individual speech behavior is emphasized in studies of the linguistic personality of real native speakers [6]. Indeed, observations of spontaneous oral speech make it possible to draw important conclusions about the level of language proficiency, since the pronunciation is a very vivid indicator of the language speaking.

However, the clearness of pronunciation should be determined on the basis of the compliance of a speaker with the system requirements. The pronunciation can be influenced by the place of birth and residence - dialectal features, as well as a long stay in a foreign language environment (especially in the intonation of speech). Regulatory mistakes (violations of orthoepic norms), which can even be attributed to native speakers and reasoned by dialectal features, include the features of the reduction of unstressed vowels (okanie, strong acanie, yakanie, etc.). These mistakes lead to the fact that the pronunciation norms of the literary language are violated, but not the phonetic system. A speaker in any case will comply with the basic phonetic laws of a language.

Grammar marker. As in the case of pronunciation, an indicator of a native speaker can be presented by the absence of system mistakes in his speech. Even communicatively insignificant mistakes can disrupt language system, although they do not affect the understanding of the meaning of an utterance. It is necessary to identify cases of violation of non-grammatical norms that sometimes are not complied by native speakers, especially those who are not highly educated, namely system mistakes of a language (for example, in the speech of representatives of Central Asia, the agreement in gender is often violated, since their languages do not have this category, the native speaker does not make such mistakes).

Systemic grammatical mistakes are better detected in written language, because oral speech implies greater freedom. On the other hand, too correct oral speech, non-compliance with stylistic features of colloquial speech, violation of the requirement of relevance is also an indicator of the "rote learning" of a language, and not of the speaking condition.

Lexical semantic marker. An indicator of language speaking is the ability to adequately understand the meaning of texts and statements. However, the perception of texts is one of the indicators of language proficiency, but this is not enough to identify a speaker. In our opinion, a clear criterion can be presented by the ability to perceive precedent texts, understand the elements of a language game. The role of phraseology in linguodidactic is indisputable [15], but language game has an even greater importance in identifying the speaking of a language - "a certain type of speech behavior of speakers, based on deliberate (conscious) violation of the systemic relations of language, i.e. on the destruction of speech norm in order to create non-canonical language forms and structures that acquire as a result of this destruction an expressive meaning and ability to evoke an aesthetic and, in general, stylistic effect of a listener / reader"[5].

This marker is closely related to the associative potential of a word, which is available only to a representative of a certain cultural and linguistic community. The associative criterion makes it possible to determine whether a person has a linguistic heritage (linguistic traditions). It allows evaluating his ethno-linguistic identity, that is, the correlation of a linguistic personality with a certain "dominant component" defined by "national-cultural traditions", and to reveal "cultural elements of a language" [4, p. 37].

Extra-linguistic marker. The nature of the reaction to tasks and linguistic units can also serve as an indicator of a native speaker. Even if the applicant is not able to complete the task immediately and fully due to personal characteristics, his reaction may indicate whether he is a native speaker. Adequacy of response is a marker of a native speaker, even if a language task is difficult.

It is possible to determine whether an applicant is a native speaker of a language only comprehensively, given all the listed markers, although real situations are always more difficult than any theoretical research.

We would like to consider an example of the original tasks developed by the authors of this article for interviewing applicants for recognition as native Russian speakers. These tasks were based on the above mentioned aspects and are aimed at identifying various linguistic markers of a native speaker. In addition to assignments, criteria for evaluating the answers of applicants were also developed.

In the Chuvash Republic, an interview for the recognition of an applicant as a native speaker of the Russian language consists of two parts - written and oral.

The first part - "Writing" - is divided into 2 sections: viewing video material and answering questions for it, as well as explaining the meaning of a phraseological unit. Let us consider these sections in more detail.

Firstly, an applicant is offered to watch video material relating to social, cultural and official business areas of communication, relevant to the modern social life of Russia. The duration of the video clip is 3-5 min. The task of an applicant is to view a video, to determine a topic, to understand its main idea; to answer written questions in writing.

