ЛІНГВОДИДАКТИКА ТА СОЦІОЛІНГВІСТИКА

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GENRE PECULIARITIES OF WEB-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AS A MEANS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The article is devoted to the issues of the global Internet system as a means of intercultural communication, definition of the general concept of web-mediated communication, its functions, features and types in the modern world, which have introduced new forms of dialogue and interaction into socium. Having stepped across national borders and uniting the world's information resources into a single system, the Internet has become a means of intercultural communication with its own specific genres, defined conditions and factors of communication derived from technological multilinear communication means. Currently, online platforms represent a major means for communities to communicate globally, provide news coverage, exchange ideas, share data and knowledge, study and have fun. In this context, the research of web-mediated communication, its genre characteristics and peculiar features is of utmost relevance, as cultural practice and dialogue between diverse cultures are essential tools in promoting mutual understanding, intercultural learning and exchange.

Since there are multiple approaches to defining genres of web-mediated communication, the focus of the article was on revealing their peculiar features and affect on intercultural communication. It is shown that genres in web-mediated communication are based on the technological factor, with their characteristic features being increased complexity and multi-dimensionality, creolization, responsiveness and interactivity as well as enormous user outreach, relevance, accessibility, autonomy and hypertextuality.

Keywords: *web-mediated communication, the Internet, intercultural communication, genres of web-mediated communication, functional approach, social media, user outreach, language choice.*

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ЖАНРОВІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ВЕБ-ОПОСЕРЕДКОВАНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ ЯК ЗАСОБУ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ

Стаття присвячена аналізу глобальної системи Інтернет як засобу міжкультурної комунікації, визначенню загального поняття веб-опосередкованої комунікації, її функцій, особливостей і типів в сучасному світі, які привнесли в соціум нові форми діалогу і взаємодії. Перетнувши національні кордони і об'єднавши світові інформаційні ресурси в єдину систему, Інтернет став засобом міжкультурної комунікації з притаманними йому специфічними жанрами, певними умовами і факторами спілкування, що походять від технологічних багатолінійних засобів комунікації. Сьогодні онлайн-платформи є основним засобом для спілкування спільнот у всьому світі, висвітлення новин, обміну ідеями, інформацією і знаннями, для навчання й розваг. У цьому контексті дослідження веб-опосередкованої комунікації, її жанрових характеристик та специфічних особливостей є надзвичайно актуальним, оскільки культурна практика та діалог між різними культурами є важливими інструментами сприяння взаєморозумінню, взаємодії різних культур та міжкультурному обміну.

Оскільки існує безліч підходів до визначення жанрів веб-опосередкованої комунікації, основна увага в статті була приділена виявленню їх специфічних особливостей та впливу на міжкультурну комунікацію. Показано, що жанри у веб-опосередкованій комунікації базуються на технологічному факторі, причому їхніми характерними рисами є підвищена складність та багатовимірність, креолізація, оперативність та інтерактивність, а також охоплення величезної кількості користувачів, релевантність, доступність, автономність та гіпертекстуальність.

Ключові слова: *веб-опосередкована комунікація, інтернет, міжкультурна комунікація, жанри веб-опосередкованої комунікації, функціональний підхід, соціальні медіа, охоплення користувачів, вибір мови.*

Introduction. Innovative technologies, in particular the World Wide Web, have gradually penetrated into various spheres of human life and resulted in the emergence of the "social presence" concept, which explains social interactions in a mediated

communication and is defined as the degree to which interlocutors in a communications medium perceive each other as real (Yildiz, 2009: 46).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic that has dramatically changed our social lives and social presence due to stay-at-home orders and social distancing, Ukraine now is being faced with the communication challenges of the wartime, which resulted in restricted face-to-face interactions and increased the role of communication technologies, especially that of web-mediated communication. A computer has become a universal device that can serve as a means of news coverage, learning, everyday communication, leisure and entertainment as well as a professional tool in a variety of jobs. Media that used to merely supplement face-to-face interactions are now being used to replace them (Choi & Choung, 2021).

