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SPEECH STYLES AND PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The problem of the relationship between personal identity and community of practice belongs to the most important ones researched by social linguists. Identity is viewed as self-understanding and self-ascribing category that is rational, multi-dimensional, dynamic, mediated through behavior, performance, and communication. Identity discloses in the process of communication within certain groups. Community of practice is just one of such groups but it is rather influential. The idea of the community of practice was borrowed into sociolinguistics from other social sciences. Communities of practice were initially developed as part of a social theory of learning. They were understood as groups of people sharing a certain profession or a certain craft. According to Meyerhoff communities of practice represent a specific kind of social networks. Their specific features include mutual engagement, a jointly negotiated enterprise and a shared repertoire. Mutual engagement is one of the most characteristic features of this social network because it presupposes direct personal contacts. In the process of these contacts individuals interact with each other and in this way their personal identities change in accordance to the needs of the particular community. A jointly negotiated enterprise means that the members of this community not only have contacts with each other, but they have a shared goal. They also define and satisfy a specific enterprise. A shared repertoire presupposes a specific speech style. It also presupposes various social practices. Meyerhoff argues that "In the domain of language, it includes shared ways of pronouncing words, shared jargon or slang, and in-jokes" [2,189]. Language becomes one of the crucial markers of belonging to a certain community. Language also manifests beliefs and values of this community.

The importance of community of practice is difficult to underestimate because it has a huge impact on linguistic behavior and so it influences personal identity. In

general, personal identity has the following dimensions: how we see ourselves, how we are seen by others and what groups we belong to. Thus, belonging to community of practice is a part of personal identity. People absorb the norms of the community of practice they belong to and demonstrate them by means of communication. As it was mentioned by Le Page and Tabouret-Keller "An individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified" [1, 181].

There were conducted numerous studies researching the impact of the community of practice on personal identity. One of such researches was conducted by Penelope Eckert (1989, 2000). She researched language variation typical for adolescent peer groups at a Detroit high school. In the process of the research it was discovered that speakers actively exploit and manipulate a big number of language variants in their community repertoire. By doing this, they mark peer group membership. They used the language to represent themselves either as Jocks or as Burnouts. So language variants served as means of self- conceptualization. This point of view is supported by other researches: "Other work emphasizing communities of practice (whether working explicitly within that framework or not) have noticed the association between extreme variants of changes in progress with speakers who are engaged in more flamboyant and extreme social positioning overall" [2,198].

Wenger who was one of the first scholars researching the phenomenon of community of practice argued that all individualities belonging to any community of practice are in certain relations to this group. These relations can be either harmonious or conflicting. If these relations are harmonious, individuals have all the opportunities to develop and realize their personal identity. However, in case these relations are conflicting, people have to either adjust to the communities by changing their identity and acquiring new models of behavior.

References:

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