

FUNCTIONS AND SPHERES OF USE OF LATVIAN LANGUAGE VARIETIES: RADIO AND TELEVISION JOURNALISTS' OPINION

The aim of the present paper is to characterize those functions and spheres of Latvian language variety uses that can be inferred from interviews with radio and television journalists. The study is based on interviews recorded with 24 Latvian radio and television journalists as well as programme hosts. It is part of the project *Baltic Sociolinguistics (BalSoc): Linguistic Awareness and Orientation in Lithuania and Latvia* (project leader Dr Loreta Vaicekauskienė) submitted to the Lithuanian State Science and Studies Foundation by the Institute of the Lithuanian Language. The face-to-face standardized interviews with the total length of 883 minutes consisted of 20 questions focusing on the following issues: language features, language prestige, the journalists' linguistic and communicative competence, language policy and language situation in Latvia as well as the data about the respondents (age, place of birth, native dialect, education, work experience) and programmes hosted by them. The sample consisted of 24 male, 32–48 year old representatives of both national and commercial audio-visual media. After long discussions and preliminary research during the project, representatives of this social group have been categorized as typical radio and television journalists and programme leaders. It should be a task for gender studies to analyze “why radio and TV in most Western countries feature men in news programs and hosting documentaries and other “serious” programs” (Kroløkke, Sørensen 2006: 91). The present paper deals with radio and television journalists' opinion about functions and spheres of use of literary language, colloquial speech, slang and sub-dialects not only in audio-visual media but also in other discourses.

STRATIFICATION OF THE LATVIAN LANGUAGE

In modern linguistics there is no uniform understanding of the stratification of the Latvian language. For instance, Inta Freimane proposes that Latvian language varieties should be divided into standard language and non-standard language where literary-colloquial speech is part of standard language and low colloquial speech is a variety of non-standard language (Freimane 1993: 27–28). Jānis Rozenbergs holds a similar view, expressed in other terms (Rozenbergs 2004: 143–145). In the above approaches the criterion *literary – non-literary* has been applied. If we look at this issue from the sociolinguistic point of view, colloquial speech is an independent form of the existence of language outside the framework of literary language. It is a territorially unlimited variety of the national language whose principal signs are a spontaneous spoken form and the informality of the speech situation (Lauze 2004: 160). According to Ferguson's theory of diglossia, literary language has a higher prestige in society than colloquial speech.

When dealing with slang, up to now Latvian linguists have paid more attention to its vocabulary. The most significant publications on this issue have been produced by Ojārs Bušs and Vineta Ernstsone; others include Ernstsone's PhD thesis and a dictionary of Latvian slang (Bušs 1979; Ernstsone 1998; Ernstsone 1999; Bušs, Ernstsone 2006; Bušs 2006; Ernstsone 2006). Some sociolinguists agree that slang could be a variety of the Latvian language (Druviete 1988: 198–199; Ernstsone 1999: 8). The present research claims that dialects may be treated as territorially limited varieties whereas slang as a socially limited variety of the Latvian language. Nevertheless, to be able to strongly claim the independent status of slang, it would be necessary to further study other levels of slang; not only vocabulary but also phonetics, morphology and syntax.

NATIONAL RADIO AND TELEVISION: EXISTING RULES OF LANGUAGE USE

We claim that people working in the media, especially in the national media, should use exclusively standard language. Journalists working in the

Latvian national radio in their labour contracts have a special clause focusing on language use. Some of its restrictions are as follows:

- Under the contract journalists are not allowed to use slang, vulgar or rude expressions.
- They have to avoid using too many foreign words. Interviews and comments in foreign languages have to be translated into Latvian.
- Dialects are tolerated only in cases when the interviewee uses one variety of language, and the journalist has to use literary language, except when the programme targets at a special audience (for instance, Latgalian dialect speakers).
- Journalists working for the Latvian radio have to use high quality, rich literary language which corresponds to the spirit of the time and accepted norms.
- The study centre continuously follows and evaluates the speech of radio journalists, commentators and programme hosts in terms of quality and culture.

Journalists working in the Latvian television have to follow similar rules. They all have to take into consideration the *Ethical Principles of all Employed in Journalism and in Latvian Television* and the *Professional Standards of Latvian Television Programmes*. Here are some restrictions:

- Language has to be clear and simple; exaggerations and ambiguous expressions have to be avoided.
- Programme hosts and journalists have to adhere to the style of literary Latvian language.
- The use of dialects is tolerated only to protect special social interests (for instance, to retain specific dialects).
- In television programmes it is not allowed to use vulgar expressions or language which is not in accordance with the existing social norms.
- In exceptional situations inappropriate expressions (non-standard, impolite) are acceptable if they help to provide information of higher quality and if avoiding such expressions could decrease the quality of the programme.

LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

In the interviews on Latvian language varieties journalists and programme hosts expressed their opinions referring to several important language functions, namely, communicative, referential, phatic, emotive, appellative and aesthetic.

Communicative Function

In performing the communicative language function through audio-visual media, standard language dominates. We can draw several conclusions about the situation of other language varieties in mass communication as provided in the responses to the following questions: *Do you think it is allowed to use colloquial speech on radio and TV? What is your attitude towards elements of slang? What is your attitude towards using elements of a local dialect or sociolect? In which situations are they applicable?* Most respondents admitted using colloquial speech and slang in audio-visual media but simultaneously they set diverse limits in reference to the programme theme, kind and audience. These language varieties could be acceptable in entertainment programmes about everyday life for large audiences, programmes on special topics, like popular music, sports, computers and programmes for young people, but not in news broadcasts and other serious programmes. In some interviews, the usage of non-standard language is reduced to particular elements. It is emphasized that in these cases the journalists' linguistic taste and instinct should remain within the limits of decency.

When speaking about elements taken from other language varieties, they could be treated within the definition of the informative style given by Jānis Rozenbergs: "the informative style is one of the styles of standard written language, which makes use of elements of colloquial speech where appropriate, and even (to achieve certain effects) elements of non-standard language" (Rozenbergs 2004: 94). Journalese used in radio and television broadcasts exists in the oral form; however, it also has features of both spoken and written language. On the one hand, when speaking during their programmes, journalists use texts written in advance. On the other hand, they can speak spontaneously while hosting the programme or just reacting in a speech situation. The border between prepared public speech and spontaneous speech could be rather vague, but it is spontaneous speech which is

concerned with a stronger possibility to use elements of non-standard language. It is also an issue of self-control. According to the data of the interview, during their own programmes, hosts think less about how they talk; they concentrate more on the content of a conversation. In recent linguistic literature several authors have pointed out a tendency of language use called *intersecting of styles*, *merging of styles* or *transparency of styles* (see Rozenbergs 2006: 114; Nitiņa 2004: 32; Ernstsone 2009: 36–37).

The research results have shown that there are no marked differences in the journalists' linguistic attitudes towards colloquial speech and slang. Elements of colloquial speech were evaluated slightly higher, but overall, the respondents did not juxtapose colloquial speech and slang except for vulgar expressions which belong to slang. We can mention a stereotype feeling about the work of colleagues in the opposing camp. A representative of a commercial medium L¹ (42, male, working on a popular programme) emphasizes that journalists working for the national radio and the national television which represent the state, should speak correct literary language. In return, a representative of a public medium N (44, male, working on a programme for academic audience) points out, "a privately owned medium can be free to say something that I can't say in a public medium." Special attention is given to the number of elements taken from colloquial speech and slang. They should not be overused. A radio host G (38, male, working for a commercial radio station, working on a popular programme) has come to realize that "sometimes the density of colloquial speech in a public sphere is too high and one can make oneself noticeable by speaking in a nicer way".

Dealing with the place of the language of mass media in the system of functional sub-types and styles, Ilze Lokmane admits that in the last decades the norm of journalist stylistics has moved towards colloquial speech (Lokmane 2009: 8). In several interviews radio and television journalists have expressed an idea that slang should not become the only means of communication in society.

When analyzing language varieties performing a communicative function, it should be stated that in audio-visual media the use of sub-dialects is also limited. It should only be allowed in special cases, for instance, in special programmes or in regional news. An exceptional case when a well-

¹ To keep the respondents' privacy, each person is referred to by a capital letter which corresponds to none of his initials.

known musician hosts a popular programme and speaks the Latgalian dialect in a commercial radio station is given positive evaluation. Two respondents have mentioned an additional function of a sub-dialect. When it is heard during a programme, it could promote the listeners' and viewers' patriotism. The following idea expressed by a representative of a commercial medium G (38, male, working on a popular programme) is worth discussing. He says, "in the face of fierce competition in mass media, a programme host could be noticeable if s/he speaks a sub-dialect, but to be a success, s/he has to be a personality." To provide information, the language of mass media should be understandable, but in this respect sub-dialects (like slang) have set communicative barriers. There exist two diametrically opposed views concerning journalese. A radio host G (38, male, working for a commercial radio station, on a popular programme) is of an opinion that the idea accepted in Latvian journalism that literary language is good journalese is unacceptable. Another journalist C (34, male, working for a national radio station, on a popular programme) does not consider the use of non-standard language varieties in mass media necessary.

