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A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF DISCOURSE PRACTICES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION

This article investigates the discourse practices of college students in virtual communication, emphasizing the impact on personal changes. The research aims to find out psychological features of college students' discourse practices based on their virtual communication written products – email letters. The study employs Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model and the social constructionism approach to explore the relationship between discursive practices and social practices, drawing parallels with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. The research analyzes 310 student emails, employing Critical Discourse Analysis, content analysis, and intent analysis to examine communication styles and motives. The findings reveal that virtual communication contributes to changes in the emotional and behavioural aspects of students, including increased anxiety, depression, social frustration, loneliness, aggressiveness, and motivation to avoid failure. The research identifies dominant communication styles such as dramatic, contradictory, attentive, and reliable, often observed concurrently in emails.

Key words: virtual communication, college students, discourse practice, content analysis, intent analysis.

Introduction. Research background. In today's world, virtual communication encompasses various forms of communication like emails, text messages, webchats, etc. that do not require in-person interaction. The significance of being clear and using the appropriate tone is just as essential in virtual communication as it is in face-to-face communication. In the professional sphere, emails are considered one of the most reliable and effective means of communication. The study of discourse practices of college students' virtual communication is conditioned by the research within the discursive paradigm, particularly in the context of the social constructionism approach, which is consistent with the methodology of cultural and historical theory. The research algorithm was developed based on N. Fairclough's three-dimensional model [7; 8]. From the perspective of this model, there is a clear distinction between discursive and social practices. According to social constructionism, personality is created through constructing these levels – text, discursive and social practices. Therefore, the study of any personal constructs is not only possible but also necessary through the identification of the specifics of these levels.

H. Fairclough (2010) notes that the first step of the algorithm should be formulating the problem [7]. The basic principle is that discourse practices are in a dialectical relationship with social practice: any discourse is socially conditioned. Therefore, the formulation of the problem always coincides with the establishment of actual social practice. According to N. Fairclough, social practice is often the subject of interdisciplinary research – sociology, political science, history, social psychology and the like.

As we can see, the idea that social practice determines discursive practice, which in turn creates a personality, resonates with Leo Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, in particular with the idea of the mediated nature of the human psyche through the influence of social interaction that plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition [9].

Formulation of the problem. Virtual communication as a factor of personal changes in students also involves the study of social practice surrounding the virtual personality – the Internet space. The Internet space, covering a wide variety of signs (verbal, figurative), creates a specific form of consciousness in a constant interactive mode with the dominance of visual and figurative operations. The mediation of the psyche by virtual signs also generates personal changes. These include, first of all, changes in the emotional and behavioural spheres of the personality: anxiety, depression, social frustration, loneliness, aggressiveness and motivation to avoid failure. **The purpose of the study** is to find out psychological features of college students' discourse practices based on their virtual communication written products – email letters.

Method. *Material.* In our study, the material was written products – electronic anonymous letters (emails) that were provided with the authors' consent. All the respondents were students of the Academician Yuri Bugay International Scientific and Technical University (Kyiv, Ukraine) and Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Lutsk, Ukraine) who were registered on Facebook and X/Twitter. A total of 310 emails were analysed. The next stage is the analysis of their discourse practices, which focuses on what types of discourse belong to a particular written product, i.e., how interdiscursivity is expressed in emails. Here is an example of one of the emails:

"Hi. No, I will not limit myself to the semantic differential. We also need to evaluate the content component of speech. We were thinking of evaluating programmes or slogans. I think it might be appropriate to make a frame analysis of the speeches of these 3 politicians (Zelensky, Byden, Scholz), which I evaluated according to Osgood, to highlight concepts (what would be better to do?). I also analysed their slogans. And this will be the entire second section (Osgood + frame (or content) + slogans). And in the third section, make a general assessment of the effectiveness of the speech image. I have a link, but in the draft version everything is so confusing that I deleted it before sending it to you so as not to confuse you".

In the above letter, interdiscursivity is expressed in the use of the following types of discourse: scientific (psychology of speech, research methods and techniques); political (speeches by politicians); and everyday (explanation of the creation of the technical side of a scientific paper).

