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THE EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH SMALL TALK: A COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Since Malinowski defined small talk as a communicative mode – the establishment of human bonds or communion, abundant studies have supplied numerous data about its cultural contexts, social and phatic function, participants and topics of small talk, conversational routines and etiquette mores etc. Nevertheless, some aspects of small talk, both its historical and contemporary procedures, still lack clarification. Lately, a new linguistic approach of cognitive pragmatics has made possible to take inquiry into cognitive-intentional and social-cultural aspects of the communicative behavior of small talk. In this paper, we have worked out an integrative framework for cognitive-pragmatic analysis of small talk underpinned by the ideas of historical pragmatics. We implemented this framework in the analysis of small talk as a case study of English fiction of the 17th–21st centuries culled from the BNC database. We aimed to find out evolutionary trends of small talk in English and to describe the underlying change of English ethos, politeness principles, in particular. Our findings have revealed the following historically stable and variable characteristic features of small talk: the former mainly concern people's communion as a universal value, the latter reflect procedural communication patterns and requirements of a particular community. We argue that small talk is a meta-communicative (accompanying informative communication) form of behavior that satisfies human needs for social cohesiveness; its cultural conceptualization depends upon the prevailing social-cultural values and changes throughout history. We hope this study may shed light on small talk as a type of communicative behavior that occurs both in fiction and in other contexts.

Key words: small talk, English, evolution, historical pragmatics, cognitive pragmatics

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that people as social beings are in want of communion. Malinowski (1936, p. 316) defined such communicative behavior as 'phatic communion', that "<...> serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of

companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas". In Homes' (2003, p. 65) parlance, small talk "oils the social wheels".

From different theoretical viewpoints, researchers described linguistic pragmatic (Senft, 2009; Pocheptsov, 2009; Shevchenko, 2015), sociopragmatic (Coupland, 2003; Holmes, 2014), gender (Mullany, 2006), psychologic (Kardas et al., 2021), cross-cultural (Pullin, 2010; Schneider, 2012) and other related features of phatic communication. Within phatic discourse, they single out small talk aimed at establishing and developing speech contact; the main topics of small talk are of universal and neutral nature, it avoids 'taboo topics'; its general tone is friendly, calm and neutral.

Cultural studies (Drazdauskienė, 2021; Mak & Chui, 2013) show how much phatic communication owes to culture and how much it reflects ethos and ethic norms. Culture is the customs, beliefs, rules, knowledge, etc. developed at a given period by members of a society and stored in their construal of the world. Cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2017) studies individual and group communication, phatic practices included. As a vivid manifestation of culture, politeness principles are in the focus of analysis of both small talk and various means of phatic communication (Chen, 2019).

Since culture changes throughout history, the ethic norms, politeness principles, and communication practices are subject to historical variation. Recent diachronic studies of phatic communication and small talk, in particular (Belous, 2010; Drazdauskienė, 2021; Matyukhina, 2004; 2014), have revealed historical transformations of its topics, discourse strategies of ritualized behavior, their frequency in discourse, and other issues. Nevertheless, there are some questions that still need clarification: the periodization of the English small talk, causes and trends of its historical changes, and phatic speech formulas typical of certain periods.

In the latest decade, seminal insights into cognitive pragmatics (Schmid, 2012) have drawn scholars' attention to the interface of cognition (conceptualization) and linguistic pragmatics (communication) as rooted in philosophical, action-theoretical and sociological approaches (Shevchenko, 2017). At the same time, the pivotal work of Jucker and Taavitsainen (2020) on historical pragmatics suggested analytical tools for describing the transgressions of manners and norms of polite communicative behavior while Culpeper and Kytö (2000) shed light on the problem of data in historical pragmatics.

In this paper, we aim to combine a cognitive-pragmatic and historical pragmatic approaches to small talk and to trace its changes in English. We hypothesize, on the one hand, a tendency for small talk to evolve throughout history as a result of the underlying change of English ethos, politeness principles, in particular; on the other hand, this evolution embraces stable and variable characteristic features; the former concern a universal value of people's communion, the latter reflect procedural patterns of communicative behavior based on changing cultural conceptualization of ethic norms.

