

NARRATIVES OF ETHNO- LINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND ADAPTATION

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Addressed issues

- Stories as an instrument of conveying and revealing values
- Life narratives of linguistic adaptation in the *Multilingual Moscow* project
- Formal features and discourse strategies

Life narratives as a research tool

- Questionnaires often reflect a desired image of reality, not reality itself
- *Life Stories* reveal values and sensitive issues
 - Are told and retold in the lifespan
 - Culturally bound
 - Touch upon personal issues
 - Very instrumental in revealing attitudes and values as manifested in formal features such as:
 - evaluative passages and utterances
 - mini-stories (does not equal to 'small stories' - Georgakopoulou 2015)
 - **Paraverbal signals** - laughter, sighs, pauses, change of tempo and accent

Languages of Moscow project

- *Multilingual Moscow* - studies of linguistic and cultural diversity of a metropolis
 - Actors: **Non-monolingual speakers of Russian**
 - Ethnic language vs. Russian language issues
 - What? How many? Where? How?
 - **What do they really think about it?**
- **Participants**
 - Institute of Linguistics research staff
 - HSE students
 - Funding sources
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Pilot study

- **First stage** within the *Multilingual Moscow* project:
 - 9 life narratives from **non-monolingual speakers of Russian** initiated by the question: "Could you please tell how you ended up speaking Russian?"
 - **Research issue:** clustering features for the 'linguistic portrait'
 - 1. former USSR nationals
 - 2. heritage speakers of Russian living abroad
 - 3. «foreigners»
 - 3a. Russophiles - "western countries"
 - 3b. "Russia - a land of opportunities"
- **Repeating formal features**
 - Lexical
 - Para-verbal
 - Laughter
 - Smile
 - Sigh
 - Coughing

Other variables that floated up

- Besides the origin/goal cluster
- Russian was acquired/learned
 - Naturally
 - Out of necessity/compulsion
 - Realization of a dream
- Age/locus of acquisition
 - Family
 - School
 - On the spot
- Degree of satisfaction



Second stage: Data and Method

- 30 and then 90 more narratives from non-monolingual speakers of Russian initiated more or less by the same questions:
 - 'Place, role, and/or story of Russian in your life'
- Plus additional request to remember any funny (or - dramatic) stories when 'Speaking another language would help out, or cause problems'
- 15 narratives analyzed for the contexts where the narrator produced embarrassment laughter
 - Marked by the transcriber as <laugh>, or <smile>

Recurring topics in the discourse about linguistic identity and adaptation

- 1. Maintaining ethnic language
 - Emotionally loaded context
- 2. Split identity
 - What language to speak with whom and where
- 3. Learning dominant language 'on the spot'
 - Getting through
- 4. Category-dependent topics
 - Older generation reflections on the better past situation



Ethnic language related values

1a. It is bad to forget/not to maintain your ethnic language

1b. It is good to know Russian and bad not to know it well

2a. It is good to know more than one language

2b. It is bad to mix languages in one's speech

➤ They may lead to the **values' conflict**

- manifested in an argumentative/persuasive discourse register

➤ Strategies used for narrating unpleasant experiences due to mixed or conflicting values

- Narrator tries to present the situation as humorous
- Telling it 'as is'

➤ Both strategies include 'embarrassment laughter'

Embarrassment laughter (EL)

- Specific functions that the embarrassment laughter realizes as part of the interactional dimension of the discourse in life narratives:
 1. Apologizing for the use of stereotypes and expository (explanatory) discourse passages;
 2. Politeness strategies compensating for breaking norms and expectations
 3. Disclaiming own conceptualizations and verbalizations;
 4. Dissatisfaction with the produced discourse;
 5. Attempts to present a situation as humorous
 6. Talking about unpleasant things.