This change is being observed in intercultural communication as well. Currently, virtual environments are increasingly common sites of encounter and communication for individuals and groups across the borders. According to J. Matusitz, cyberspace is a global village, a sphere for interaction between users from multiple cultural backgrounds (Matusitz, 2014: 713). However, this "global village" is currently being threatened with a rise of xenophobia, increases in gender-based violence, misunderstanding and hatred. UNESCO in its latest report "The socio-cultural impact of COVID-19: exploring the role of intercultural dialogue in emerging responses" highlights the necessity of online platforms as a key means through which governments, practitioners, and communities are able to create effective solutions so that to continue intercultural learning and exchange. This report underlines that cultural practice and dialogue between diverse cultures are essential tools in fostering processes of development and resilience (Mansouri, 2020). In this context, the research of web-mediated communication, its genres characteristics and peculiar features is of utmost relevance, since currently communication between diverse cultures is increasingly carried out through the web, which is the main platform for promoting mutual understanding, intercultural learning and exchange.

Therefore, this article **is aimed** at analyzing the genres of web-mediated communication and revealing their peculiarities and impact on intercultural communication.

Literature review. In recent years, numerous researches concerned with various aspects of web-mediated (computer-mediated/ virtual/digital/Internet) communications have been conducted both in Ukraine and abroad (O. Tereshkun & O. Iliushkin, M. Sydorov, O. Shyrokykh, L. Horodenko, G. Kirwan, J. Meier et al, Ch. Xie, S. Herring). A lot of attempts have been made to describe and classify the genres of web-mediated communications by foreign and Ukrainian scholars (D. Crystal, S. Herring, T. O'Reilly, L. Kompantseva, O. Kalyta, E. Goroshko, E. Zemlyakova, O. Skyba, L. Shvelidze). Many of the studies investigate intercultural communications using one particular communication genre, with examinations of email communications prevailing (S. Gill, F. Grotenhuis). Other papers are devoted to researches of intercultural communication in asynchronous forums and discussion boards (A. Hewling, V. Savicki et al), in group conferencing platforms (S. Abdat & G. Pervan), in newsgroups (J. Choi & J. Danowski), and via synchronous communications technologies such as chat (L. Cherednyk, S. Danyliuk). The sphere of researchers' interests also encompasses the hybrid genre of blogging (M. Luzón, C. Miller & D. Shepherd). However, the issue of web-mediated communication genre peculiarities in the context of intercultural communication requires further research and generalization.

Methodology. The research can be defined as executing an investigation to acquire additional knowledge on the issue of genre features in web-mediated communication, their role and impact on intercultural communication. In the study, a combination of analysis, synthesis and comparison was applied as the basic research principles.

Results and Discussion. According to A. Duran and I. Shepherd, there are two major influences on contemporary societies today: transnational population flows and the impact of mediated communication, including by means of the Internet (Duran & Shepherd, 2009: 147). As of July 2022, there were 5.03 billion active internet users worldwide, which is 63.1 percent of the global population. Of this total, 4.7 billion or 59 percent of the world's population were social media users (Statista Research Department, 2022, Sep 20).

Currently, the Internet is available not only through computer networks, but also through communication satellites, radio signal, cable TV, telephone, cellular communication, special fiber-optic lines and electrical wires. Of the total of active internet users, 92.6 percent (4.32 billion) access the Internet via mobile devices (Ibid.).

The World Wide Web has become an integral part of life in both developed and developing countries. In Ukraine, 31.10 million internet users were reported as of January 2022. Ukraine's internet penetration rate stood at 71.8 percent of the total population at the start of 2022 (Kemp, 2022). This indicator was expected to reach 90 percent in 2022 and 2023, according to newage. However, due to displacement of the population by the hostilities, the number of internet users in Ukraine was reported to have dropped down to 19 million as of July 2022 (newage, 2022, Jul 5).

The scale of the technological breakthrough, phenomenal possibilities of practical application and, consequently, the global penetration rate allow us to consider the Internet to be one of the defining factors of the new millennium culture. The Internet performs an important social function of providing people with timely and extensive information, orienting them in the information space. In addition, it serves as a powerful means of mobilizing all the knowledge accumulated by mankind to meet certain challenges of today. Widely using the information received through various Internet channels, it is possible to get a fairly complete picture of the accumulated experience in solving various problems and sensibly assess the situation in the real time.