To prove this hypothesis, we will first elaborate the framework of our analysis and then define evolutionary stages of small talk in English. We hope the analysis of the historical shift in cultural conceptualization of ethic norms and the study of patterns of communicative behavior will help us explain the main tendencies in small talk evolution. Our analysis is a case study of the 17th – 21st centuries English fiction.

2. Methods and material

Situations in discourse differ conforming to the criterion of prevailing functions. In some speech events, participants aim to exchange 'serious' meaningful and conceptual information, while in others, socializing function predominates. Accordingly, the former is described as communication proper, and the latter as phatic or meta-communication, a subsidiary discourse type. Metacommunication elucidates both cases of metatext or Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage, and cases of social rituals that create social bonds known as phatic communication.

Malinowski (1936), having laid the foundations for the analysis of social communication, described the phatic function in a very sketchy way, believing that a person has an inherent desire for sociality. (Cf. Aristotle's famous argument that "man is by nature a social animal"). In Malinowski's parlance, words in phatic function are used not to convey meaning but to fulfil a social function of building a rapport by mere exchange of words. By phatic communication, Malinowski meant only the initial phase of establishment of speech contact. Building on this idea, Jakobson (1960, p. 353-357), who included the phatic function in his system of linguistic functions, did not limit it to just the contact implemented in the exchange of ritualized formulas, but rather viewed it as entire dialogues with the mere purport of continuing communication and maintaining social bonds.

Phatic communication accompanies rendering factual information and consists of microsystems – discursive events corresponding to different stages of interaction: the establishment of speech contact, contact maintenance, and contact completion. These microsystems are represented by speech-processing 'auxiliary' metacommunicative elements, or phatic speech acts that serve (a) to establish social bonds – greetings, introductory utterances; (b) to maintain speech contact – formulas of attention control, hedges, filler words; (c) to politely close the conversation – farewell utterances and formulas. According to Coupland (2014), conversation openings and closings have ritualized nature; they all take part in providing social bonds at different stages of small talk. Pocheptsov (2009, p. 475), who uses the term 'metacommunicative' for phatic function, claims that

Socio-, psycho-, and physiological characteristics of verbal communication condition implementing the metacommunicative function in the process of communication, along with the communicative one. In the act of verbal interaction and in the resulting text, two following aspects can be distinguished, respectively: communicative aspect (the aspect of transmission and reception of the message per se) and metacommunicative aspect (in this case, the aspect of regulating verbal interaction in communication process). Taking into account the three phases of communication, the latter can be represented as contact opening (establishing)—contact maintenance—contact closing means (translation is ours – I. S., Y. M., & M.-L. D).

The explorations of social functioning of small talk reveal its context and social-cultural dependence. "What is conversationally achieved by and for participants through small talk is likely to be different depending on the specific contextual constitution of the speech event, and this is as true for cultural context as it is for context in its more local sense" (Coupland, 2003, p. 1). As an embodiment of society ethos, culture presents a system of historically variable ethic values, rules, and norms of communicative behavior, dominated by specific politeness principles.

Brown and Levinson (1988) built their theory of politeness on Hoffman's notion of face and distinguished between positive and negative politeness principles. Their theory is based on observations of communicative practices in the West (Ameca & Terkourafi, 2019) and culturally oriented at European ethics. In European culture, the dominant politeness principles historically vary from positive in the Early Modern English period to negative in the present-day English; as Jucker (2012) puts it, from 'discernment' in Old English to positive in Early Modern and 'Non-Imposition politeness' in present-day English, while the eighteenth-century is dominated by 'compliment' culture (Jucker, 2012). This shift accounts for the transformation of etiquette norms of communicative behavior on the whole and phatic practices, in particular.

Though small talk can be an indicator of in/appropriate behavior and un/successful socialization, it is not a type of universal behavior (Mak & Chui, 2013). It occurs only when there is a social and cultural need for it and transforms with the development of ethos. To trace the evolution of small talk in this article, we build on the principles of historical pragmatics and trace small talk through the history of English since the 17th century when it emerged. According to Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000, p. 92),

Speech acts have to be seen in a multidimensional pragmatic space that they share with neighbouring speech acts. Specific realizations are therefore context-specific, culture-specific and time-specific. Moreover it is not only the realization that changes over time but the underlying speech function may change too.