Procedure. The first stage of the research was to study the texts according to the N. Fairclough's [7] Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) procedure. CDA can be defined as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research approach, combining an array of aspects, each with different theoretical models, research methods, and agendas [10, 302].

Our study envisaged the following stages: a) analysing dialectical relations between discourse orders and other elements of students' social practices, between email texts and other elements of events; b) selecting texts, and points of focus and categories for their analysis, in the light of, and appropriately to, the constitution of the object of research; c) carrying out analysis of texts – both interdiscursive analysis and linguistic/semiotic analysis.

To this end, textual parameters of the research material were established, i.e. how the text is created and perceived. At the stage of text creation, the main motives for its creation are essential, and at the stage of perception, the target audience's characteristics are important.

An essential stage in the study of the text, according to N. Fairclough, is the identification of its leading categories. The leading categories of a text, on the one hand, express the personal orientation of an individual as a set of his or her interests and motives, and on the other hand, are determined by social and, accordingly, discursive practices. To find out the thematic categories, content analysis was applied.

Content analysis (CA) is a method used in the qualitative study of the systematic and objective description and classification of the expressed or hidden information in a text by counting the frequency of the presence of words/phrases in the text, which are then grouped into thematic categories [1].

The CA method is widely used in psycholinguistics, sociology, political science, and psychodiagnostics when there is a need for analysing the content characteristics of media texts, political speeches, election speeches, etc.

The undoubted advantage of CA is that it allows us to identify and objectify hidden trends in information and to register relatively accurately undifferentiated indicators in the empirical data sets [2]. Thus, CA contributes to the objective detection of unconsciously generated elements present in texts, i.e., it allows us to learn more than the author intended to say. For example, the author may not realise the constant repetition of specific themes in the text or the use of characteristic formal elements or constructions. However, the researcher identifies and interprets it in a certain way [5].

To increase the reliability of the content analysis, we conducted it in conjunction with the content analysis.

The method of intent analysis is a relatively new one in psycholinguistics and used primarily by Slavonic scholars [1]. The name originates from the English word "intention". The speech behaviour of an individual in society is always intentionally directed and impacts the addressee. Intention is a subjective focus on a certain object, the activity of the subject's consciousness. Any text is a product of the thought processes of its author and, therefore, contains one or more intentions of different orientations.

The text as a means of communication between the author (speaker) and the reader (listener) contains communicative intentions of a two-part structure. The expression of intention implies a) the designation of the object and b) the author's (speaker's) attitude towards it. Intent analysis allows the researcher to reconstruct these intentions based on a text – written or spoken.

In intent analysis, the text's qualitative content is considered, i.e. not what the author says (cf. content analysis), but what he or she intends to say. For example, the question "Do you still want to play with us?" may contain hidden intentions of threat or encouragement towards the subject, depending on the context.

Traditionally, the intent analysis list of intentions includes accusations, threats, debunking, opposition, demonstration of strength, encouragement, praise, etc. Intent analysis usually includes two stages: a) identification of intentions and b) expert assessment of the intentions underlying the statement. If there is no apparent intention, the text is reformulated before the second stage according to the following procedure: the most concise possible derivation of the units of meaning with maximum preservation of the logic of the text and avoidance of unwanted associations in the lexical meaning of the units; omission of secondary clarifying units and separation from their content.

As a rule, at the second stage, semantic units are reduced to subject-predicate structures – "propositions" [3]. That is, the propositional analysis accompanies the intent analysis.

The intent analysis procedure of email texts was carried out in four stages. First, we identified the fundamental propositions and their hierarchy. Next, we determined the range of objects discussed and the links and relationships between them. Then, we evaluated each group regarding morality, dynamism, and competence. The 'identification of key propositions' stage envisaged the information compression by removing the secondary information and identifying the predicates as part of the key sentences. The last stage was to summarise the results.

Results and Discussion. The empirical study shows that the students' motivation to succeed does not change in the context of their long-term virtual communication. At the same time, the motivation to avoid failure is growing, manifested in indecision, uncertainty, and weakness in decision-making.

