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Means of indirect imperative influence in the genre “question to an expert” in the discourse of popular psychology

Abstract

This article aims to identify the means of imperative influence in the texts representing the discourse of popular psychology. Imperative influence implies encouraging the recipient to perform a certain action. This type of influence is common in the “question-to-expert” genre. Therefore, the material was obtained from the original English magazine “Psychologies”, its Russian edition and the rubric “Ask Philippa” in “The Guardian”, as they are assumed to contain prescriptive information about the necessary actions to solve a problem. Continuous sampling was used to select 200 English and Russian sentences from the texts published in the editions, then functional, contextual and comparative methods were used to identify and describe the ways to express imperativeness. The number of tokens representing each pattern was calculated for Russian and English texts. We found that in the Russian material, (i) modal verbs with the semantics of obligation prevailed to a certain extent, (ii) correspondence of actions to the communication conditions and relations between the communicants was important, (iii) the authors sounded more neutral and objective. Meanwhile, in the English material, (i) modal verbs with the semantics of possibility prevailed, (ii) the possible positive result of the action was crucial, (iii) the authors sounded more positive trying to create the atmosphere of solidarity with the recipient. The obtained results enable to conclude that the psychologist performed the role of a boss in the Russian texts while in the English texts it was more of a mentor.

Keywords: discourse, popular psychology, speech influence, imperativeness, communicative role

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