Our study focuses on the changing cultural grounding and the changing ways in which small talk and related phatic speech acts are realized.

At the interface of pragmatics and cognitive linguistics, cognitive pragmatics examines the impact of cognitive factors, such as speaker's intentions, etc., on language use in interaction (Schmid, 2012). Cognitive pragmatics is "a sub-paradigm of linguistic pragmatics, which integrates cognitive and communicative (pragmatic) issues within a functional megaparadigm" (Shevchenko, 2017, p. 307). The cognitive research vector is inherent in traditional pragmatics that has always been focused on mental processing of information. According to Carston (2002, pp. 128-129), "Pragmatics is a capacity of the mind, a kind of information-processing system, a system for interpreting a particular phenomenon in the world, namely human communicative behavior".

To analyze the transformations of ethos throughout history we also address cultural linguistics (Sharifian, 2017). It helps to trace cultural conceptualization of phatic communicative behavior according to the etiquette norms of a certain period.

3. Results and discussion

Small talk has long been one of linguistic genres, an integral part of secular etiquette and communicative culture of middle and upper classes. In Europe, the genre of small talk took shape at the royal courts and nobility parlors during the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century is considered as the golden age of small talk, but we trace its roots earlier, in the seventeenth-century England. Under the Renaissance, the need for social rapport was stimulated by social, cultural and economic conditions. The most common reasons for the emergence of small talk is economic growth, the development of culture, and its further humanization. Among stereotyped topics of aristocratic small talk, there were personal issues, gossip about friends and relatives, marks of a game of wits, and humor (example 1):

- (1) *BENVOLIO. Good morrow, cousin.*
ROMEO. Is the day so young?
BENVOLIO. But new struck nine.
ROMEO. Ay me, sad hours seem long.
Was that my father that went hence so fast?
BENVOLIO. It was. What sadness lengthens Romeo's hours?
ROMEO. Not having that which, having, makes them short.
BENVOLIO. In love?
ROMEO. Out. (W. Shakespeare. Romeo and Juliet)

In Early Modern English, the ritualized conversation openings included: questions *How now?*; *How dost thou (How do you?)*; *How fare you?*; *How goes the day with us?*; *How is it with you?*; wishes *Good morrow (day, even)*; *With all my heart to you*; *You're very welcome*; *You very well met*; *Happily (well, fairly) met*; *Well be-met*; *Peace to this meeting*; *Good day, and happiness*; *Health and fair time of day*; *health to you all*; *Well be with you*; *I greet thee well*; *All hail good morrow*; *Hail to thee. Welcome*. At the initial stage of speech interaction, typical of this period were formulaic blessings: *God ye good morrow (day, even)*; *God be wi' you*; *God save you*; *The Gods preserve ye!*; *God save the king!*; *God see you*; *God bless thee*; *God give you hail*; *God 'ild you for your last company* (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 214).

Contact-maintenance formulas were mainly of appealing character: *Oh; Listen; Look; Here! you know; you see; Oh, hey; Here!; I say; Look here*; sometimes there were hedges (*well, hm*) or conatives (*true*).

The ritualized conversation closings featured the following: wishes *I wish your highness a quiet night; I shall desire more love and knowledge to you; Peace be with you; I wish you much mirth; A kind good night to all; A thousand times good night; Prosperity be thy page; All happiness to your honour; Be strong and prosperous; Fare you well; we bid farewell*; interjections *Adieu; Farewell; Hey-day*; and typical of this period blessings: *God be wi' you; God ye good den; The Gods preserve you both; The Gods keep you; God save thee; Heaven bless you, and prosper your affairs, and send us peace; The Gods assist you and keep your honour safe; Be bless'd for your good comfort; Heaven strengthen thee* (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 219).

The English Restoration and the ideology of new aristocracy with their behavioral patterns of libertinism gave another stimulus for the development of small talk that reached its peak in the eighteenth century. Social and cultural changes rooted in a colonial empire brought great wealth to England: the development of the manufactory boosted free capital, as well as its rapid distribution and practical application. Industrial development also nurtured the middle class, who were eager to coalesce into the culture of the bourgeoisie and its communicative practices.