Referential Function

The referential function of language is mainly concerned with the context in its broadest sense "involving reference to entities, events, states of affairs etc." (Matthews 1997: 313). In discourse analysis "this level of language use is called linguistic representation" (see Thornborrow 2004: 58). Two typical conclusions of journalists and programme hosts reflect the referential function of colloquial speech and slang as well as sub-dialects. First, to better characterize a personality or a speech situation, it is necessary to use the above-mentioned language varieties on radio and television. It helps to ensure credibility for the given information. For instance, a radio host J (33, male, working for a national radio station, developing a popular programme) proposes to think of a situation when standing by his tractor a farmer in muddy boots would speak about his expectations of a harvest in a highly sophisticated academic language. He adds that in this case he would look like an actor. Second, it is very important to give clear information, because in popular programmes on specific topics, like sports, music, cars and traffic, widely used colloquial or slangish words are preferred to officially accepted terms approved by linguists.

Appellative Function

When performing the appellative function in audio-visual media, the language use targets at listeners and viewers to influence them. The interview data have shown that journalists are aware of the power of mass media. In this sense, the appellative function is also concerned with normative and terminological aspects of language. Several respondents point out that the new terms used on radio and television are easier accepted in society. It is known that the language of mass media can influence the quality of language in society. Thus it is also the journalists' responsibility for the language they choose to use. We can agree with a radio host G (38, male, working for a commercial radio station, on a popular programme) who says: "in a commercial medium we should use literary language because children are listening. I don't cross the street when the red light is on if there are children around."

Phatic Function

In the phatic function that ensures contact between the speaker and the addressee during communication, it is possible to use all language varieties but journalists and programme hosts have paid special attention to colloquial speech and slang. An informal speech situation allows decreasing the distance between the interlocutors, namely, between the interviewer and the audience. A television programme leader A (41, male, working for a national television, developing a popular programme) indicates that a journalist can establish a necessary contact with the invited person before the interview. Another programme leader T (36, male, working for a commercial radio station, on a programme for academic audience) emphasizes that he dislikes being addressed in an informal and friendly way. It reflects the linguistic attitude of a significant part of society; people find it unacceptable whenever addressed by strangers by the informal pronoun of the Latvian language *tu* (see the results of the sociolinguistic investigation Lauze 2002). Evaluating the use of slang which performs phatic and other functions of language, journalists and programme leaders should take into consideration the following sociolinguistic conclusion: "the use of words like 'fuck' and 'shit' in public media has become a mark of liberation or a sign of revolt, depending on one's point of view" (Spolsky 2003: 36).

Emotive function

Most programmes can hardly do without expressing the emotive function of language. Nevertheless, we should distinguish two different functions of television identified by a television host U (39, male, working for a commercial television, on a programme for academic audience): the news should be given as information without showing any personal attitude but in another programme slang and simple words expressing the journalist's attitude would be acceptable. The analysis of the interviews has shown that all language varieties can perform the emotive function.

Aesthetic Function

When responding to the following questions *What do you think is "good language"?* *What language would you describe as good?* *What features define good language?* *What language seems more attractive to you?* and the above-mentioned questions about the respondents' linguistic attitude towards colloquial speech, slang and sub-dialects, journalists and programme leaders have also focused their attention on the aesthetic function of language. The aesthetic aspect of language is concerned with its richness manifested in epithets and synonyms, in some cases with its sonority. It is clear from the context of the interviews that the above features are traditionally treated as characteristic of literary language. Several respondents have mentioned that the use of sub-dialects makes journalese more colourful and attractive. A television programme leader N (44, male, working for the national television, on a programme for academic audience) compares language of uneducated people which is full of abusive words and jargon expressions, with peculiar music. Overall, the interviewed representatives of audio-visual media are more or less aware of the aesthetic function of all language varieties.