One of the consequences of the Internet development is the emergence of virtual communications, with their participants having a sense of collective identity based on the use of special jargon and communication norms, sharing common values and ideals. Virtual communication is communication in virtual environment with the help of discourse formed in computer networks: the Internet has its own etiquette (netiquette), its own rules, prohibitions and its own emotional atmosphere. Virtual communication is mainly executed through text comprised of forwarded messages; message transmission is not unidirectional, i.e. the circle of recipients and senders is known. Virtual environment is viewed as a special communication space formed by a permanent set of defined extralinguistic conditions and factors of communication derived from technological multilinear communication means (channels). This space can be characterized by realization and certain transformation of the forms, types and codes of communication already existing in society as well as by a possibility of emergence, consolidation and dissemination of innovative communication means, which constantly enrich and modify the sensory, mental, socio-psychological, socio-cultural and communicative experiences of the linguistic socium (Usacheva, 2007: 87).

Therefore, we can assert that the Internet contributes to the development of symbolic exchange, where individual self-understanding of a person is mediated with symbolic materials from different sources. Furthermore, in intercultural communication, the Internet both serves as a cultural standardizer (through netiquette) and reveals cultural differences (Marcoccia, 2012: 353). Having stepped across national borders and uniting the world's information resources into a single system, the Internet has become a means of global communication.

Web-mediated Communication

Web-mediated communication (WMC) is an umbrella term that covers a wide range of communication types on the Internet (Yus, 2015). It involves communication methods, in which information is transmitted through the use of a standard protocol (the Hyper Text Transfer Protocol, or HTTP). Therefore, WMC can be defined as communication between different parties separated in space and/or time, mediated through the World Wide Web with the use of various devices, namely computers, smartphones, etc.

There are two modes of WMC: synchronous communication that happens in real time (e.g., chat rooms, instant messaging, Skype, etc.) and asynchronous communication, in which messages to the addressee come with a delay (e.g., e-mail, Twitter, etc.).

According to the findings by F. Yus (2015), four types of web-mediated communication are distinguished: a) system to user (e.g., e-mails from social networking sites announcing that a user has commented on an entry, a pop-up window indicating that an instant messaging friend is attempting communication with the user); b) user to system (e.g., users' activity in search engines, reading content on the Internet); c) user to user (all the range of communicative options both in the synchronous axis-chat rooms, instant messaging, WhatsApp, and in the asynchronous axis (e.g., e-mail, Internet fora, messages to friends on social networking sites); and d) user to collectivity (the kind of communication that is mainly intended to shape the user's identity by generating feelings of group membership).

Nowadays, users are no longer passive consumers of information. Instead, they are active *produsers* (both consumers and producers) (Yus, 2015: 1554). The amount of user-generated content is increasing, thus creating the trend of participatory culture on the web.

Internet technology promotes communication cross-border. Communication has ceased to be tied to a communication location, with the Internet performing a social and creative function, i.e. establishing new communities with a single database and a common value ground. Therefore, we can argue that the general development trend in disseminating information consists in establishing a heterarchical (horizontal, equal) order to replace a hierarchical (vertical, with one of communicating subjects dominating). So far, we have seen the transition from a one-way to a two-way communication model.

In the WMC context, the audience can participate in the production and exchange of information, including among themselves. The audience is no longer only the recipient of messages. According to H. Lasswell, two-way communication occurs when the sending and receiving functions are performed with equal frequency by two or more persons (Lasswell, 1948).

Currently, we are observing a rapid development of multi-way communications, which are understood as an enriched way of communication from two-way communication in eParticipation, e.g. internet conference, online mediation and comments, discussion forum, etc. Multi-way communication means any form of communication between parties including but not limited to (a) video chat; (b) video messaging; (c) VoIP applications; (d) multi-user gaming; or (e) multi-user real-time collaboration applications such as video conferencing (Law Insider, 2022).

Analyzing the WMC functions, we should distinguish between the concepts of "feedback" and "interactivity". In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, feedback is defined as the transmission of evaluative or corrective information about an action, event, or process to the original or controlling source (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022). In the communication process, feedback refers to a response from the receiver which gives the communicator an idea of how the message is being received and whether it needs to be modified. Negative feedback indicates that a communicator should do less of what he/she is doing or change to something else, whereas positive feedback encourages him/her to increase the activity, which can go out of control (Gill & Adams, 2002). It is in this capacity that the "forum" function is mostly often used in WMC. The attendance figures also act as feedback indicating the users' interest.

