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Destructive Discourse in the Modern Conditions of Belarusian-Russian Bilingualism

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Abstract. The study presents the findings of a study of Belarusian destructive discourse in the comparative aspect of the language code used (the Belarusian and Russian languages). Destructive discourse in the paper is understood in the legal linguistic aspect as a practice of verbal interaction, the content of which does not correspond to the dispositions of the legal field. In this regard, texts sent by investigative and inquiry bodies and courts for linguistic examination were used as factual research material (in total, 74 units were selected for 2021–2023: 56 Russian-speaking, 18 Belarusian-speaking). The quantitative parameters of the studied texts correlate with statistical data on the preferences of Belarusian citizens in using language as a means of interpersonal and institutional communication. As a result of the analysis, it was established that there are no serious discrepancies in the extralinguistic characteristics of conflict-producing texts. They are subject to active digitalization and gravitate towards small genre forms. At the same time, Belarusian-language texts are less likely to have a creolized form. More differences are found in the sociolinguistic portrait of the subject of the destructive discourse implementation: a Belarusian-speaking delinquent usually has a higher education and is older in age. Male participants dominate in both types of destructive communication.

Key words: destructive discourse, legal linguistics, juvenileization, creolization, digitalization, parametric triangulation

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Деструктивный дискурс в условиях современного белорусско-русского двуязычия

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Аннотация. Представлены результаты исследования белорусского деструктивного дискурса в сопоставительном аспекте используемого языкового кода (белорусский и русский языки). Деструктивный дискурс в работе понимается в юрислингвистическом аспекте как практика речевого взаимодействия, содержание которой не соответствует диспозициям правового поля. В этой связи в качестве фактического материала исследования использованы тексты, направленные органами следствия и дознания, судами для проведения лингвистической экспертизы (всего отобрали 74 единицы за 2021–2023 гг.: 56 — русскоязычных, 18 — белорусскоязычных). Количественные параметры изученных текстов коррелируют со статистическими данными о предпочтениях белорусских граждан в использовании языка как средства межличностного и институционального общения. В результате анализа установлено отсутствие серьезных расхождений в экстралингвистических характеристиках конфликтогенных текстов. Они подвержены активной дигитализации, тяготеют к малым жанровым формам. В то же время белорусскоязычные тексты реже имеют креолизованную форму. Больше отличий обнаруживается в социолингвистическом портрете субъекта реализации деструктивного дискурса: белорусскоговорящий делинквент обычно имеет высшее образование, старше по возрасту. Среди участников обоих видов деструктивной коммуникации доминируют мужчины.

Ключевые слова: деструктивный дискурс, юрислингвистика, ювенилизация, креолизация, дигитализация, параметрическая триангуляция

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Introduction

The modern communicative space of Belarus formally corresponds to the parameters of bilingualism: Belarusian-Russian bilingualism is constitutionally enshrined in the country, and the state guarantees respect for the linguistic rights of citizens. While, the Russian language, in fact, dominates in all spheres of social relations, with the exception of culture. Thus, according to data from general population censuses in the early 21st century, the country observed an increase in the significance of the Russian language both as a first language (14.3% in 1999,

42.3% in 2009) and as a means of interpersonal communication (58.6% in 1999, 70.2% in 2009). At the same time, the Belarusian language is represented in different types of communicative interaction, and our research shows that its use, for example, in destructive discourse is systematically increasing.

It should be noted that destructiveness, although it “is one of the fundamental discursive categories that play a significant role in the organization of communicative interaction” [1. P. 160], is considered in linguistic research in variable guises. In our work, we start from the legal linguistic understanding of destructive discourse, that is, as a communicative practice, the content of which does not comply with legal norms. We are talking not only about the dispositions of criminal and administrative legislation, but also about an attack on civil rights, about legal issues of carrying out economic activities.

Destructive discourse has a powerful potential, capable of “displacing, replacing some meanings with others, establishing new meanings that contribute to changing the addressee’s picture of the world and controlling <...> consciousness” [2. P. 122]. At the same time, destructive speech interaction remains anthropocentric — therefore, “the characteristics of the linguistic personality will always influence the methods used by representatives of the establishment in the communication process” [3. P. 20]. In other words, in a deep understanding, any characteristics of discourse are, to some degree or another, explicators of the speech-behavioral characteristics of its subject — a linguistic personality. In this connection, the stated research goal seems relevant which is *to present the features of the destructive discourse of Belarus in the comparative aspect of the languages of communicative interaction (Belarusian and Russian)*.

Materials and methods

Data from the author’s practice of conducting linguistic expert research and interaction with investigative and inquiry authorities were used as the research material. In total, 74 texts (2021–2023) classified as destructive (56 Russian-language, 18 Belarusian-language) were subjected to analytical consideration. The quantitative non-parity of the presented material in this case is not a basis for recognizing the sample as unrepresentative for a comparative study due to its correspondence to the above statistical data on the actual preferences of Belarusian citizens in the use of language as a means of interpersonal and institutional communication.