The motivation for virtual communication may be the desire for cooperation, altruism, or a repressive stance towards others. V. Posokhova (2007) notes that depressive communication is quite common in virtual communication, as the latter allows people to behave as they wish [4]. Our analysis of the target audience showed increased social isolation and frustration in the context of prolonged exposure to virtual space.

To determine the motivation for virtual communication as an important stage in the study of students' discursive practices, a content analysis of emails was carried out. Its results confirm the availability of the following communication styles: dominant (attempts to increase one's status at the expense of others), dramatic (exaggeration of

information in order to increase its significance); contradictory (desire to prove something); soothing (expression of sympathy, support); impressive (desire to attract attention); reliable (trying to provide a reliable message); attentive (interest in the incoming information); inspirational (emotional reinforcement of information); friendly (encouraging others to communicate); open (eagerness to express their thoughts).

It is worth noting that several different communication styles were often observed in the emails. The dominant communication style was observed in 36% of the analysed emails. Examples of this style include the following fragments: "How much can I explain? Don't slow down..."; "I've already told you about this ten times, you need to listen...". The dramatic style is often expressed in hyperbolic terms: "In December it is a real spring. Soon the willow will bloom" and "I have already explained it a million times". This communication style is rare in the letters of the respondents (4%), which are more characterised by expressive minimalism.

The contradictory style is often found in group correspondence of several people simultaneously in the research material devoted to educational and professional topics: the date of tests and exams and clarification of homework. It should be noted that the contradictory style is observed in 16% of the analysed emails. Impressive style is often used (18%) through such linguistic means as addressing and attracting attention (see, hear, know, etc.). Impressive style is often expressed through slang linguistic forms (bomb, tin, etc.).

The attentive style was found in 10% of the emails and is usually expressed through repeating the interlocutor's previous phrases, asking questions, clarifying, etc. Reliable style is mainly used in the form of persuasion when one of the interlocutors tries to provide sufficient arguments on a particular issue, and it is also represented in 10% of the letters. The friendly style is also widespread in students' virtual communication, represented in 6% of letters.

The content analysis results made it possible to formulate the leading themes / categories and lexical items from the text that belong to these categories (12 most used lexical items in each category). Let us consider the categories and their content in more detail. The analysis resulted in three main categories - "study", "leisure", "war/volunteering".

A. The category "study": cramming (16), photocopies (14), pedagogy (14), note-taking (18), pairs (22), windows (11), nets (8), module (8), practical (12), teachers (9), essays (7), printouts (8), qualification work (23), session (13), module (13), exams (7), databases (10), scientific conference (6), cram (8), printouts (11), press conference (14), teachers (8), practice (10), "zarakh" (6).

B. The category of "leisure": discos (6), walking (28), Instagram (11), sleeping (12), friends (8), dating (6), watching films (5), travelling (13), music (11), ICQ (7), entertainment (6), Skype (5), sleepy (9), no time (6), music (5), friends (8), ICQ (6), trips (7), dam (4), games (4), talking on the mobile phone (7), sitting in the park (7), watching films (4).

C. The category of "war/volunteering": war (56), donation(s) (27), support (12), combatants (27), frontline (14), air-raid alert (47), missile (17), drones (11), killing (12), injury (18), victims (8), rear (3).

Objects and Predicates:

1. University
−many tasks;
−quite interesting subjects;
−you need to take many notes.

2. Apartment/Dormitory:
−I want to go home
−expensive
−there is nothing to do
−cold
−neighbours make noise
−smell

3. Home
−it is good there
−you can relax
−many friends
−much nicer atmosphere

4. The students proper:
−go for walks;
−would like to get a scholarship sooner
−get sick during the epidemic.
−want to sleep all the time
−too boring to sit in class
−spend much time on the Internet, mainly social media.

The results of intent analysis are based on the evaluation of the group discussion on the scales of morality, dynamism and success are presented in Table 1. The evaluation was carried out by three experts – specialists in psycholinguistics whose work experience in the field of psycholinguistic expertise is more than seven years.

As seen from table 1, the assessment results of these subjects/objects are often neutral. The most positive expression is not observed in the written texts of the subjects.