It was the time when large groups of people visited houses of aristocracy and bourgeoisie, where they were entertained by hunting, music, and literature. Eloquence, gourmet food and conversation were the hallmarks of the English top in the eighteenth century. Poetry, travel, theater, newspapers, and books shaped the culture of the emerging 'higher society' and established new etiquette rules. In privileged position, representatives of higher society felt entitled to emphasize their social status not only via the material tokens of wealth, but also by their manners and communicative practices, small talk, in particular.

In the period of the Enlightenment, polite standardized speech becomes a hallmark of the social class. Communicative behavior, and the skills of small talk, became a factor of social stratification of society that split the top into urban hereditary aristocracy (nobility), rural aristocracy (gentry), and middle class, including wealthy citizens that strived for their social prestige. French borrowings, characteristic of the language of English aristocracy, became tokens of a privileged social class. In small talk (example 2), young ladies, both of noble and bourgeois descent, boast of their neighbors and the estate; they use French borrowing *beaux* and emotional adjectives, verbs, and adverbs *prodigious, beautiful, smart, admire, and excessively*:

- (2) *'Norland is a prodigious beautiful place, is not it?'* added Miss Steele.
'We have heard Sir John admire it excessively,' said Lucy, who seemed to think some apology necessary for the freedom of her sister.
'I think every one must admire it,' replied Elinor, *'who ever saw the place; though it is not to be supposed that any one can estimate its beauties as we do'. And had you a great many smart beaux there I suppose you have not so many in this part of the world; for my part, I think they are a vast addition always.* (J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*)

The repertoire of stereotyped small talk topics is very diverse. People opted for the following:

- mutual acquaintances, news and gossip concerning relatives and friends;
- news of high society, sports news;
- morals, education, and children's behavior;
- entertainment and arts: theater, painting, music, literature;
- nature: weather, landscape, climate;
- hobbies: horse riding, music lessons, collecting, hunting, traveling, etc.

At the same time, politics, religion, and finance were taboo topics for speech events of small talk.

Drazdauskienė (2012, p. 5) maintains that even though the initial meaning for phatic utterances might seem trivial and aimed to maintain the rapport, the speech event suggests a deeper meaning, i.e. information about interaction participants. This corresponds to indexical or referential (in Jakobson's terminology) function of phatic communion. In example (3) below, Mrs. Bennet is talking over a ball with Miss Lucas and their communication is not a mere gossip since it renders information of the would-be marriage partners:

- (3) *You began the evening well, Charlotte," said Mrs. Bennet with civil self-command to Miss Lucas.*
"You were Mr. Bingley's first choice."
"Yes; but he seemed to like his second better."
"Oh! you mean Jane, I suppose, because he danced with her twice. To be sure that did seem as if he admired her—indeed I rather believe he did—I heard something about it—but I hardly know what—something about Mr. Robinson."
"Perhaps you mean what I overheard between him and Mr. Robinson; did not I mention it to you? Mr. Robinson's asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies, and whether he did not think there were a great many pretty women in the room, and which he thought the prettiest? and his answering immediately to the last question—'Oh! the eldest Miss Bennet, beyond a doubt, there cannot be two opinions on that point.'"
*"Upon my word! Well, that was very decided indeed—that does seem as if—but, however, it may all come to nothing, you know." (J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)*

In the eighteenth century, the ritualized conversation openings are less diverse, they include: questions *How is it (with you)?; How dost thou?; How have you been this century?; How now?; How do you do?;* wishes *Health and the happiness of many days attend upon your grace; Come most wished for; With all my heart to you; I joy to meet thee alone; You are (heartily) welcome;* interjections *Hail, Welcome, Goodmorrow (day);* and a few blessing formulas: *God give ye good morrow (day, even); God save you; God bless you* (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 215).

Contact-maintenance formulas, besides appellatives and hedges, were replenished with conatives. Phrases like *All right; You mean; You know; I see; Yes; yes-yes; sure; exactly; true; Indeed; Well said* strengthened the involvement of interlocutors and their mutual intention to maintain social rapport.

In the eighteenth century, the range of closing formulas is the smallest and limited to blessings *Heaven strengthen thee; God b'w'you; God give you good morrow (day, even); Praise the lord;* wishes *Take courage; Fare thee well;* and occasional interjections *Good day (even, night); How now; Adieu; Farewell* (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 220).