The methodology of the carried out research work included the use of general scientific methods of analysis, generalization, systematization, observation, etc. The expert study of conflict-prone texts was based on the use of parametric triangulation techniques, the application of which requires the use of a number of linguistic research methods (lexical-semantic, pragmalinguistic, logical-contextual, lexical-centric analysis, the method of semantic fields, etc.).

Discussion

Notes on the criteria for identifying destructive discourse

Before turning to the discussion of the research findings, several comments should be made regarding the object of the research attention — destructive discourse. In the introduction, we indicated that we understand it in a legal linguistic aspect, that is, it is maximally synonymous with the concept of a destructive text. Without going into discussions regarding the correctness of this interpretation of the phenomenon of discourse itself, we point out that this approach is determined by real legal practice. When issuing a decision to order a linguistic examination, the investigation and the court determine the text as the object of study and ask questions regarding its content. It is the expert opinion that de facto determines whether a text belongs to the category of destructive. De jure, this is the competence of the court, which, however, only formalizes the conclusions of the examination.

Identification of the linguistic and legal characteristics of the text (discourse) destructiveness, on the one hand, is objectified by legislative dispositions. Expert work in this case comes down only to establishing signs of compliance or non-compliance of the text with legal norms. On the other hand, special research into the products of speech activity is often subjectivized by the methods used. It is no coincidence that experts point out the unjustified use of some of them by expert linguists [4. P. 5]. A.N. Baranov calls this the offensive of globalist experts who, when conducting special text studies, turn to an excessively large list of research methods [5. P. 25].

We believe that the methods of linguistic expertology will be the subject of scientific and practical discussions for a long time; therefore, the issues of identifying destructive discourse will remain controversial. We, in our turn, to minimize the subjectivity of expert conclusions regarding the classification of a text as destructive, used the method of parametric triangulation, the implementation algorithm of which includes 1) establishing, based on legislative dispositions, a list of parameters for identifying signs of an offense committed verbally, 2) determination of methodological procedures for their expert study (use of several methods to analyze each parameter), 3) quantitative and qualitative assessment of the special study findings (for more details on the methodology, see, for example, [6]).

Thus, the factual material selected for the study included texts whose content corresponded to all the linguistic and legal parameters of crimes committed verbally. In our case, we are talking about such common offenses as insult, slander, threats, manifestations of extremism.

Extralinguistic features of destructive communication in the bilingual space of Belarus

Any type of discursive practice has its own non-linguistic features. E. Benveniste discovered them in their axiological content and social-ideological attitudes [7. P. 54].

For modern communication, the opportunities obtained through a change in the technical and technological structure are considered indicative. The expansion of demonstrativeness, polycode, “compression of the world,” and erosion of institutionality have become obvious [8. P. 17–25].

Analysis of the collected factual material shows that for the bilingual space of Belarus several trends are clearly observable regarding the forms of implementation of destructive discourse. In particular, we are talking about digitalization, creolization, multiplicativity and replication of destructive texts. In general, these features are found in relation to both Belarusian- and Russian-language speech materials. Yet quantitative indicators of individual characteristics have features of their own.

Belarusian- and Russian-language destructive discourse actively uses the digital environment: of the total volume of factual material, only 11% of texts in Belarusian (1 in 2021 and 1 in 2022) and 13% in Russian (2 in 2021, 3 in 2022 1 in 2023) were leaflets and graffiti, that is, objects of reality. In other cases, objects distributed via Internet technologies were subject to examination. That is, we are talking about the *digitalization* of destructive interaction. This trend is an obvious trend in the context of intensifying mediated communication, which is most often implemented on social networking sites and instant messengers. In the narrow sense, text digitalization is considered synonymous to the concept of digitalization. However, experts believe that digital transformation of the text is more than simply reformatting it. In a deeper sense, in this case, the visualization of communicative space is implemented — the transition from the mythologized world to the imaginary world [9. P. 134].

A consistent step in the dynamic transition of destructive discourse into the digital sphere was the *creolization* of speech materials. This is evidenced from the quantitative indicators of the studied Russian-language content: on average, about 74% of texts (2021 — 13 texts, 2022 and 2023 — 14 texts each) are polycode, that is, “consisting of inhomogeneous parts (verbal language (speech) and non-verbal (belonging to other sign systems than natural language)” [10. P. 181–182]. For Belarusian-language material this figure is slightly more than 44%, although here there is a certain tendency towards the use of polycode texts (2 texts in 2021 and 2022, 4 texts in 2023).