The concept of interactivity is much wider. Interactivity is defined as the involvement of users in the exchange of information with computers and the degree to which this happens (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022), thus including other ways of user control over the content (request, evaluation), participation in content creation through formulation of problems for coverage and discussion, initiative in the discussion, authorship, exchange of views with other users, etc.

The WMCs attractiveness can be explained by psychological reasons. In particular, the WMC uses no preliminary categorization and assessment of the communicator based on external signs; there is a possibility of attempted communications and their correction, which promotes development of communication skills; anonymity is an important characteristic of WMC; developed communication norms do not require ritual presentation of communicators to each other, there is always a possibility of direct appeal; the external, social, ethnic, educational, gender, age, geographical characteristics of the communicator are leveled; the user voluntarily establishes contacts or avoids them, and can also interrupt them at any time; there is a certain emotional complexity, which is partially compensated by a specially developed sign system for transmitting emotions (the so-called "emoticons").

Thus, we can state that WMC is one of the most common and widely used communication types. Not only does the Internet promote joint informational, cognitive and communication activities, but it also largely acts as a carrier of modern moral values. WMC affords Internet users an unprecedented level of contact with people from other cultural and social groups, thus facilitating intercultural communication and reducing the perceived distance between cultures and misunderstandings due to its specifics (anonymity, absence of visual cues, etc.).

WMC genres and their impact on intercultural communication

According to communicative linguistics, speech genres are established types of messages in terms of topic, composition, and style, which are united for the purpose of communication and the speaker's idea with consideration of the addressee's personality, context, and communication situation (Kalyta, 2012: 105).

Genre differentiation of web-mediated/virtual discourse in its modern state is multifaceted and quite contradictory due to several key factors. First, the genre system of WMC is characterized by complexity and multi-dimensionality, since the technology

development impacts significantly on both the structure of the WMC genre system and communication itself within the framework of one or another genre. Moreover, the WMC genre system is multi-level, with hyper-genres, genres, and subgenres being differentiated. Secondly, the Internet, being a high-tech and highly dynamic communication space is constantly evolving and changing, which results in emerging of new web-mediated communications, whereas the old ones are being modified (Goroshko & Zemlyakova, 2011).

There are different approaches to classifying WMC genres, namely cognitive and pragmatic approach (Crystal, 2004); the approach based on the established communication forms fixed by the existence and circumstances (Ivanov, 2000); functional approach (Shchipitsina, 2009).

Based on the functional approach, the following genres of WMC communication are distinguished: informative, directive, phatic, presentation, aesthetic, entertainment (Ibid). *Informative genres* are intended for presenting or receiving information. They include institutional web pages, including web pages of news agencies and online media, search systems, online encyclopedias, catalogs, mailing lists, electronic libraries and archives: e.g. Ukrainska Pravda online media (URL: https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/), the Reuters news agency (URL: https://www.reuters.com), Google search engine (URL: www.google.com).

Directive genres are meant for inducing the addressee to perform certain actions: web banners, web ads, online stores and auctions: e.g. online bookstore Bukva (URL: https://bukva.ua/en), online store and auction E-Bay (URL: https://www.ebay.com).

Phatic genres serve to satisfy the need for communication and compliance with the etiquette norms: chats, emails, newsgroups (Google Web Toolkit), forums (URL: www. litforum.net.ua).

Presentation genres are aimed at self-expressing, presenting own data or works, or a company: personal webpages, online business cards (e.g. Evoulve B2B Company URL: www.evoulve.com), weblogs (e.g. UK Interiors & lifestyle blog https://www.seasonsincolour.com/).

Aesthetic genres serve to realize artistic and creative potential and make an aesthetic impact by creating an imaginary reality: online novels (short stories, etc.), fanfiction (e.g. a popular Ukrainian fanfiction site URL: https://fanfic.com.ua.).

Entertainment genres are designed to have fun and amuse yourself when performing certain communicative actions: multiplayer worlds and games (e.g. World of Warcraft: Dragonflight URL: https://dragonflight.blizzard.com.).