The practice of conducting an interview for recognition as a native speaker has shown that it is more reasonable to offer interviews with famous people as video materials, rather than episodes of films. On the one hand, with the help of this task we familiarize applicants for recognition as native speakers with famous personalities Russia. On the other hand, by proposing episodes from recent interviews as a task, we prevent the situation of preliminary acquaintance with a material. If some participants have already watched a particular video clip, while others have not, unequal conditions are created for different applicants. The absence of a non-linguistic context is also important. In the episodes of films, one can understand the content of what is happening, based on the video sequence. In addition, the perception of an interview requires an understanding of unprepared speaking, what native speakers are capable of. The presence of emotional and expressive stress, pauses, a huge number of elliptical and incomplete sentences of various types, words-appeals, word repetitions, sentence rupture by insertion constructions, weakening and breaking the forms of syntactic connection between parts of the utterance, etc. - all these facts distinguish unprepared speech. In the context of pronunciation, one can note insufficiently clear diction, which is normal for everyday communication, but difficult for non-native speakers to understand.

For example, as a video of one of interviews, an episode from the well-known in Russia TV show "Posner" was offered (TV airtime of 04.06.2013). The guest of Vladimir Pozner was a famous theater and film actor Yevgeny Mironov. The presenter discussed with the guest questions of choosing an acting or directing profession, attitudes towards theater and cinema, ways of finding inspiration. We briefly render the content of their conversation in order to show how such tasks help to reveal the semantic marker of a native speaker. The applicant had to understand that between the professions of actor and director, Yevgeny Mironov unequivocally chooses the profession of an actor because he got such a qualification in university, because "everyone must do his own business." When asked about the choice between cinema and theater, the guest of the program answers not so categorically: he likes both; but, if it were necessary to choose, it would be a theater, because it is a "living substance," it is in the theater that a miracle takes place, which is little susceptible to rational analysis. Speaking about the possible ways of behavior of an actor in case of the absence of inspiration, Mironov cites the example of Innokenty Smoktunovsky and Svyatoslav Richter, which illustrate two types of behavior. The first did not consider it necessary to "force" one self. "If I felt that I could not fully enter the image, I played mechanically".

"Well, today, just like this ...", - Mironov transmitted his words. Richter, on the contrary, gave inspiration such importance that, when he felt the absence of it, he canceled

concerts. Evgeny Mironov, unlike the two great people listed above, acts in his own way. His upbringing does not allow him to cancel performances ("My mother said: people paid the money, they came ..." - says the artist), but he cannot play to the full extent. Therefore, it is necessary to "to touch a wound", to find the emotion that is necessary on the stage, and this is detrimental to the mind of an artist. But according to Mironov it is necessary.

During the interview, applicants had to answer in writing for 2 questions: 1. What would Evgeny Mironov choose if he had to choose: theater or cinema? Why? 2. What are the two ways for an artist who has no inspiration this evening, which path does Mironov choose?

The answer to the first part of the first question does not cause difficulties, but in order for the answer to be recognized as complete, an applicant must substantiate the position of E. Mironov. Moreover, under time constraints, an applicant must quickly accomplish several tasks: understand the answer Mironov, choose one of the arguments cited by the artist, and render the content of this argument in short form.

When answering the second question, applicants should independently formulate two ways, because only their illustrations are given in interviews.

A typical mistake of this task was the lack of the understanding by applicants of the first variant of the behavior of the artist, which is illustrated by the example of I. Smoktunovsky, who in the case of the absence of inspiration played his role flimsy. Many participants of the interview did not understand that E. Mironov chooses the third way - in the case of the absence of inspiration, he evokes emotion by "finding" emotional wounds. However, some applicants still wrote that he motivated himself in a special way, just did not designate his behavior as a third way. From our point of view, this is a situation when the level of proficiency in the language is not in doubt, but there is an inability to structure the answer due to the lack of ability to analyze.