In example (4) below, the small talk takes place at lady Sneerwell's. It illustrates ironic and game-like character of such speech events in the eighteenth century aristocratic parlors. It also reveals cultural conceptualization of aristocrats' manners and communicative behavior. Their small talk (4) is full of irony (*Mercy...*), mockery (*ensorious, bad, they will allow...*), hedges (*I dare swear*), and conative utterances (*'Tis very true, indeed*):

- (4) *Enter SIR PETER*
SIR PETER. Ladies, your obedient—Mercy on me—here is the whole set! a character's dead at every word, I suppose.
MRS. CANDOUR. I am rejoiced you are come, Sir Peter—they have been so censorious and Lady Teazle as bad as any one.
SIR PETER. That must be very distressing to you, Mrs. Candour I dare swear.
MRS. CANDOUR. O they will allow good Qualities to nobody—not even good nature to our Friend Mrs. Pursy.

LADY TEAZLE. *What, the fat dowager who was at Mrs. Codrille's [Quadrille's] last Night?*

LADY SNEERWELL. *Nay—her bulk is her misfortune and when she takes such Pains to get rid of it you ought not to reflect on her.*

MRS. CANDOUR. *'Tis very true, indeed.* (R. B. Sheridan. *The School For Scandal*)

Jaworski (2014) claims the pivotal role of small talk for breaking silence, which establishes links of fellowship, and likens it to breaking bread and the communion of food. In example (5), Mrs. Higgins tries to involve Eliza Doolittle in a general conversation at her evening party and uses the topic of weather:

(5) *A long and painful pause ensues.*

MRS. HIGGINS [at last, conversationally] *Will it rain, do you think?*

LIZA. *The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction.* (B. Shaw. *Pygmalion*)

In the present-day English, in small talk they deploy opening formulas as questions *How are you?; How are you tonight?; How do you feel?; How are you doing?; How are things going/with you?; How is it going?; How have you been?; Are you doing Okay?; Have you been okay?; How are you feeling getting on/managing?; How goes it with you?; How're things?;* interjections *Good morning (afternoon, evening); Hiya (Hi to you); Hi; Hello (Hallo, Hullo); Hey; Welcome;* and occasional greetings *Greetings!; Greetings and felicitations/salutations!; You are welcome* (Матюхина, 2004, p. 216).

The range of present-day contact-maintenance formulas is the most various since the 17th century and besides phrases used in the previous periods, includes those of clarification *I mean; You know;* hesitations *well; I mean; so to say; that is; hm; mm; er; eh;* conatives *All right; OK; surely; (Excellently) Well said; Good; Fine; I see; I agree; That's understood; Yeah; mhm; uh – huh;* and such new forms of conversation feedback as questions of attention control (*Can) you hear me? Are you with me? Are you listening to me?* (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 217-218).

In the last five centuries, the closing phatic rituals demonstrate the most dramatic changes as compared to openers and contact-maintenance rituals. With their scarcity in the Enlightenment English, in the 20th – 21st centuries their range has grown. Among the prevailing closing phatic formulas there are wishes: *Good luck; I wish you well; Good luck and all that sort of thing; Be careful; Have a good time; Have a nice day; Take care; Take it easy;* and interjections *Good bye; Good night (morning, evening, afternoon); Salute; So long; See you; See you later; See you in a few hours; See you in the morning (in the evening); Tomorrow. Whenever. Bye for now; Fine evening. Cheerio; Ciao; Bye; Farewell.* Closing blessings are no longer typical and examples like *God bless you* are rather an exception than a rule (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 221).

Throughout its evolution, phatic discourse has always been the embodiment of the principles of politeness, which vary from epoch to epoch. In the phatic discourse of the 17th – 21st centuries, negative politeness qualitatively dominates. Among historically stable strategies, there are three negative politeness strategies and four positive politeness strategies that realize speakers' intentions of solidarity, respect, involvement in communication (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 143-144). In Brown and Levinson's terminology, they are:

- P1 – notice, attend to hearer's interests, wants, goods;
- P3 – intensify interest to hearer;
- P4 – use in-group identity markers;
- P7 – presuppose, raise, assert common ground;
- N2 – question, hedge;
- N5 – give deference;
- N7 – impersonalize speaker and hearer.