SPHERES OF USE OF LATVIAN LANGUAGE VARIETIES

Language can function in well-defined spheres of use in society. To analyze the language situation in a state, one of the important factors is the use of literary language in the main areas of social life. In other words, reference is

made to sociolinguistic functions of language. Ina Druviete claims that there is no uniform and universally recognized classification of sociolinguistic domains in the theory of language politics (Druviete 2007: 138). In Latvian sociolinguistics the following division into 13 domains is widely accepted:

- State and governmental institutions (Parliaments, Councils of Ministers, ministries).
- Armed forces, federal police.
- Self-governments, municipal police.
- Transport and communications.
- Industry and agriculture.
- Health care, social security.
- Trading, social services.
- Higher education, science.
- Mass media.
- Basic and secondary education.
- Culture (literature, theatre etc.).
- Everyday life, informal contacts.
- Family (Druviete 2000: 10–11).

In the responses to the question *Are there areas of life and society, where exemplary standard language should be used?* the respondents' attitudes towards the spheres of literary language use can be identified. They are referred to in two ways. First, journalists and programme hosts mention definite sociolinguistic domains and secondly, they speak about representatives of these domains. Most of the respondents emphasize that literary language is the language variety to be used in public space. In many cases, making the response more precise, the spheres of literary language use are mentioned, like in the following: state and governmental institutions; higher education, science; mass media; basic and secondary education; culture. Higher requirements in using literary language have been set for politicians, members of parliament, scientists, teaching staff, journalists, radio and television programme leaders etc. So, a representative of the public radio F (48, male, working on a popular programme) says: "those people, including politicians and various stars are public figures." Several respondents juxtapose public space and private life when speaking about the spheres of use of non-standard language, which includes everyday life, informal contacts and family.

CONCLUSION

Colloquial speech has considerable impact on language use in public space; however, the interview results have shown that the position of the Latvian literary language is sound. When implementing the communicative function through audio-visual media, standard language dominates. On the one hand, the existing rules of language use ensure limitations to the use of other varieties of the Latvian language on the national radio and television. On the other hand, the journalists' self-control as well as that of their colleagues, listeners and viewers of the programme and their own personal conviction about the significance of the literary language strengthen its position not only in the national but also in the commercial audio-visual media.

The interviewed representatives of radio and television do not speak about all language functions² reflected in journalese; however, they are aware of the main functions and spheres of use of all Latvian language varieties. When speaking about literary language, colloquial speech, slang and sub-dialects, the respondents' opinions refer to the communicative, referential, phatic, emotive, appellative and aesthetic functions.

Most respondents have emphasized that literary language is a language variety to be used in the main areas of social life. In several cases public space is juxtaposed with private life; then the spheres of use of non-standard language include everyday life, informal contacts and family.

In further research it would be necessary to analyze the speech behaviour of the respondents while developing broadcasts on radio or television. It would show a correlation between their linguistic attitude and real-life use of the Latvian language varieties.

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² There was no direct question about language functions in the interviews.

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LATVIŲ KALBOS VARTOSENOS VARIANTŲ FUNKCIJOS IR SRITYS: RADIJO IR TELEVIZIJOS ŽURNALISTŲ NUOMONĖ

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnio tikslas – apibūdinti latvių kalbos vartosenos variantų funkcijas ir sritis, išryškėjusias pokalbyje (interviu) su radijo ir televizijos žurnalistais. Buvo tiriama žurnalistų nuomonė apie literatūrinę, šnekamąją kalbą, tarmes ir kitus kalbos vartosenos variantus bei komunikacinę, referentinę, fatinę, emocinę, apeliatyvinę ir estetinę kalbos funkcijas.

Darbe remiamasi 24 pokalbiais su Latvijos radijo ir televizijos žurnalistais bei programų vedėjais. Visi tyrime dalyvavę respondentai buvo 32–48 metų vyrai. Bendra pokalbių trukmė – 883 minutės. Interviu sudarė 20 klausimų, pagrindinė jų tematika susijusi su kalbos prestižu, kalbos politika ir bendra kalbos situacija Latvijoje, žurnalistų kalbine ir komunikacine kompetencija. Tiesioginių klausimų apie kalbos funkcijas nebuvo.

Tyrimo rezultatai parodė, kad šnekamoji kalba turi nemenką įtaką viešosios kalbos vartosenai. Tačiau nenustatyta, kad latvių literatūrinė kalba patiria didesnę neigiamą poveikį, jos padėtis pakankamai stabili. Nors žurnalistai ir programų vedėjai nebuvo linkę kalbėti apie žurnalistų kalbos funkcijas, iš pokalbių buvo aišku, kad jie suvokia pagrindines latvių kalbos vartosenos variantų funkcijas ir sritis. Toliau tiriant žurnalistų kalbą būtų svarbu išnagrinėti respondentų kalbinę elgseną jiems rengiant radijo ir televizijos laidas.

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