Table 1

Results of assessing texts by intent analysis

Object	Evaluation		
	morality	dynamics	success
Students	-1	+1	0
University	0	+1	+1
Apartment /Dormitory	-1	+1	0
Home	+1	0	+1

Thus, the use of N. Fairclough's three-dimensional model in the aggregate of the three stages of studying social practice, discourse practice and texts allows us to trace the peculiarities of virtual communication as a factor of students' changes.

The vast majority of email texts is devoted to educational and professional discourse, and various types of virtual communication are observed, which at the same time is characterised by minimal emotional expressiveness. Such emotional minimalism is consistent with the previous results of the empirical study of students' personal changes in the conditions of long-term virtual communication, which negatively affects the emotional sphere of young men.

The percentage distribution of the use of different types of discourses in the letters we analysed is shown in Table 2.

Thus, the most common discourses in students' discursive practices in virtual communication are military, gender, academic and educational discourses, which is explained by the time setting, age of students and their leading activities.

Considering the methodology of Leo Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, according to which virtual space creates a specific type of psyche and consciousness of an individual, a discursive analysis of students' emails was carried out. The peculiarities of social practice and discursive practices of students and their texts have been identified. This emotional minimalism is consistent with the previous results of the empirical study of students' personal changes in the conditions of long-term virtual communication, which negatively affects the emotional sphere of young men.

Conclusions. The study found that the most common discourses in students' discursive practices in virtual communication are everyday, war, gender, sports and educational and professional discourses, which is explained by the age of students and their leading activities. The percentage distribution of students' virtual communication styles is as follows: 36% of the analysed letters (112 letters) are dominated by fragments of the dominant style (attempts to raise their status at the expense of others); 18% (56 letters) – fragments of the impressive style (desire to attract attention); 16% (50 letters) – fragments of the contradictory style (desire to prove something); 10% (31 emails) – fragments of a reliable style (attempts to provide a reliable message);

Table 2

Discourse practices of students involved in virtual communication, per cent

Types of discourse	Distribution of discourse types in per cent
Political	3%
Educational	20%
Religious	2%
Medical	4%
Academic	11%
Military	28%
Gender	22%
Folklore	2%
Sport	8%

10% (31 emails) – fragments of an involved style (interest in the information received); 6% (19 emails) – fragments of a friendly style (encouraging others to engage in the communication process); 4% (12 emails) – fragments of a dramatic style (exaggeration of information to enhance its significance).

Thus, the study's results made it possible to identify the peculiarities of the impact of virtual communication on students' personal changes in their educational and professional lives. Among the prospects of further research are the possibilities of studying other forms of students' virtual communication.

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ПСИХОЛОГІЧНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ДИСКУРСИВНИХ ПРАКТИК ВІРТУАЛЬНОГО СПІЛКУВАННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ

У статті досліджуються дискурсивні практики студентів коледжів у віртуальній комунікації з акцентом на їхньому впливі на особистісні зміни. Мета статті – встановити психологічні особливості дискурсивних практик студентів університетів на основі письмових продуктів їх віртуальної комунікації – електронних листів. Дослідження використовує тривимірну модель Н. Феркло (1995) та підхід соціального конструкціонізму для вивчення зв'язку між дискурсивними практиками та соціальними практиками, проводячи паралелі з соціокультурною теорією Л. Виготського (1978). У дослідженні проаналізовано 310 студентських електронних листів із застосуванням критичного дискурс-аналізу, контент-аналізу та інтент-аналізу для вивчення стилів і мотивів комунікації. Результати засвідчили, що віртуальне спілкування сприяє змінам в емоційних і поведінкових аспектах студентів, включаючи підвищену тривожність, депресію, соціальну фрустрацію, самотність, агресивність і мотивацію уникати невдач. Дослідження визначає домінуючі стилі спілкування, такі як драматичний, суперечливий, уважний і надійний, які найчастіше зафіксовано в текстах електронних листів.

Ключові слова: віртуальна комунікація, студенти університетів, дискурсивна практика, контент-аналіз, інтент-аналіз.