Example (6) illustrates discourse strategies N2 (*is not he?*), N5 (*Mr. Bingley*), N7 (*those persons who fancy themselves...*), P1 (*What an agreeable man...*, *So genteel...*), and P3 (*He has always...*):

- (6) *What an agreeable man Sir William is, Mr. Bingley—is not he? so much the man of fashion! So genteel and so easy! He has always something to say to everybody. That is my idea of good breeding; and those persons who fancy themselves very important and never open their mouths, quite mistake the matter.*” (J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)

In small talk, strategies of negative politeness are mostly stable, while positive politeness strategy P4 historically varies: it loses frequency in discourse and its forms change in accordance with the demands of changing etiquette norms (Matyukhina, 2004, p. 185-186), since forms of addressing feature historically variable cultural norms (Drazdauskienė, 2021).

Though phatic communication is usually interpreted via politeness principles, Schneider (2012) argues that ‘appropriateness’ and ‘inappropriateness’ are more salient notions than ‘politeness’ and ‘impoliteness’ or ‘rudeness’. This seems to account for the cases of using rude language in small talk. As Chen (2019, p. 52) puts it, an apparently impolite utterance in a situated context sometimes may be used to render messages that differ from that of genuine impoliteness, as in the case of jocular abuse. In small talk, jocular abuse is a complex interactional practice doing various kinds of face work simultaneously. For example, at lady Sneerwell’s (example 7), men don’t hesitate to use ‘strong’ language as harmless jokes in the following small talk:

- (7) *LADY SNEERWELL. Nay, positively, we will hear it.*
SURFACE. Yes—yes the Epigram by all means.
SIR BENJAMIN. O plague on't unkle—'tis mere nonsense—
CRABTREE. No no; 'fore gad very clever for an extempore!
SIR BENJAMIN. But ladies you should be acquainted with the circumstances. You must know that one day last week as Lady Betty Curricle was taking the Dust in High Park, in a sort of duodecimo Phaeton—she desired me to write some verses on her Ponies
 (R. B. Sheridan. *The school for scandal*)

In today’s digital world, phatic communication over the telephone, on the Internet, etc. is no less important to maintain social bonds, but its forms and mechanisms are changing:

Phatic communication is a relevant discourse mechanism that takes place in social interactions, allowing for an easier, stress-free dynamic that aids in the establishment and maintenance of social bonds with a wide variety of individuals across the social spectrum, and thus its functionality continues to be of high importance today. Its different uses, on the other hand, makes phatic communication a versatile tool that enables users to become more or less engaged in the communicative encounter based on their desires and needs.

When we turn to social media in particular, phatic communication is shown as a very helpful communicative tool that assists in the maintenance of a variety of networks users can have online. In the same way as in the offline setting, phatic communication online eases the beginning of an interaction, and provides certainty about the outcome. Its formulaic nature allows for facility of use and works as a convenient tool for bond management through one's networks. (Manzo, 2014, p. 232)

This evidence of online phatic communication assumes a tendency of small talk evolution: its nature has not changed but its forms have become and will be more and more versatile.

4. Conclusions

We argue that small talk is a metacommunicative (accompanying informative communication) type of communicative behavior that satisfies human needs for social cohesiveness; its cultural conceptualization depends upon the prevailing social-cultural values and changes throughout history.

In this article, the integrative cognitive-pragmatic analysis of small talk underpinned by the ideas of historical pragmatics has revealed cognitive-intentional and social-cultural nature of small talk. Its cognitive-intentional features include: first, its communicative goal that is pleasant communion, desire to entertain and please interlocutors; secondly, the stereotyped roles and etiquette-predetermined politeness strategies; thirdly, the limited scope of conversation topics; fourthly, its competitive and game nature that boosts the deployment of irony and wordplay.