The development of technologies has also resulted in the emergence of hybrid genres, which do not correlate with any classical genres and represent pure products of Internet technologies (twitting, blogging). Hybrid genres appeared due to unification of several Internet genres within a single Internet service or platform.

WMC genres are greatly affected by technologies, which determine genre design, peculiarities of its functioning on the Internet, and features of its service language. The use of Internet technologies enables including video images, audio recordings and animation in the text, widely applying graphic tools (various fonts, colors, etc.) as well as altering texts, their content and structure.

Therefore, we can state that among the WMC genre peculiarities there are the following ones. First, WMC genres are highly creolized (elements of various semiotic systems, namely images, animation, video, music, etc. are used), hypertexted, responsive and interactive (e. g. social networks, blogs). The technological capabilities of the Web facilitate the convergence of many technologies (e.g., text, audio, computing) and the mixing of a variety of modalities (Heyd, 2015).

Second, all the WMC genres exist in the communication space characterized by numerous communication subjects and their interaction. The outreach of WMC promotes the usage of its genres by an enormous number of people, thus connecting diverse cultures and social layers. For instance, the market leader Facebook was the first social network to surpass one billion registered accounts and currently sits at more than 2.89 billion monthly active users. The company currently also owns four of the biggest social media platforms, all with over one billion monthly active users each: Facebook (core platform), WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram (Dixon, 2022, Jul 26).

Third, the content of WMC genres can be generated and altered both by users and experts, who professionally create and monitor it. Currently, technologies allow fast content generating with the possibility of instant and simultaneous editing as well as collaboration on any text or other content type. In a WMC context, the software used facilitates the incorporation of a variety of ways of constructing meaning and interacting with the text not afforded by print or oral media.

Fourth, WMC genres allow mixing the boundaries between public and private, with traditionally private information or information for exclusive groups going public and being accessible to every interlocutor.

Fifth, genres' functioning draws upon the principles of relevance, accessibility, interactivity, autonomy and hypertextuality, indicating the richness of cultural practices in a particular culture. This multiplicity affects text, discourse, and communication process development, thus combining philosophy, religion, psychology, and language into a single system.

Finally, we cannot but emphasize on the WMC genres' capabilities of mixing different languages in a single document and linking between documents with different languages, creating a multilingual text. The researches of language choice in WMC show that communicators shape their style, including selection of the language, in response to their audience's social characteristics. The desire to reach an international audience promotes the use of English in web-mediated environments (Seargeant et al., 2012: 525). Consequently, language choice can be used as a strategy for designing the audience and increasing outreach, mainly by choosing English, or for partitioning the audience by choosing a language of only some participants in the network (Androutsopoulos, 2014).

Language barriers, differences in values and standards of behavior, lack of experience, lack of trust, and lack of knowledge about other cultures or stereotypical thinking are among the most widespread obstacles for cross-cultural communication (Lifintsev & Canavilhas, 2017). As WWW enables its users to communicate with people from other cultural and social groups, it can facilitate intercultural communication, help build trust, gain knowledge and promote understanding between different cultures, thus favoring cultural globalization and cultural standardization, e.g. through netiquette, that is, the rules of communication mostly reflecting a certain North American communicative style. However, under condition of restricted face-to-face communication, multiple cultural backgrounds can lead to reinforcing cultural stereotypes and increasing disparity between cultures, especially when the Internet is used by diasporas. According to Glover and Friedman, functioning successfully within different cultures can be a struggle for many…; dealing with other cultures, both domestic and international, requires competence in both identifying and transcending cultural boundaries (Glover & Friedman, 2015).

Conclusions. The evolving digital technologies alongside with the recent COVID-19 pandemic have promoted a great shift from communication in real life to web-mediated communication in multiple fields, including learning, interpersonal communication, professional activities, leisure and entertainment. Being a high-tech and highly dynamic communication space, the Internet is constantly developing, which results in emerging of new WMC genres that can be characterized by an increased complexity and multi-dimensionality, creolization, responsiveness and interactivity as well as their enormous outreach, relevance, accessibility, autonomy and hypertextuality. WMC bridges the communication gap existing between various ethnic and cultural groups, contributes to globalization, which, directly or indirectly encourages society members to adjust their behaviors in such a way that they can interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The study lays the foundation for the research of linguistic features of various WMC genres and impact of language choice on the WMC genres' development.

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