The active creolization of destructive material is due to the specifics of popular social networks focused on posting polycode texts. Also, this form of presenting information seems more preferable for its suggestive influence on the mass addressee. R.O. Jakobson wrote that “the largest part of socially significant, rich and sign systems essential for society is focused on perception through vision and hearing” [11. P. 323]. In addition, the creolized text is productive for the so-called information saturation, that is, it increases the amount of information perceived per unit of time.

The last of the mentioned factors largely predetermined the manifestation of such a tendency in destructive text as *multiplicativeness*, although this is still less typical for Belarusian-language material. Multiplicativeness as an element of the

development of the genre studies of destructive discourse determines its attraction to small genre forms. The volume of information in texts sent for expert study is often relatively small: in polycode texts, the verbal component is represented by 1–3 potentially destructive phrases, the non-verbal component by the same number of iconic signs; mono-code (verbal) materials are designed in the genres of commentary or note.

All the above-mentioned features of destructive materials help to increase their *replication*, that is, repeated transmission of the content. Among the analyzed material, only 5.6% of Belarusian-language and 8.9% of Russian-language texts were distributed through closed (non-mass) communication channels.

Sociolinguistic notes on the specificity of bilingual destructive discourse in Belarus

For science, it is axiomatic to say that social factors are special mechanisms of influence on language [11. P. 481]. However, in linguistics there is no agreement regarding the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the “social aspects of language”. Consequently, there is no unity in determining the parameters of the sociolinguistic portrait of a linguistic personality. That is why, in the practice of research, scientists most often start from the collected factual data, which allows them to describe the image of the subject of communicative activity. Our study is no exception and therefore reflects individual (although, we dare to believe, important) characteristics of the delinquent linguistic personality — the subject of the implementation of destructive discourse.

Turning to the sociolinguistic aspects of the Belarusian destructive discourse indicates its linguistic inhomogeneity, that is, the presence of a dependence of the choice of means of communication on the personality characteristics of the communicant. Let us briefly introduce these sociolinguistic characteristics:

1. ***The age parameter*** of the Russian-speaking delinquent indicates the juvenileization of destructive discourse. This trend is not a unique phenomenon of the Belarusian communication space. Researchers have been declaring “the universal promotion of a juvenile style of behavior” for quite a long time [8. P. 19], which is associated with the “rejuvenation” (digitalization) of communication. Our actual data also confirm the indicated conclusion: on average, the authors of 73% of texts (2021 — 70%, 2022 — 68%, 2023 — 82%) with illegal content are people under the age of 45, and the number of young people (up to 31 years) covers 57% of the total number of Russian-language texts (2021 — 55%, 2022 — 58%, 2023 — 59%).

An analysis of Belarusian-language destructive discourse shows slightly different results: the average youth authorship of the specified content is 22% (2021 — 25%, 2022 — 17%, 2023 — 25%), the category of addressees under the age of 45 is 32 % (2021 — 25%, 2022 — 33%, 2023 — 38%).

2. Among *the gender characteristics* of the delinquent, the dominance of men in the system of destructive speech interaction is obvious (94% for Belarusian-speaking texts and 91% for Russian-language texts). The correlation of this indicator according to the language of communication, we believe, is associated with the traditions that have developed in society and a more active position of the stronger sex in almost all spheres of social relations, including at the level of communication.

3. Investigative and judicial materials made it possible to identify such a parameter for portraying a linguistic delinquent as *the level of education*. We believe that information about the professional employment of authors of destructive texts is more representative for sociolinguistic research. However, due to the fact that part of the data we collected related to cases of special proceedings (that is, carried out against persons outside the country), the investigative authorities did not always have the information we were interested in.

It is noteworthy that the Belarusian-speaking destructive linguistic personality in the overwhelming majority has higher education (89%). The other authors have secondary specialized or vocational education. In the Russian-language destructive discourse of Belarus, a different state of affairs is observed: in fact, the distribution of addressees according to education is parity (37% have a diploma from a higher education establishment, 32% have secondary specialized or vocational education, 31% graduated from high school).

Conclusion

Thus, the modern Belarusian- and Russian-language destructive discourse of Belarus has common and specific features. Its extralinguistic features do not differ significantly depending on the language of speech interaction. In both cases, there is an intensification of digitalization of conflict-generating texts, their design in small genre forms, which allows for the active dissemination of destructive content through social networks and Internet messengers. At the same time, Belarusian-language destructive discourse is less susceptible to creolization and multiplicativeness, although there is reason to talk about the development of these trends.

Conceptual differences between Belarusian- and Russian-language destructive discourse, determined by the choice of language code, are revealed when clarifying the sociological characteristics of the portrait of a delinquent linguistic personality. The Belarusian-speaking addressee has a higher level of education and is older. In the gender aspect, in both cases (Belarusian- and Russian-language destructive text), the authors of the speech material are often male.

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