1. EL as an apology for the use of stereotypes and expository (explanatory) discourse passages - including the use of set phrases and clichés

*Хм, детство мое было
довольно веселым/
Италия как никак (смеется).*

Well, my childhood was
quite fun/..
It's Italy, anyway <laughter>

*просто чтобы, как бы, быть
частью мира...{смех} миро
вого общества, я не знаю,
если можно так сказать*

Simply to be part of .. so to
say .. world <laughter>
world community .. I am not
sure if you can say that

2. EL as politeness strategies compensating for breaking sociocultural norms and expectations

Знала только, что хочу
увидеть мир и веселиться, я
думаю, этого вполне
достаточно {смеется}.

I knew that I only wanted to
see the world and have fun ..
I think that it's quite enough
<laughter>

Планов у меня нет {смех}

I don't have plans <laughter>

Сначала я ничего не понимал
{смех}

First I did not understand
anything <laughter>



3. EL as a signal of disclaiming own conceptualizations and verbalizations

Не знаю даже, что и рассказывать (смеется).

I don't even know what to tell you <laughter>

Вообще/ мы с друзьями были грозой района, как тут говорят (смеется).

Basically/ we were most dangerous guys in the area, as they say it <laughter>



4. EL as a marker of dissatisfaction with the produced discourse, including at the end of the episode

И вот так я изучала русский язык с самого детства... можно сказать, что он у меня родной... ну не знаю я, какой родной (смеется). Ну, в общем, ладно.

Вот, .. мне так круто было в Москве, / как бы, эээ... видеть все места, где, .. ааа, мои любимые, там, книги...эээ..были написаны, или, как бы, ммм.../ извини, что я плохо говорю по-русски...{смех}

So this is how I studied Russian .. since childhood .. You could say it is my mother tongue .. well .. Not exactly .. I don't know whether it is <laughter>.. Ok, let's leave it like that

Well ..it is so cool to be in Moscow/ sort of .. See the places where ..umm ..my favorite books were written or how you say it .. Um ./ Excuse me for speaking poor Russian .. <laughter>

5. EL in attempts to present a situation as humorous

Ах, мои впечатления о России, ну знаете, странно немного читать книги и видеть один мир, а потом приезжать и видеть совершенно другой
{смеется}

Но просто у меня сейчас, ну, бывает, что я забываю сербские слова, и мне надо некоторое время, чтобы просто перейти на сербский, так что...
{смеется}

Oh, my impressions on Russia ..you know . It is weird to read books and see one picture .. And then to come and see an absolutely different one
<laughter>

Well just that it happens that I forget Serbian words .. And I need some time to just switch to Serbian .. so ..
<laughter>

6. Talking about unpleasant things: using EL in 'as is' strategy.

Учила русский, потому что.
надо было здесь как-то жить
{смех }

я просто забыла одно слово, а
оно самое главное было.. я
пыталась объяснить, смотрела
на нее такими глазами типа
«ну что, что ты не
понимаешь?» В итоге на меня
вообще разозлились, сказали,
что «девочка вообще
психованная» {смех }

I learned Russian because
I had to live/survive here
<laughter>

I simply forgot one word
.. And it was central .. I
almost yelled .. tried to
explain .. looked at her
as if saying 'well, don't
pretend you don't
understand' ... Finally
they got really angry with
me .. said 'the girl is
crazy' <laughter>

Third stage: Corpus and Analytics

➤ Creating corpus

- Meta-annotation by narrator groups revealed in the pilot study
 - True bilinguals
 - Receptive multilingualism
 - Russian as L2
- by language and age

➤ Research by other parameters

- Multifactorial analysis:
- Whether there are other discourse strategies besides expressed through EL
- To what degree discourse strategies used can be based on
 - the length of the story
 - abundance, or conspicuous lack of evaluations
 - abundance, or conspicuous lack of deviations from the main line
 - discrepancies and contradictions in the evaluative passages

Message to take home

- People tell stories and when they do, they reveal what is important for them
- Ethnic language is a value
- Ethno-linguistic identity can not be easily defined - at least partly because of the conflicting sociocultural norms and values
- But it can be revealed through the use of certain narrative strategies
- We look for the markers of these strategies in the stories about linguistic adaptation