When evaluating written work (writing skills were checked) of applicants, due attention is paid to the adequacy of solving communicative tasks, that is, to the correct response to the proposed speech situation. At the same time, the lexical-semantic marker is updated. After all, in order to respond adequately, it is necessary to understand what was asked (reading skills were checked) and what was provided as a source of information (listening skills). It is important to give a complete answer to the question, because the completeness of information is estimated quite rigorously. From the 50 points awarded for the adequacy of the reaction, 25 points are deducted because of the lack of answer to the question and 12 points because of the lack of substantiation of the answer to the question, as well as 5 points are deducted because of the skipping the information unit in argumentation.

When checking the written part of the answer, communicatively significant (minus 2 points for each) and communicatively insignificant (minus 0.5 points for each) mistakes made by an applicant were taken into account. By communicatively significant mistakes, we mean "linguistic (lexical-grammatical, phonetic, intonational, etc.) or

sociocultural mistakes that lead to a disruption of communication, misunderstanding when communicating”, and by communicatively insignificant - “mistakes of various kinds, including lapses that do not lead to a violation of communication” [1]. The “price” of a communicatively significant mistake is greater, because such mistakes are typical of non-native speakers.

According to the abovementioned aspects, the lexical-semantic marker was decisive, since determined the understanding and ability to formulate thoughts that were most highly rated. A grammar marker was detected, but only system mistakes were of decisive importance in the assessment.

Then, in the framework of the written part, an applicant was offered precedent texts (idiom, catch phrase, proverb) that were relevant to modern speakers of the Russian language. It is no coincidence that the concept of ethno-linguistic identity includes the knowledge and adherence of values recorded in case texts and phenomena, the ability to reproduce texts that are precedent for a given society [9].

For example, during one of the interviews it was necessary to explain the meaning of the phraseological unit “a well hung language” and give examples of the use of this phraseological unit. It is advisable to choose such case texts, the internal form of which is hidden, i.e. it cannot be restored, based on the values of the components of set expression.

The answer should not be necessarily formulated close to dictionary articles of phraseological dictionaries, not only because the familiar scientific style of a dictionary article may not be available to a native speaker, but also due to the fact that the cognitive and communicatively significant information may not be fixed in a dictionary. “A dictionary description can be either redundant or insufficient.” [3, p. 8] In this connection, any statement that correctly reveals the meaning of “the ability to speak fluently and easily formulate thoughts” is recognized as correct. In this task, the familiarity of an applicant with the proposed precedent text is checked. We have already noted that sometimes even native speakers do not have sufficient knowledge in the field of phraseology, but for an interview such expressions are chosen that are still familiar to most native speakers.

When evaluating the second part of the written work of applicants, the adequacy of the solution of the communicative task was also important. Further evaluation is carried out by subtracting points for insufficient implementation of the answer. Thus, for example, for the absence of an explanation of a phraseological unit or its incorrect explanation, 35 points were deducted, and also for the absence of an example of the use of a phraseological unit or a wrong example 15 points were deducted. Hence the knowledge of the meaning of an expression is much more important than an example of its use. This is explained by the fact that due to different intellectual abilities, applicants are not always able to independently model the situation of using a phraseological unit, although they understand its meaning. Therefore, a typical mistake when performing this task is the absence of an example of use. As well as during the evaluation of the first part of the written work, it is necessary to take into account communicatively significant (minus 2 points for each) and communicatively

insignificant (minus 0.5 points for each) mistakes made by the applicant.

The second part “Speaking” includes two tasks.

Firstly, an applicant is offered a statement containing a certain point of view on a particular phenomenon. The applicant verbally expresses his position, agreeing or disagreeing with the proposed statement, and justifies it.

For example, do you agree with the statement that when one door closes, another opens somewhere. Explain your position.

While performing this task, many applicants, even being native speakers, face some difficulties: agreeing with the statement, they cannot explain their position and make reasonable arguments. Often, only the direct meaning of lexical units is taken into account and, as a result, hidden implication is not revealed.

However, in our opinion, the tasks offering interesting statements for analysis and reflection not only make it possible to assess proficiency in the grammatical system of a language, but also clearly demonstrate speech behavior in an unusual situation, that is, in this case, the extralinguistic marker helps to distinguish a native speaker, to establish his belonging to a certain “linguoculture”, as was noted by M. Agar for example. Moreover, the lingua component in the word linguoculture denotes discourse, and not just words and sentences. And the culture component in the word linguoculture denotes a meaning that is deeper than the meanings of words in a dictionary and the rules of grammar [11].