Social-cultural nature of English communicative behavior analyzed in this paper is featured in terms of several periods as small talk originated in the 17th century, reached its peak in the 18th century, and partially lost some of its characteristic features in the 19th–21st centuries. We claim that small talk has historically stable and variable characteristic features. The former mainly concern people's communion as its main aim and a universal value, the latter reflect changing topics and historically transformed dominant politeness principles. Though negative politeness strategies steadily dominate in small talk and their frequency grows throughout history, positive politeness strategies lose their frequency in the 19th–21st century discourse and change their forms. Small talk as a discourse genre also undergoes changes from oral and written interaction in traditional cultures to online interactive practices in a modern digital culture. Historical variation affects all semantic-functional subtypes of phatic speech acts: ritualized formulas of openings, closings and contact-maintenance speech acts conform with cultural conceptualization of social community at a given epoch and changing politeness principles; the variety of these acts expands by the 18th century and narrows by the 21st century.

We hope, this study may shed light on the understanding of small talk as communicative behavior featured not only in fiction but also in other contexts, both in real and virtual discourse.

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ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ SMALL TALK: КОГНІТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

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Анотація

Відтоді, як Малиновський визначив small talk (світську бесіду) як особливий вид комунікації – створення людських зв'язків чи спільності, численні дослідження надали різні дані про культурні контексти small talk, її соціальну та фатичну функції, учасників та теми, конверсаційні шаблони, етикетні установки і т. д. Проте деякі аспекти small talk, її історичні та сучасні процедури, досі не отримали пояснення. Останнім часом становлення нового лінгвістичного підходу когнітивної прагматики дозволило виробити нову методологію, яка дає змогу досліджувати когнітивно-інтенціональні та соціокультурні аспекти комунікативної поведінки small talk. У цій статті ми розробили основу когнітивно-прагматичного аналізу small talk, засновану на ідеях історичної прагматики. Ми реалізували цю методику в аналізі small talk на матеріалі англійської художньої літератури XVII–XXI століть, отриманої з бази даних BNC. Мета статті – виявити еволюційні тенденції small talk в англійській мові та описати зміни англійського етосу, що лежать в їх основі, зокрема, принципів ввічливості. Наші результати виявили історично стабільні та змінні характеристики small talk: перші переважно стосуються спілкування людей як універсальної цінності, другі відображають процедурні моделі спілкування та потреби конкретної спільноти. У статті

робиться висновок, що small talk – це мета-комунікативна форма поведінки, що супроводжує інформативне спілкування, яке задовольняє людські потреби у соціальній згуртованості; культурна концептуалізація small talk залежить від провідних соціокультурних цінностей та їх змін на протязі історії. У перспективі це дослідження може пролити світло на розуміння small talk як комунікативної поведінки, яка представлена не тільки в художній літературі, а й в інших контекстах.

ЭВОЛЮЦИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОЙ SMALL TALK: КОГНИТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация

С тех пор, как Малиновский определил small talk (светскую беседу) как особый вид коммуникации – создание человеческих связей или общности, многочисленные исследования предоставили различные данные о культурных контекстах small talk, ее социальной и фатической функциях, участниках и темах, разговорных шаблонах, этикетных установках и т. д. Однако некоторые аспекты small talk, ее исторические и современные процедуры, до сих пор не получили объяснения. В последнее время становление нового лингвистического подхода когнитивной прагматики позволило выработать новую методологию, которая дает возможность исследовать когнитивно-интенциональные и социокультурные аспекты коммуникативного поведения small talk. В этой статье мы разработали интегративную основу для когнитивно-прагматического анализа small talk, основанную на идеях исторической прагматики. Мы реализовали эту методику в анализе small talk на материале английской художественной литературы XVII–XXI веков, полученной из базы данных BNC. Цель статьи – выявить эволюционные тенденции small talk в английском языке и описать лежащие в их основе изменения английского этоса, в частности, принципов вежливости. Наши результаты выявили исторически стабильные и изменчивые характеристики small talk: первые, в основном, касаются общения людей как универсальной ценности, вторые отражают процедурные модели общения и потребности конкретного сообщества. В статье делается вывод, что small talk – это мета-коммуникативная форма поведения, сопутствующая информативному общению, которая удовлетворяет человеческие потребности в социальной сплоченности; культурная концептуализация small talk зависит от ведущих социокультурных ценностей и их изменений на протяжении истории. В перспективе данное исследование может пролить свет на понимание small talk как коммуникативного поведения, которое представлено не только в художественной литературе, но и в других контекстах.

Ключевые слова: small talk, английский язык, эволюция, историческая прагматика, когнитивная прагматика.