In order to assess the performance of tasks, it is proposed first to pay attention to the reaction to the discussed situations. A different approach to evaluating process results is practiced. Unlike written answers, when with an adequate response, points are immediately awarded, and then, if there are some mistakes, points are deducted, an applicant receives a different number of points for a verbal response (from 0 to 10) for substantiating the position (from 0 to 30) for the completeness and deployment of an answer (from 0 to 20). Only a few applicants give a complete answer, organize their speech compositionally, but they clearly understand what they are talking about, and although they use a limited number of means, they explain why they adhere to this or that position. It is often difficult for applicants to digress from the vocabulary contained in an answer; in this case, they do not get points for completeness of an answer, but they gain enough points to be recognized as native speakers.

In the second part of oral interview, an applicant was offered a small text based on the language game. The applicant verbally explained the comic effect of a phrase or text. In a language game, words were consciously displayed outside their normal use; they underwent some kind of transformation, thus creating the effect of an unusual utterance.

Performing the proposed task, native speakers understood that the comic effect was created through the actualization of different meanings of a multi-valued word. As a result of

combining different meanings, an unexpected semantic shift occurred.

For example, explain the comic effect of the expression:

When you were ill last spring, I wished you to grow better quickly, but you misunderstood me.

In this example, the meanings of a multi-valued word to grow better are updated: to “restore health, recover” and “gain weight, gain excess weight”. For native speakers, this task is not particularly difficult, since they realize that this is a funny expression, and the comic effect is achieved by combining the meanings of the word to grow better.

In order to assess the performance of the task, the attention is paid to whether an applicant understands which of the words is used in a figurative sense. For a simple indication of this word an applicant receives up to 20 points. At the same time, the independence of finding this word is evaluated. As a rule, after leading questions, all speakers name this word, but only the ability to independently decode the language game is estimated by the maximum of points. When determining the actual values of a multi-valued word, the applicant may also receive up to 20 points. At the same time, experts do not require dictionary definitions. The selection of synonyms, as well as giving examples of the use of a multi-valued word is considered as a sufficient explanation, in which different meanings of this word are actualized.

When listed tasks are completed, the number of points scored by the applicant is calculated. The entire test is estimated at 200 points (100%): the writing subtest is 100 points (100%); the speaking subtest is 100 points (100%). When evaluating the test results, 2 levels are distinguished: satisfactory (markers of a native speaker are identified) and unsatisfactory (markers of a native speaker are not identified). An applicant is considered a native speaker if he has completed at least 66% of the tasks for each subtest: the 1st part - at least 66 points, the 2nd part - at least 66 points. This assessment makes it possible to take into account individual characteristics of a person: intellectual abilities, level of education and recognize as a native speaker, regardless of the preparation of an applicant.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, to recognize an applicant as a native speaker, it is necessary to identify several markers: pronunciation, grammar, lexical-semantic, associative and extra-linguistic.

As a rule, a native speaker is distinguished by pronunciation, complying with the basic phonetic laws of a particular language system. Pronouncing variants (dialectal, social, etc.) do not present difficulties in determining a native speaker.

When performing written and oral tasks, the lexical-semantic marker is still decisive, since it is the understanding and ability to formulate thoughts. Grammar marker plays a crucial role only when there are many system mistakes that lead to a violation of the grammatical structure of an utterance.

Being the representatives of a certain cultural and linguistic community, native speakers are familiar with the corpus of precedent texts that are significant for a given culture (idioms, proverbs, sayings, etc.).

Native speakers, even in the absence of certain linguistic knowledge, are able to detect a language game and, on an intuitive level, determine its nature.

A native speaker is also distinguished by verbal behavior in an unusual situation. The speed and nature of the reactions, the emotional response to exam situation and the proposed tasks are also indicators of speaking conditions, i.e. extra-linguistic marker helps distinguish native speakers.

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